

Design and Co-creation of Experiences in Green Hotels

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Abstract

Even though environmentally friendly hotels are becoming more popular, attracting and maintaining guests in green hotels can be challenging. In favor of competitive advantage, hotel managers design and create memorable experiences involving the consumers in the creation process. However, there is not enough evidence on how environmental friendly hotels engage their consumers in the experience design. This study seeks to fill the gap in tourism and hospitality literature, examining *how green hotels design and co-create with their consumers experience-centric services*. The research's theoretical framework builds around the green marketing principles in the concept of environmental-friendly hotels (green hotels) and the notion of experience marketing in the design and co-creation of memorable experiences. The research relies on social constructivism and interpretivism positions using a qualitative approach and methods. The collected data consists of five structured and semi-structured interviews, as well as online data representing five selected cases in Denmark and Greece. The main findings demonstrate (1) the promotion of green brand positioning by the green hotels, (2) the collection of personal information about the consumers' preferences and needs, and (3) the provision of information by the green hotel to the consumers.

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry is one of the most important economic activities in the world. The travel and tourism industry's direct contribution was 3.3 percent of the total global GDP in 2019, and the overall contribution reached 10.4 percent of the worldwide GDP the same year (Lock, 2020).

In the last 20 years, sustainable tourism and green hotels are vital players in the fight against the latest environmental and climate changes. The hotel companies that recognized the problem of the negative impact of their business activities on the environment have consciously shifted to implement practices that minimize the harmful effects on the environment. Moreover, the tourism and hospitality industry moved to sustainable development when the public awareness and the demand for change increased (Karavasilis et al., 2015).

The concept of Green Hotels refers to *“environmentally-friendly properties whose managers are eager to institute programs that save water, save energy, and reduce solid waste-while saving money”* (Green Hotels Association, 2008). Furthermore, the going green programs in hospitality have shown positive results in improving brand image and value, increasing social responsibility, and competitive advantage (Karavasilis et al., 2015). In addition, previous studies have shown a significant percentage of hotel guests prefer to stay in a hotel that cares about the environment (Han et al., 2009).

However, attracting and retaining consumers in green hotels can be challenging for managers as the sustainability management of the properties is not enough to differentiate the green hotels from their competitors (Lee et al., 2010; Korosec, 2012). Experience marketing is a well-established strategy that aims to increase brand image and value, and increase the competitive advantage by engaging consumers in personalized brand experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In the last two decades, marketing scholars argue that the core of the service offering must be consumer experience. In the context of the green hotel, the going green paradigm can be admitted as a unique experience for the consumer that differentiate the green hotels from non-green hotels; however, the core of the service is the protection of the environment or the promotion of the company, not the consumer.

Companies that offer good experiences need to move further from this stage and engage more the consumers in the creation of the experience. The reason why companies, and more specifically the tourism and hospitality industry, should include consumers in the design and the co-creation of the experiences relies upon consumers' willingness to involve in the design, delivery, and consumption process of the experience (Hwang & Seo, 2016).

Unlike other industries, the notion of co-creation in tourism has not received the same attention even if tourism is one of the more significant experience generators (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). The experience marketing has been studied in tourism and hospitality the previous years; however, there is not enough literature that supports the engagement of consumers in the design and the co-creation of experiences in the Green Hotels.

Therefore, this research aims to examine and answer the following question:

- ❖ How Green Hotels design and co-create experience-centric services with the consumers?

1.1 Thesis outline

The thesis is comprised of the following chapters: the literature review represents relevant theories on green marketing strategies in the hospitality industry, as well as the notion of experience marketing and its application in tourism to create experiences by the consumers. The methodology chapter discusses why the thesis relies on the social constructivism and qualitative approach to collect and interpret the data. The data collection consists of four semi-structured interviews, one structure interview, and netnography research. The analysis chapter follows a thematic analysis divided into three themes: Sustainability, Consumers, and Front-line Employees. Finally, the last chapters represent the research question's findings, personal reflection to the problem and the results, and the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

This chapter is an overview of the current knowledge and relevant theories to the research problem, and it follows a thematic structure and consists of two parts. The first part represents the academic approaches to sustainable marketing strategies in tourism and the concept of green hotels. The terms “green,” “sustainable,” “sustainability,” “environmental” and “eco-friendly” are interchangeably refer to environmentally friendly practices in tourism, as well as the term “green marketing” and “sustainability marketing” are used interchangeably. The second part discusses the experience marketing chronologically, i.e., from the first attempt at experience economy until recent approaches and marketing strategies in consumer experience, consumer participation, and co-construction of experience. Most of the time, the terms “customer” and “consumer” are used interchangeably in the text. However, in some cases, the use of one term is adopted by the original text indicating exact characteristic by the author(s) (i.e., customer, the buyer of product or service, who may not use the product or service; whereas the term consumer, the person refers to the individual who uses or consumers the product or service).

2.1. Sustainable Tourism

Over the last years, terms such as “sustainable,” “sustainability,” “responsible tourism” are becoming more popular in everyday life for tourists. From the academic perspective, the concept of sustainable tourism encompasses economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects of sustainable development. However, the term ‘sustainable tourism’ has been used extensively in tourism literature since 1980, addressing to the greatest extent the ecological problems caused by the tourism industry and tourists, concerning eco-nature-based and alternative forms of tourism (Ruhanen et al., 2019). In addition, Liu (2003) emphasizes that sustainability, sustainable tourism, and sustainable development are well-established and interchangeable terms in tourism literature, and recommends the following classification and definition. *“Sustainability is broadly considered state-focused, which implies steady life conditions for generations to come; ‘sustainable development’ is more process-oriented and associated with managed changes that bring about improvement in conditions for those involved in such development. Similarly, sustainable tourism is conveniently defined as all types of tourism (conventional or alternative forms) that are compatible with or contribute to sustainable development”* (Liu, 2003, p.460-461).

Various studies emphasized the existence of many and different definitions of sustainable development in tourism (Butler, 1999; Knowles et al., 2004; Sharpley, 2000; Fennell & Cooper, 2020). Sharpley (2000) explains the conceptual framework of sustainable tourism development; he points out the need for a ‘theoretical bridge’ between sustainable tourism and sustainable development. For Sharpley (2000) the development theory *“is an ambiguous term that is used to describe both a process through which a society moves from one condition to another, and also the goal of that process”* (Sharpley, 2000:3). Moreover, sustainability is the global environmental concern, which in combination with the development, embraces principles, objectives, and prerequisites (Sharpley, 2000).

In addition to the previous definition in sustainable tourism, Butler (1999) argues that term sustainable had been used widely in past years, and the need to define the actual meaning of sustainability in tourism is essential for the future of tourism. Thus, sustainable tourism is determined as *“tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such manner and at such scale that it remains viable over an infinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well being of other activities and processes”* (Butler, 1993, p.29). In other words, sustainable tourism is an extended time process activity in a specific area with negative results in other activities.

Another and more holistic definition by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2005) argues the importance of sustainable tourism development and reports that:

“Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments.

Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

Thus, sustainable tourism should:

Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.”

Furthermore, Clarke (1997) discussed a different idea in sustainable tourism and identified a framework of four approaches based on academic and industry literature. The framework of four approaches compare sustainable tourism (small-scale tourism) with mass tourism (large-scale tourism) and suggests how the tourism industry can achieve sustainable tourism goal, improve and maintain ecological business orientation (Clarke, 1997). Therefore, the definitions of sustainable development and sustainable tourism by Clarke are the opposite and the alternative solution to mass tourism (Knowles et al., 2004).

Overall, Clarke's approach to sustainable tourism touched upon the negative social and environmental impact of mass tourism on the host community and culture, whereas all the previous approaches argue about the protection and preservation of nature. However, no previous approaches to sustainable tourism refer to tourists' attitudes, behavior changes, and increasing tourists' demand for change (Liu, 2003; Ruhanen et al., 2019).

2.2. Green Marketing

Towards more sustainable consumption and the environment's protection, many companies re-formed and aligned their practices and products in response to this global change. In particular, the increasing environmental awareness by consumers led companies to new marketing strategies. Peattie (2015) has categorized three ages in sustainable marketing starting in the 1970s with the Ecological Marketing approach, which draws its attention from the environmental problems caused by humans (e.g., air pollution) and tries to find technical solutions to the problem. A notable comment on the first sustainability-marketing era was the low number of companies and consumers who changed their activities and behavior (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). The environmental solving approach in marketing inherited the second perspective in the sustainable marketing age, targeting to the green consumers, satisfying their needs through products and service development for the purpose of competitive advantage, and in awareness of global problems (Peattie, 2015; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Environmental Marketing, as it is called, was the reflation of consumers' awareness of sustainable problems. According to Peattie (2015), the marketing world now lives in the third sustainable marketing age. The latter approach to Sustainable Marketing focuses on socio-environmental investments from the companies building long-term sustainability-oriented relationships with the consumers (Peattie, 2015; Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). However, the use of the term Sustainability Marketing is considered more appropriate than the term Sustainable Marketing as it refers to *"the integration of the ecological and ethical concerns of the green marketing era, along with a relationship marketing focus, to create a form of marketing that develops long-term, sustainability-oriented value relationships with customers"* (Peattie, 2015, p.102).

Moreover, Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017) collected and reviewed all the previous studies regarding sustainability marketing and find out that the sustainability marketing strategy consists of four main steps. In the first two main steps of Green Marketing Strategy, the segmentation and targeting, companies need to realize who their customers are, who they are targeting, and who they want to attract. All the previous academic

marketing studies identified that green marketing is oriented towards to green consumers. However, a few more components have been included in Dangelico and Vocalelli's (2017) research. These include consumers' motivation and perception about green products, consumers' passive or active behavior, and the willingness to contribute to environmental protection, which is their object of concern and which is their knowledge about environmental problems. Moreover, throughout the last years, the internet became a useful marketing tool for companies in targeting better their consumer.

On the other hand, positioning and differentiation steps refer to the brand position and the green level of differentiation. Because a single sustainable action is not sufficient enough for a successful green marketing strategy, companies should have a clear green brand position. In this way, they will achieve to differentiate from their competitors.

However, some marketing communication strategies fall into marketing myopia. The same issue applies to green marketing communication strategies when green companies focus more on their products than the consumer. Companies with a green marketing strategy should not forget who their target is and why they target them. While, at the same time they understand consumers' needs and try to satisfy those needs (Font & Villarino, 2015).

Furthermore, Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017) reviewed several articles that focus on the Marketing Mix model of 4Ps in Sustainability Marketing. The model of 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) is a set of marketing tools used by a company that does not focus on consumers. Firstly, some characteristics of green Products refer to the quality, e.g., if the product is recyclable and reusable, its' durable, and if the product is safe for the environment, where the latter refers to the environmental impact and the products' green packing (reduce packing). Secondly, the Price does not show the cost of purchase of the green product but the willingness of the consumer to pay for the product. Thirdly, the Place in Marketing Mix shows where consumers can find the product when they buy or consume it (the physical place).

Moreover, Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017) included in their review that the usage of the internet has a positive effect on the reverse logistics such as cost-saving, time-saving, increase revenue, better customer service and more. Lastly, Promotion is an advertising way for excellent communication with the consumer. In particular, through communication, companies can build trust and long-lasting relationships, eliminating the negative impact.

Even if the Green Marketing Strategy and the Green Marketing Mix do not have many common elements, they both agree and suggest that the internet is a powerful marketing tool. The internet is a cost-and-time efficient tool that targets the customer, shows the brand's green position, and finally, it created long-lasting relationships, eliminating negative impacts.

Taking into consideration the previous positions in green marketing, a final definition on Sustainability Marketing is *"the planning, developing and promotion of products or services that satisfy the need of consumers for quality, output, accessible price and service without negative affect on the environment"* (Papadopoulos et al., 2010, p.167).

Because this research focuses on green hotel marketing, from now on, the term marketing product will refer to both tangible (i.e., product) and intangible (i.e., service) elements without further explanation or clarification.

2.2.1. Greenwashing

Many companies take advantage of consumers' environmental behavior and sensitivity by claiming ecological responsibility and eco-friendly image (Chen et al., 2019). Greenwashing is the positive communication about environmental awareness and actions by companies, which actually has poor environmental performance (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). However, greenwashing has a negative impact on companies and consumers' perceptions (Chen et al., 2019). The phenomenon of greenwashing has been observed in the hospitality industry, too, creating mistrust feelings for the consumers; thus, hotel managers should inform and educate their guests about their green policy and actions to enhance their credibility (Chen et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Chan (2014) used Ginsberg's and Blooms' marketing mix approach on green marketing and explained that the degree of green initiatives (from low green strategy to high) might affect customers' perception. Hence, if a company adopts high green marketing strategies that promotes the green initiatives, it has fewer chances to be accused of greenwashing by customers.

2.3. Green Marketing as a Strategy in hotels

Previous studies have indicated that nowadays, consumers are becoming more responsible towards environmental issues (Han et al., 2009). This increasing awareness is notable in green consumption; customers buy eco-friendly products and prefer companies with a green image. However, studies found that many consumers underestimate environmental problems while traveling or do not pay much attention to environmental actions while staying in a hotel due to their lack of knowledge (Han & Yoon, 2015). Although the green marketing plans develops and promotes green strategies in hotels, this message is not always delivered successfully to the consumers. Therefore, an effective marketing strategy should promote and specify which green decisions and actions are followed by the hotel (e.g., organic food, non-chemical cleaning, etc.), motivating the consumers to change their everyday habits (Han et al., 2009).

Moreover, such green strategies can be a powerful operational tool for attracting and retaining hotel guests, while consumers can also use it as a decision-making process (Lee et al., 2010). Also, Chan (2014) demonstrates in his research that hotel managers who use green marketing strategies will have a positive impact on their customer's loyalty, achieve a green image of the hotel. Moreover, they will differentiate their hotel from its competitors. As well as advertising green awards and eco-labels on their websites, hotel managers will eliminate misunderstandings (i.e., accusations for greenwashing) and increase the hotel's trustworthiness about their products and services (Chan, 2014).

The role of the internet as a marketing tool used by the hotels to advertise their green image has been discussed Han and Yoon (2015). Their research argues about the importance of positive environmental responsible reputation by hotels using the social media or innovative sustainable technologies *"develops competitive positioning, enhances a pro-environmental business vision as part of an organization wide perspective, and demonstrates that the principles of corporate social responsibility are being widely incorporated as part of the firm's strategy will be effective ways to improve their reputation"* (Han & Yoon, 2015, p.30). Moreover, green positioning on media by hotels will inform customers and potential customers about their green actions, will emphasize the importance of these actions in their everyday lives and finally, will increase their knowledge and awareness (Han et al., 2009; Han et al., 2010; Kim & Han, 2010, Han & Yoon, 2015).

Tilikidou and Delistavrou (2014) argue that green hotel communication should aim to maximize consumers' positive beliefs about eco-friendly hotels and demonstrate positive environmental protection and people's health. Furthermore, the communication must be effective, meaning that consumers should be informed that those green hotels are as competitive as conventional hotels in terms of location, pricing, eco-friendly guestrooms, amenities, food. At the same time, they also pose an opportunity for consumers to become socially responsible (Tilikidou & Delistavrou, 2014).

2.4. Going Green

Previous researches had studied the motivations of hotel managers to implement sustainability policy in the hotels. Scholars find that cost reduction is the primary reason to replace or upgrade existing operational practices (Tzcsehentke et al., 2004). Moreover, new properties have cost-benefit minimizing the consumption of construction materials (Hsieh, 2012). Tzcsehentke et al. (2004) highlight the inability to exert control over consumers for an imprudent waste of energy in the hotels. Furthermore, the same research notices that trade associations and the government's financial benefits, i.e., less taxation, motivate hoteliers in Scotland to implement environmental practices. Another motivation views green positioning as a marketing strategy increasing the competitive advantage, raising the company's profile, and attracting more visitors.

In contrast to financial benefits and marketing strategies, moral obligation and commitment is another reason to implement sustainability management in hotels. The research illustrates that ethical and social concerns are equally important as financial factors for hoteliers. The personal values and beliefs of hotel owners and managers are driven forces behind going green, motivating them to act socially responsible (Tzcsehentke et al., 2004).

2.4.1. Green Hotels

Sustainable tourism development and responsible consumption in tourism has been noticeable in the hospitality industry since 1990 and is known as the concept of Green Hotels (Lee et al., 2010). Global trends

and environmental awareness by stakeholders, employees, and consumers have guided the hospitality industry to implement new environmental programs and an eco-friendly image (Lee et al., 2010; Chan, 2013).

Green Hotels are environmental-friendly properties whose managers are eager to institute programs that save water, energy, and reduce solid waste-while saving money-to help protect our one and only earth (Green Hotels Association, 2008). By extension, a hotel that applies a green policy indicates respect to the environment using green practices and programs to save the planet and creates a sustainable competitive advantage. Moreover, the green practices in hotels enhance the company's brand image, create positive public attention, and comply with government laws (Han et al., 2010).

Following the guidelines and legal restrictions, big hotel chains have created sustainability operation positions for directors and managers, whose goal is to develop and implement sustainable programs in their hotels (Hsieh, 2012).

2.4.2. Green Practices

Being a green hotel is extremely complex implementing programs, which achieve sustainable development, can be a daunting task in green hotels. Previous studies (Hsieh, 2012; Ogbeide, 2012; Yu et al., 2017) has addressed such programs and green practices, including:

- Water usage/conservation
- Energy efficiency
- Waste division and management
- Green building design and material
- Organic food
- Noise pollution reduction
- Room air quality
- Carbon footprint reduction
- Bio-diversity/ eco-system
- Environmental partnership
- Green purchase and supply chain
- Environmental education for the hotel employees and guests

In addition to the previous practices, green hotels can be awarded by several global and regional sustainable certificates based on a set of specifications and standards. A third party assesses to determine if a hotel complies with global and national standards. The most common sustainable certificates in Denmark and Greece are the Green Key, the European Ecolab for Tourism Accommodations, ISO 14001, and Green Globe.

Having an eco-label certificate is an important marketing tool to enhance customers' credibility about hotel products and services, proving the environmental effort (Chan, 2014). In this way, they can reduce any assumptions around greenwashing.

2.5. Consumers' Perception on Green Hotels

Even if previous studies on sustainability marketing has shown positive effects on guests' satisfaction and loyalty, most of the latest research on consumers' perception towards green hotels and green practices do not support these outcomes totally. More precisely, previous studies in guests' experience and guests' satisfaction for green hotels find out that not all green practices contribute to guests' satisfaction (Yu et al., 2017). The results of the research demonstrate that

1. either the guests are not informed about the green practices in the hotel,
2. either the guests care more about hotel amenities paying less attention to green practices because they understand them as a marketing strategy with no direct benefits for them, or
3. or the hotel employees are not informed enough about the green initiatives in the hotels. As a result, they cannot transfer the knowledge to the guests (Yu et al. 2017).

The solutions by the same authors suggest to hotel managers to educate their employees. When the employees will be familiar with hotel's green practices, will create a dialog with the guests about those practices. Although an educated staff can transfer such knowledge to the hotel's guests and hotel managers should also educate the guests. Moreover, the employees should be trained to *"constantly appreciate cooperative eco-friendly customers, not only to create social value but also to make the customers believe that they are really part of an important initiative"* (Mishra, & Gupta, 2019).

Furthermore, the hotels' website can provide all the useful information about their green actions and promote individual, societal, environmental, and economic benefits of the implementation of the green practices to their customers before they visit the hotel. Also, during the visit, the hotel managers should illustrate the eco-friendly awards that have a positive impact on the brand's loyalty (Yu et al., 2017).

Finally, consumers' motivation, emotion, and purchasing decisions in sustainable tourism have been examined by several studies during the last decade (Chan, 2013; Lee et al., 2010), leading to a new direction in sustainable tourism development (Liu, 2003). As Lee et al. (2010) observe in their research, functional positioning by hotels (i.e., green service and products, green initiatives) is not enough as a marketing strategy to differentiate themselves from competitors.

2.6. Experience Economy

It is only 22 years since Joseph Pine and James Gilmore introduced to the business world the coined concept of 'experience economy' identifying the experience as the fourth economic offering of postmodern societies (i.e., commodities-goods-services-experiences). The theory of the experience economy argues that companies should be significantly different from being more competitive, offering unique individual experiences. Moreover, they argue that a good product or/and an exceptional service are no longer enough for the consumers who seek new experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Hence, the experience economy is a

strategic extension of service and goods that increases the revenue, the value, and the loyalty for the company (Lorentzen, 2009).

The theory demonstrates that service and goods are commodified economic ideas, while the experience economy goes beyond these ideas; it is the progression of economic value (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). However, why Pine and Gilmore believe selling and buying experiences is more important for companies than selling goods and services? What is the experience for them?

According to Pine and Gilmore, the experiences *“occur whenever a company intentionally uses services as the stage and goods as props to engage an individual. Whereas commodities are fungible, good tangible, and service intangible, experiences are memorable. Buyers of experiences – call them guests- value being engaged by what the company reveals over a duration of time. Just as people have cut back on goods to spend more money on services, now they also scrutinize the time and money they spend on service to make way for more memorable-and more highly valued-experiences”* (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, p.17). A few years later, the same authors mentioned that *“what a company customizes to an individual, it engages that person in the creation of an offering produced just for him, and can easily become a memorable event”* (Pine & Gilmore, 2013, p.27). In other words, a company does not sell only products and services to consumers, but it sells ‘memorable staged experiences’ adding value in the consumer experiences (Tussyadiah, 2014). Because experiences are personal and unique moments in a consumer’s memory, each consumer creates its own emotions during the event (Oh et al., 2007). As a result, the value of the experience creation is closely connected with personal memories from the past (Lorentzen, 2009).

Hence, companies should create staged memorable experiences engaging the consumers in the event and with the event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Lorentzen, 2009). The level of consumer engagement in the staged event has described by Pine and Gilmore (1998) via active and passive participation and though the level of absorption and immersion.

Overall, Pine and Gilmore’s theory on experiences was a primary suggestion on how companies can create competitive advantage, charging higher for the valuable, memorable experiences. Even if experiences are more expensive than goods and services, they add higher value to the consumer because they are memorable (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). However, recent studies in consumer behavior do not fully support the idea of staged experiences as *“modern consumers want context related, authentic experience concepts and seek a balance between control by the experience stager and self-determined activity with its the spontaneity, freedom and self-expression”* (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009, p.312). The staged experience paradigm has been criticized for being too commercial, artificial, and superficial because consumers do not act spontaneously, and it does not allow self-expression (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009).

Similarly, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) rejected the idea of staged experiences because it is not relevant anymore due to the consumers’ passive participation in design and planning. As it is mentioned, staged experiences are implicit moments guided and controlled by the company. Even if companies stage experiences with active or passive consumers’ participation with the primary goal to enhance their experience, they fail to

engage consumers in experience design. *“Consumers have little or no role in value creation [...] and the firm is still in charge of the overall orchestration of the experience”* (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p.8).

2.7. New Directions in Marketing

The previous section introduced Pine and Gilmore’s idea, representing a new type of economic offering in the business world. Similarly, companies become customer-centric, seeking to improve their services and finally *“understand the needs and wants of their customers in detail so that they can use their capabilities to work hand in hand with customers to deliver successful products”* (Goldsmith & Tsiotsou, 2012:208). Consequently, goods are tangible and standardized, while services are intangible and customized. Companies tend to mass customize their products and services to fit into customers’ needs. As a result, mass customization service can turn into an experience for the consumer (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). From a marketing perspective, consumers seek to fulfill their needs and wants, while marketing works to create strategies and managerial systems to accomplish those needs (Goldsmith & Tsiotsou, 2012).

The shift from traditional marketing strategies, implementation tools, and methodologies to a new way of thinking and experiential marketing was inevitable when experiences were identified as the fourth economic offering (Williams, 2006). As Schmitt (1999) observed, experiential marketing focuses on ‘customer experiences’ rather than functional features and benefits of products and services. However, the same author, a few years later, rephrased and recommended that the term ‘consumer experience’ is more appropriate instead of his first suggestion, customer experience, which was given in 1999. He admits that the new direction in marketing focuses more on the consumer, the user of the product or service offered by a company, rather than the buyer (Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2013).

The experiential approach was influenced by the experience economy theory of staging events for good consumer experiences; Schmitt (1999) suggested that companies should become experience-oriented organizations and focus on experiential marketing principles. This transforming nature of experiential marketing, as Schmitt approached, focuses on *“consumer experiences and lifestyles, which provide sensory, emotional, cognitive and relational values to the consumer”* replacing functional characteristics (Williams, 2006, p.493). By understanding consumer needs, experiential marketing also views that consumers are rational and emotionally driven human beings who seek to accomplish pleasurable experiences. Companies and marketing managers should act accordingly to create holistic experiences for consumers (Schmitt, 1999).

The term ‘experiential marketing’ referring to experience economy theory used for the first time by Bernd Schmitt in 1999. However, some scholars recommend the term ‘experience marketing’ instead of experiential, as the former is a strategic marketing, whereas the latter is a tactical tool (Same & Larimo, 2012). Similarly, Voss et al. (2008) observe that the experiential marketing, as Schmitt described it, is *“product demonstration and sampling, as a way to get potential customers to try a product or service”* (p.249-250), while selling experiences is a functional strategic tool for companies to *“differentiate their offerings... creating and delivering experience-centric services”* (p.250).

2.8. Co-creation of experience

A unique, different, and memorable experience has a deeper meaning, due to personal satisfaction, emotional connection, and brand loyalty for the consumer (Voss et al., 2008). From a managerial perspective, the creation and management of quality experiences is an essential tool used by companies in the race of competitive advantage (Pullman & Gross, 2004). Pine and Gilmore's theory influenced the concept of co-creation in marketing in the degree of customer participation in and with the experience. Later studies in marketing use phrases such as 'be involved in' and 'be engaged in' to describe the company's interaction with the customer. Therefore, the companies' principal focus is the consumers, not the firm, the product, or the service.

C.K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy (2004) discussed first the notion of co-creation in experiential marketing, entirely denying the Pine and Gilmore approach on how companies should create the experiences. The notion of co-creation in experience refers to the high-quality interaction between the company and the customer. Because the traditional view of marketing comprehends consumers as targets, making a clear division of the roles, i.e., the company, which acts alone, and on the other side is the customer, who has to accept the company's creating value. The authors argue that the firm and the consumer are equal partners in this relationship, and they create together the experience. Whereas Pine and Gilmore argue that companies should stage the experiences in advance, allowing the consumers to be involved only during the event, Prahalad and Ramaswamy's opinion argues for a collective decision and value creation of experiences.

Consequently, the interaction process allows customers to generate their own unique experiences (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). However, not all the experiences are positive or successful because they are individual creations, as it discussed in the experience economy chapter. The degree of interaction and participation determines if and how the customer will co-create quality experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Moreover, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) analyze the concept of co-creation in-depth and emphasize the importance of previous interaction between the company and its customers. The co-creation cannot be accomplished if there is no previous interaction between both sides; first, the company should build an equal dialog with the customer defining the rules of engagement. In contrast to previous marketing strategies, this notion of co-creation gives access and transparency to information to the customers. Moreover, the dialog, the access, and the transparency lead to risk-benefits of action and decision for the customer. Companies, which leave behind the mass-customization and the firm-centric view, allow personalized interactions between the company-customer. Thus, the co-creation value is *"personalized interaction based on how each individual wants to interact with the company"* (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p.10). Even if each consumer personalizes the interaction for himself, the company cannot predict what experience a consumer will have. For the authors, this a challenge but, at the same time, an opportunity for the company and the consumer to co-create the experience. The continuous communication between the company-consumer will allow the

company to collect information about the consumer and finally co-create together experiences and expectations.

2.8.1. Co-creation in tourism

Unlike other industries, the notion of co-creation in tourism has not received the same attention even if tourism is one of the more significant experience generators (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). Tourism managers following past marketing practices include rarely the consumers in experience design beforehand (i.e. before the arrival at the destination or hotel), but they include the consumers during and afterwards (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). Campos et al. (2016) identify two positioning of co-creation experience in tourism literature. Both of them accept the interaction between the company and the tourist, but they differ when the co-creation occurs. The first positioning in the research affirms that the interaction occurs before, during, and after the visit. In contrast, the second perspective affirms that the interaction takes place only in situ and during the experience (Campos et al., 2016). However, the second positioning considers the consumer merely as tourists when he arrives at the holiday destination for a specific time, only during his visit. Without considers him also as a consumer before the experience.

2.9. Experience-centric service design in hotels

As it been discussed in the previous sub-section, the notion of the experience economy and the consumer's participation have both influenced the tourism businesses; shifting the attention to tourist's engagement and management of the experiences (Tussyadiah, 2014; Taheri et al., 2019). In addition to this change, previous researches in experiential marketing have shown effective results on tourists' satisfaction, loyalty, commitment, electronic Word of Mouth, behavioral intentions and memorable tourism experiences (Taheri et al., 2019) and a higher multi-billion-dollar segment of the hospitality industry (Salazar, 2018). In the marketing literature, the concept of experience design can be found within different approaches. The first approach views the design as a unique proposition characterizing products and services (e.g., aesthetics), the second approach considers the design as a state of mind (i.e., design thinking), and the third approach on experience design is a process that governs the creation of new products and services (Tussyadiah, 2014, p.543-544).

This research follows the third perspective in experience design because the experience-centric service co-creates personalized customer experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Voss et al., 2008; Zomerdijk, L., & Voss, 2010; Tussyadiah, 2014).

Trying to get more knowledge on how experiential marketing can manage the customer experiences and achieve positive results for the customer and the firm, Hwang and Seo (2016) created a framework based on previous academic works on experiential marketing in the general business and the hospitality and tourism industry. The conceptual framework represents conceptualizations and developments of theories in marketing research (Figure 1). The framework explores in-depth, which are the key characteristics of designing customer

experience management, which reach the most positive results for the business, starting from the previous steps of the customer's journey, before the actual customer experience and the outcomes. More profound knowledge about the customer's journey can be a beneficial strategy for companies to meet customers' expectations and, finally, satisfy them through the experience process (Berry et al., 2002).

In the first step, the researchers identified the antecedents of customer experience and divided them into two categories. The first category is related to the individual factors for the customers. More precisely, the socio-demographic factors (i.e., motives, knowledge, personality, age, individual characteristics by a consumer), the personal past experiences that can influence future experiences, and the level of familiarity with the experience. Furthermore, the framework includes the customer engagement factor as an internal antecedent. As the authors affirm, "*in the context of customer experience management, customer engagement is an important means of increasing the value of co-created experience because increased engagement with the product process can lead to positive experience outcomes*" (Hwang & Seo, 2016, p.2229). According to previous studies, the second category of antecedents includes external factors that affect the firm's brand image. Such factors are the quality of the product or service, the physical characteristics where the experience takes place, the social/online environment, the employee's characteristics, the economic factors (e.g., price, promotion, etc.), and the self-service technologies. These six factors contribute to guest satisfaction before the actual customer experience takes place.

On the other hand, the customer experience consequences consist of the emotional outcomes, emotions that may arise after the experience, the behavioral outcomes for the consumers, brand-related outcomes, and other variables, such as experiential marketing (Hwang & Seo, 2016). Overall, the desirable results are mutual in every outcome, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty.

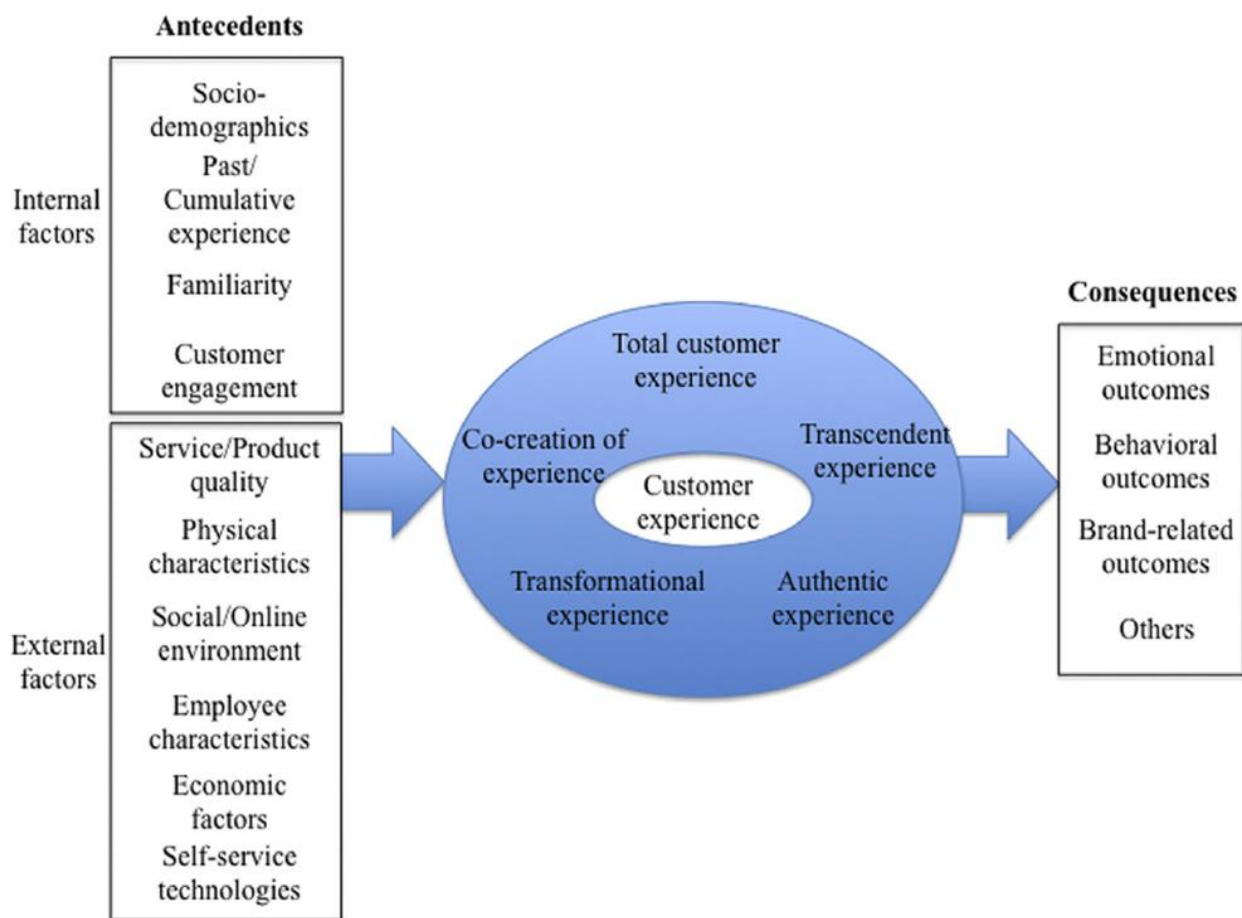


Figure 1 Customer experience management framework. Note. Preprinted from “A critical review of research on customer experience management”, by Hwang, J., and Seo, S. 2016, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(10), p.2229.

Furthermore, the increasing interest and consciousness in environmental issues by tourists, such as carbon footprint, climate change, energy efficiency, create new challenges but also encourages companies to design novel and eco-friendly strategies (Nilsson-Andersen & Bang Andersen, 2012). Towards a more sustainable future under the protection of local environment and communities, hotel companies involve guests to co-create and design new experiences in tourism (Eisen, 2018; HospitalityNet, 2020). Nowadays, tourists are more critical, more conscious, and looking for new experiences in tourism. Thus, companies in order to be more competitive, attractive, and respond to these demands, they develop related facilities and services (Liu, 2003). However, the consumer-centric approach in the tourism and hospitality sector was not always applicable because of the enormous heterogeneity of consumers’ preferences, motivation, and behavior (Williams, 2006; Goldsmith & Tsiotsou, 2012).

3. Methodology

The following chapter will introduce the methodological framework of this research process, arguing for the chosen methodology and methods. This thesis aims to provide more profound knowledge and understanding of green hotels' experience-centric services design and customer participation in the creation of these experiences. The first part of this chapter will discuss and elaborate on the researcher's position to answer this question. Moreover, it will explain why qualitative research methods were used for the research and how the data was collected and analyzed. Finally, the last sections of the chapter will discuss the research limitations.

3.1. Philosophy of science

In social science, a set of beliefs or worldviews is known as a paradigm, which based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions by the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ontology is the study of being and the nature of reality. At the same time, epistemology is driven by ontological beliefs and examines the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Answering to the philosophical questions of what is real or true, and how we know what we know, the research accepts the social constructivism (constructionism or constructivism) paradigm because it views the subjectivity of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Rather than defining what is true, the researcher represents a specific version of social reality (Bryman, 2016, p.33). The nature of this thesis's research question cannot be answered by a single case or by one person. Instead, it requires different opinions by different social actors.

Moreover, the research was guided by relevant theories, mainly in green and experience marketing. However, to answer the research questions, there is a need to investigate more and different cases. By examining only the opinion of marketing experts either in sustainability or in experience design and co-creation, the results could be similar due to common knowledge or academic background. Thus, the social constructivism relativism accepts that reality is subjective and differs from people to people (Scotland, 2012). In the case of the green hotel, social actors are marketing managers and sustainability managers, internal employees in the business, hotel owners, hotel managers, hotel employees, hotel partners such as marketing or sustainability consultants, green certificates managers, and other partners outside of the company. The role of guests is admitted as social actors. However, the research did not include them because it did not focus on the customers' perspective and the outcomes for the consumers.

In addition to the ontological approach, the interpretive epistemology chose to understand and interpret the knowledge from the collected data. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue, "*interpretivism sees knowledge as created in the interaction among investigator and respondents*" (p.111). Moreover, Bryman (2016) argues that interpretivism "*respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural science and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social actions*" (p.30). Furthermore, because the interpretivism position uses qualitative research methods to collect data, such as interviews and observations (Bryman, 2016), it allows the researcher to look for meaning and motives behind people's actions and understand their behaviors (Chowdhury, 2014, p.33).

I chose these philosophical approaches because they represent my point of view about the research problem. The main protagonist of the research might seem to be how green hotels design experience, although the problem is more complicated. The epistemology approach influenced my research and the way that I sought the participants and the data. Moreover, my working background and previous empirical experiences had influenced the way I explored the case. My professional experience in the hospitality industry in a hotel company with environmental policy in Greece and later in a green hotel chain in Denmark helped me to approach in-depth the research problem. Because of my professional background, I had noticed and experienced different approaches on the examined topic. In particular, the way of designing a green experiences in both countries. The method of communication between the employee and the guest about the green experience. The way that the guests and the employees participate in the green experience. Moreover, the fact that I worked in different companies with different managers, colleagues, hotel policies, and company values was essential to how I gathered and analyzed the data. Finally, I have to admit that I cannot be entirely objective during data analysis because I use my understandings, interpretation, and experience for the project.

3.2. Research Design

Using a qualitative research approach to the case, the research strategy, and the assumptions of reality and knowledge reflect on the research design. The research design provides the framework for the data collection and data analysis as chosen by the research (Bryman, 2016). The research design of this dissertation combines deductive and inductive design principles. In other words, the on abductive research strategy. The deductive approach develops propositions from the existing theory. Unlike inductive theory, where theory is systematically generated from data, the combination of both reasoning will generate reliable and accurate results (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). *“In studies relying on abduction, the original framework is successively modified, partly as a result of unanticipated empirical findings, but also of theoretical insights gained during the process. This approach created fruitful cross-fertilization where new combinations are developed through a mixture of established theoretical model and new concepts derived from the confrontation with reality”* (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p.559).

My personal interest in the topic formulated the general research question and the beginning of the research. The early stages of the research followed the deductive reasoning starting from the existing theories. Furthermore, the current literature and theories influenced and guided the formulation of the research question. The inductive process in data collection followed in the next stage, where data collection occurred and led to the revision of the theory (Hannam & Knox, 2011). The selecting cases in Denmark and Greece represented a few examples of green hotels in both destinations. All the examples are different in the dynamic of the hotel. For example, on the one hand, hotel chains and, on the other hand, family businesses.

3.3. Research methods

Because the research lies on social constructivism and interpretivism orientation to the problem, the qualitative research methods were chosen to collect and analyze the data. The qualitative research strategy considers the most appropriate to identify a problem and get a more detailed answers. As Bryman (2016) explains, the quantitative research goal is the generalization of the results confirming or rejecting the theory. The main characteristic of quantitative research is to test the theory and hypothesis of accepting or rejecting norms and practices. In contrast, the focus of the qualitative study focuses on the interpretation of words and agrees with the subjective nature of knowledge. The interpretation of the words, behaviors, and experiences allows the research to examine the research problem in depth. As the quantitative research use numbers, statistics, and figures by a representative sample to generate the results, the qualitative research methods allow greater flexibility to collect the data. Many researchers argue that qualitative research views events and social world through the eye of the examined participants (p.399). Moreover, the qualitative methods, due to the significantly smaller sample group than the quantitative techniques, allows face-to-face interaction of participating in the mind of another human being (p.339). In other words, qualitative research gives the freedom to the researcher to understand participants' behavior, emotions, and personal opinions.

Furthermore, quantitative and qualitative research differs in data collection methods and techniques, depending on how the research wants to answer the research question. The qualitative research methods fall into four categories, observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Because empirical observations were not possible during the data collection period, the reasons explained in section 4.6., individual interviews, and online materials were conducted. The research-based primary on interviews because *“the purpose of the interview is to explore the views, experiences beliefs and/or motivations of individual on specific matters. [...] Interviews are, therefore, most appropriate where little is already known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants”* (Gill et al., 2008, p.292).

3.3.1. Interview guide

As explained in section 3.1., my personal interest guided the formulation of research as a first step. The literature review influenced and guided the research questions for the interview. All the questions phrased and rephrased until the form of the final questions. Moreover, all questions formed to be open-ended, allowing the participants to answer with additional information about the topic. The goal of open-ended questions is to uncover as much about the problem and the participants' opinions. The structure of the questions began from easy-to-answer questions and moved towards one that was more difficult to answer (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

The communication with the potential interviewees' started before the formulation of the final research questions. All potential participants received an introduction e-mail about the purpose of the research and an invitation to participate. Moreover, three hotels had been contacted via social media. One via Facebook, as

the owner of the hotel asked for, and two hotels via Instagram because they did not provide any other contact information on the website. In addition, all the e-mail included information about the length of the interview, around 30 minutes, and the option to decide how they would like to answer the questions and when. The given options were online via Skype or FaceTime and written questions in a structured form. At the end of the e-mail, ethical principles, confidentiality, and the option of anonymity participation were included. Moreover, all the participants were informed that there no obligation to participate in the research; it was voluntary participation, and the mail encouraged them to contact me for any further explanation and information.

In total, 12 green hotels had been contacted in Greece. From the 12 hotels, only four hotels are part of hotel chains. The rest eight reached cases are small and family-run businesses. None of the hotels is located in the Greek capital because they research did not find any interesting case in Athens. Therefore, all the contacted cases are located in different parts of Greece, in the mainland and on the islands. In Denmark, seven green hotels and one hotels chain had been contacted to participate in the research. From the seven hotels, two hotels do not belong to a hotel chain, one hotel is part of an international hotel chain and four hotels are members of Danish hotel chains. All the Danish green hotels are located in different parts of Denmark. Moreover, two Danish sustainability experts in Copenhagen asked to participate in the research.

The participants (green hotels and two sustainability managers) were strategically selected because their knowledge and perceptions of the problem could generate different answers.

All the participants who agreed to participate in the research, eight in total, received an instruction note in the document with the same questions (section 8.1.). The participants received the research questions in advance in order to have more time to prepare for the interview.

3.3.2. Structured individual interviews

The structured questions have been precisely in the same order as there was no physical interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. Even if structured questions, as a method is a characteristic of quantitative research, the purpose of the thesis was not to standardize the answers, but to explore different opinion on the topic. Structured interviews are formal and they follow the same order and are the same questions for all the participants (Hannam & Knox, 2011). Besides these characteristic, structured interviews are not flexible as semi-structured of unstructured interviews and limited in participants' responses and elaboration (Gill et al., 2008). For this reason, all the questions were structured as open-ended questions and gave the freedom to the participant to answer according to his/her knowledge and understandings. The structured questions did not form as a questionnaire but adjusted in qualitative research method with open-ended question and flexibly.

Moreover, structured interviews that conducted online characterized as an asynchronous method because they do not require physical presence by the research and the interviewee at the same time and place (Jowett et al. 2011). The participants had ten days to respond and to send back the document with their answers.

The first part of the structured interview asked the participants to introduce themselves, and the next questions were more general and easy to answer. The second part of the interview was more precisely on the green experiences provided by the hotel, the way of designing, and the degree of customers' involvement. The last set of questions referred to front-line employees and their role in the experience-centric service. Moreover, the participants had to mention which green experiences external partners provide.

3.3.3. Semi-structured individual interviews

In addition to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews took place via phone calls and Skype. The same structured questions had been sent to all the participants before the interview appointment. However, because the interviews took place in real-time, the meeting was not that formal. The semi-structured interviews guided by the structured questions without being mandatory for participants to answer all the questions. Due to the different background, knowledge, and job occupation, all the questions were adapted accordingly to the interviewee. Because the dialog was active, the conversation did not follow the same structure as the structured questions. "*Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail*" (Gill et al., 2008, p.291). Moreover, semi-structured interviews are more flexible than structured in the question order, and questions not included in the guide could be asked (Bryman, 2016). Also, the semi-structured interview allowed me to follow-up questions asking the participant to elaborate on his/her answer. I could also guide the conversation, asking the participant to move to another topic.

Two limitations that I had to overcome were the geographical distance and the prohibition of physical contact. Hence, because the examined cases were in Greece and Denmark, the use of technology was essential to data collection. In total, four interviews took place using technological ways; two interviews were on Skype, and two were telephone interviews. As Bryman (2016) argues, telephone interviews are shorter than physical interviews and faster for the interviewee, allowing the participant to choose the place and the time. The telephone interviews conducted with the sustainability experts; thus, the questions were adapted accordingly to their knowledge because they did not work for a hotel, but they were external partners. Therefore, the questions were relevant to their expertise and professional attitude. The rest two interviews were online, face-to-face interviews via Skype. The advantages of Skype interviews were that the participants do not have to worry about the time or the place as they decide when to talk. Moreover, the researcher develops a rapport with the participants to establish a safe and comfortable environment to share their personal experiences (Lo lacono et al., 2016, p. 7).

Moreover, because the participants came from different professional and cultural backgrounds, further information and explanations gave in briefly to them before or during the interview. In this way, I tried to diminish any potential misunderstandings regarding questions' terminology. I avoided any detailed explanations because I wanted their original answers and not to influence their responses.

All the semi-structured interviews recorded with the permission of participants and transcribed shortly after our conversation. During the interviews, written notes were taken as a supplement to the recorded audio. Two interviews were conducted in English and two in Greek. The Greek transcripts were translated into English, and the full transcription of the four interviews can be found in the Appendix chapter. Furthermore, because the two Danish participants interviewed in the English language and not in Danish, misunderstandings might occur during the interviews. Moreover, because the interviews are verbal, grammatical, and syntactic mistakes were corrected.

3.3.4. Participants

Participants	Occupation	Location	Type of interview	Further contact
Trine Plambech	Manager – Intelligent Sustainability Principal Green Urban Designer	Copenhagen, Denmark	Semi-structured	
Mikal Holt Jensen	Head of Environment Department in HORESTA & Head Secretariat in Green Key	Copenhagen, Denmark	Semi-structured	
Marina Valli	Hotel owner – Eleonas Hotel	Evia, Greece	Semi-structured	
Anonymous	Receptionist	Skiathos, Greece	Semi-structured	
Marylin Raftopoulos	Hotel owner – Levendis Estate	Ithaca, Greece	Structured	X

Participant 4 required its anonymity and hotel's anonymity. The research respected participant's request and did not include any personal information, neither the name of the hotel and the hotel chain, which is a member.

3.4. Further data

In addition to the five interviews, further data gathered to enrich the knowledge about examined green hotels. Besides, the traditional ethnographic qualitative research methods and techniques, online ethnography, or netnography is a data collection technique that uses public online information (Kozinets, 2002).

The project 'Grøn omstilling i hotelbranchen' conducted in 2016-2017 by Alexandra Instituttet, HORESTA, Aarhus University, the Green Solution House hotel in Bornholm, and the Guldsmeden Hotels in Copenhagen and Aarhus. The project examined the relationships between the green hotels and the guests, gaining knowledge about how the guests can support the energy technology initiatives and how sustainability in hotels creates long-lasting relationships with guests.

Moreover, the research collected data from the largest travel communication channel, the TripAdvisor.com. The study gathered all the interesting online reviews stated: a) consumers' experiences in a sustainability context and b) consumers' interaction and personal relationship with the hotel employees-owners from 2017 to 2019. The online reviews from 2020 were not included because the three green hotels in Greece are seasonal. In contrast, the Danish green hotels are open all year round.

Further data were collected by the five hotel websites referring to sustainability policy, sustainability actions and solution, and green activities.

3.5. Data analysis

The thesis followed the thematic analysis to analyze and identify themes from the collected data. The thematic analysis's advantage is its flexibility in data interpretation by sorting them into themes (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a step-by-step guide of thematic analysis, starting from transcribing the data. All the interviews were converted in textual form. The second step was the coding of the data. Coding is the main categorizing strategy in qualitative research, which fracture and rearrange the data into categories (Maxwell, 2008). Moreover, the four documents from the project *Grøn omstilling i hotelbranchen* were also coded in the same way as the interviews, as well as online reviews from the website TripAdvisor and the five hotels' websites. The third step of thematic analysis was the search for themes. Themes are broader categories than codes, and all coded data were combined to fit into potential themes. At that point, 31 codes were categorized into six initial themes (marketing, consumers, design and co-creation, hotel employees, and sustainability values). In the fourth step, all themes were reviewed. Codes and themes that were not relevant to the research were discarded. In the fifth step, three themes were defined and were named accordingly to the research problem. At the last step, the analysis of the data and the writing-up took place. The data had been coding and themed in the NVIVO program.

3.6. Limitations

Covid-19

The circumstances under which the research took place did not allow a more in-depth examination of the research problem. According to the Greek government decisions amid coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, all hotels around the country were temporarily closed. The temporary suspension of the operation of the hotels resulted in 1) difficult communication with the hotels and 2) the reluctance of the hotels to participate in the research, as they could not devote time to it. Greek participants' behavior could be understood under those circumstances. More precisely, some potential participants mentioned that the temporary country lockdown and mandatory closure of their property had a negative impact on their business.

A typical example was the region of Halkidiki, the most popular summer destination in Northern Greece, where more than 70 hotels were for sale only one month after the announcement of lockdown. In addition, a survey by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels stated that in total, 65% of hoteliers are likely or most likely go bankrupt. The same case applied in Denmark, where the government's restrictions forced hotels for a temporary closure until further notice. Moreover, some Danish companies could not provide any information because they dedicated their resources and time to deal with the situation of the company.

Moreover, the temporary closure of hotels in Denmark did not allow for any empirical observation and data collection. Ethnographic techniques, such as in situ through observation, active participation, thick description, and photography, were impossible to carry out.

Each method has its limitations; however, as I argued in this chapter, the chosen methods are the most suitable to answer the research question. The research question seeks to unfold different opinions on green and experience marketing. Thereby, interviewing various experts from different countries and backgrounds helped me as a researcher to get a more profound knowledge about the research topic. Furthermore, the netnography method designed to study communities online. The websites of the hotels and the online reviews on TripAdvisor represent online communities where users can create a dialog between each other.

4. Analysis

In this chapter, the findings from the structured and semi-structured interviews will be represented, as well as key findings from the project 'Grøn omstilling i hotelbranchen', guests' reviews on TripAdvisor.com and hotels' website. The analysis is divided into three themes; sustainability in hotels, the role of consumers in the creation of experiences, and the role of front-line employees. The first part of the analysis will represent why hotels move towards sustainable tourism. The second part will discuss the procedures used by the green hotels to involve the consumers in the creation of experience. The third part will explore the relationship between green hotels - front-line employees – consumers. Finally, the analysis will represent the opportunities and challenges for green hotels to design green experiences.

The analysis chapter will use the terms visitor, guest, and customer referring to hotel clients. The use of the term consumer is avoided as the research does not study whether the tourists were involved in the experience. But, it is looking to answer how they could be involved in creating experiences. The word consumer will be used only by invoking the user of experience when the co-creation experience had occurred.

4.1. Sustainability

The increasing customers' environmental awareness towards greener choices and consumption and the negative environmental impact by the hotel industry influence the customers' decision making, as emphasized in the literature review. The research includes two types of eco-friendly hotels in Denmark and Greece. Hotels that are friendly to the environment since the first day of their operation, and hotels that followed a different trajectory and turned into green hotels a few years later. An example of a hotel, which turned into a green hotel, is a hotel in Skiathos Island in Greece. At the question, why the hotel has environmental policy the receptionist (Anonymous) who works ten years in the hotel and 12 years for this company said:

“The Company right now owns five hotels in Greece. One of the hotels is on the most sustainable Greek island, or at least they promote like this. I do not know if it is true, but it might be one reason why the company changed its values. When the two oldest children of the CEO, a family business, came back to Greece after their studies in the UK and the USA, they started to get involved more in managing the company. I guess another reason is this because they are young and they had been educated abroad. Moreover, the hotel is within nature. It is surrounding by trees, olive trees. In general, the island is very green (i.e., flora, not sustainable orientation) and has six award beaches with blue flag. I cannot say if it is their ideology. Still, I think they changed towards sustainability because it is a community demand and to attract more tourists. More tourists with this mentality.”
(Anonymous, receptionist)

The receptionist's answer combines but also points out different approaches to why hotel companies change their position towards sustainability. The answer demonstrates four reasons for change. However, the receptionist assumed attracting more customers, in particular eco-conscious guests was the determined reason for the company to adopt eco-friendly practices. The receptionist's approach about the change aligns with the previous finding in green hotel marketing observing positive outcomes for the companies with an environmentally friendly strategy in terms of competitiveness (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007). The hotel aims to attract green consumers following the trends in global marketing, realizing that a satisfactory percentage of customers have turned or will turn to ecology. So the search for a green hotel will be the solution to the problem and not a need for change.

Moreover, the receptionist pointed out the community demand for change. The increasing environmental awareness inspired hotels to take actions to eliminate the negative impact of hotels operations (Hsieh, 2012). The same approach mentioned also by Mikal Holt Jensen the Head of Environment Department in HORESTA and the Head Secretariat in Green Key in Denmark.

“What we see now is actually that it is turned around so the customers and especially business customers expect that they [the hotels] care and they do something for the environment. Actually, you [hotel manager] can end up not being choose if you are not doing it, or people can be disappointed or [people] could have negative thoughts and being concerned about not doing anything. Therefore, they have to. That is a part of the trends that has changed. So now most hotels actually should do it.” (Mikal Holt Jensen, Head of Environment Department in HORESTA & the Head Secretariat in Green Key)

A few years ago, the hospitality sector viewed the conservation and protection of the environment as a global trend guided by public awareness. This public awareness moved hotels to a new direction and to the sustainable development in hotels (Lee et al., 2010). However, the answer does not demonstrate this trend in tourism and hospitality. What actually, Mikal Holt Jensen noticed, is that the hotels shift to green operation management because more and more customers required for it. The customers now expect from the hospitality industry to follow and to implement sustainable practices in the hotels. Therefore, the trend now is not the demand for change, something that hotels should do in the future. It is a prerequisite and urgent need from the customer to choose the hotel, something that hotels should already have done in the past. This trend has turned round and changed.

Moreover, the hotels in Denmark do not only change because of a global trend or customer pressure. Taking into account what Mikal Holt Jensen said about the percentage of eco-labeled hotels in Denmark, it is clear again that more hotels change to sustainability management because of the increasing competitive advantage. Therefore, it is understandable that hotels that implement green policies, they gain an important advantage to improve their brand image and attract more guests (Tzschentke et al., 2004).

“562 hotels in Denmark with more than 40 rooms are part of Green Key. This measurement refers to 23% of the hotels in Denmark. In [the] Copenhagen area, it is a lot; more than 50% of the hotels are part of the Green Key.” (Mikal Holt Jensen, Head of Environment Department in HORESTA & the Head Secretariat in Green Key)

Another approach on why hotels going green was given by Trine Plambech about the Danish hotel chain Guldsmeden Hotels and the Green Solution House in Bornholm.

“They have a clear strategy and their management has decided that they would like to become a greener hotel more sustainable which means that they will try to find all the way to lower the use of resources.” (Trine Plambech, Intelligent Sustainability Manager).

In the cases of Guldsmeden Hotels and the Green Solution House, the green actions are a strategy to be greener hotels without mentioning the guests' involvement as a demand of change. Moreover, Trine Plambech mentioned that the hotel would try to find any possible way to lower the use of resources. One of the main benefit and primary reason, according to the theory, that motivates or forces the hotels to adopt eco-friendly practices in operation management is the reduction of cost (Hsieh, 2012; Tzschentke et al., 2004).

In contrast to the previous reasons for change, the two hotel owners in Greece emphasized different motivations towards sustainability operation management in their small family businesses.

“The philosophy it was aiming in the environmental protection was, first of all, a personal one and not a professional, and that is a point in which I would like to emphasize. [...] It was solely our desire to build it in an environmentally sustainable way. It was not also on trend at that time as it nowadays. [...] I will keep my ideology. I have a notebook since we opened I have written the basics (i.e., sustainable initiatives in the hotel). I will never change that. The market business may push me somewhere, but they cannot change me. [...] Although I will insist on many things.” (Marina Valli, owner of Eleonas Hotel)

“Our original idea was to build four traditional houses within the olive grove, which our four children could use in the future, and do this in a sustainable and eco-friendly way. [...] The fact that I am a farmer's daughter and my family's farm was organic/green, we grew our own food, had our own animals, recycled everything, collected rainwater, used our sewerage system gray water, etc. etc.”

and so were about 90% self-sufficient. As that is what I know best, it is what we re-created when we started to build. [...] It's a good feeling to be able to influence their thinking! They ask lots of questions, e.g., why we clean out the animal sheds each day and add the manures to the compost pit, why does the pool taste like salt, are these straws made of paper, how do you make soap out of olive oil, can I pick some tomatoes, etc. All these kinds of questions lead back to green/eco and they always see the reasons why it should be so. It's also fun to make statements such as 'we never need to go to the supermarket', they will ask how come and then we can explain that we make all we need – preserve our own foods, make our own cleaning products, disinfectants, soaps and body care products from our herbs, olive oil and aloe.” (Marylin Raftopoulos, owner of Levendis Estate)

What is interesting from these answers is that their choices were value-driven. The owners' values and beliefs on sustainability align with their business characteristics (Tzschentke et al., 2004). For Marina Valli, sustainability is a philosophy and ideology that influenced and motivated her decision-making in the hotel operation system. She characterizes her eco-friendly attitude as philosophy and ideology because of her strong beliefs. This also explains why she described sustainable tourism as a trend nowadays. Again, it is clear that her personal values and beliefs view sustainability in hospitality as a way of life, and not as a trend in tourism to attract more guests or as a mainstream. Moreover, her actions are characterized by moral obligation and commitment (they cannot change me, I will insist on many things). What Marina Valli pointed out are the external and internal factors exert pressure to change the hotel activities and facilities. External stakeholders (e.g., travel agencies) on the island, who want to attract more tourists and promote her hotel, asked her to design different activities than she had organized. The hotel guests are the internal factor demanding more luxurious amenities, and they would like to have during their stay. During the interview, she mentioned customers demand for non-eco-friendly practices in the hotels, which she denied. However, she will take into account their suggestion that do not alter her beliefs.

For Marylin Raftopoulos sustainability was a way of life since her childhood. Her previous experiences and her lifestyle did not change over the years. She operates the hotel with what she knows best and what she used to do in her everyday life. Moreover, Marylin Raftopoulos expressed her moral commitment and responsibility for her family, talking about a green future. The fact that Levendis Estate is a 90% self-sufficient and independent place can also motivate the customers to adopt the same or similar practices when they go home. The hotel invites guests on a sustainable journey showing unique and different experiences. The hotel promotes and shows in practice how humans can have an alternative way of life, different from their normal city life.

“Most are from European cities and many have never seen fruit on trees, a vegetable garden, collected fresh eggs from the nests, fed a donkey. They are so entertained and interested in all this

that they happily leave their mobile devices alone for days on end! – And that’s a huge thrill for everyone in my family!!!” (Marylin Raftopoulos, owner of Levendis Estate)

Each participant expressed different reason and ways of going green in hospitality. The customer pressure as well as the ethical and the economic reason are equal important for hotels to adopted and implement sustainability management offering different experience than the standard hotels to the customers (Tzschentke et al., 2004). Moreover, sustainability as a marketing position creates a long-lasting sustainability-oriented value relationship with customers (Peattie, 2015).

4.2. Consumers

4.2.1. Interaction

The results of the data highlight the existence of previous interaction between the green hotels and the guests. This interaction occurred before, during, and after the visit. In the first step, green hotels provide any useful information about their products and services. Usually, the information comes along with a short or long description/explanation. As the research focus on green experiences, six interaction methods had been identified. The six interaction methods represent the prior step of experience design in the co-creation context.

As part of the Green Key criteria, the hotels must inform their guests about the green actions. Green hotels that hold an environmental award must place it physically in the hotel or virtually, according to the expert.

“It is also part of the criteria that they should work with should inform the guest about environmental actions. [...] I see now that more and more, actually want to inform about it. There has been a period when they maybe did not want to inform so much about it because they were not sure if they were doing it. They did not want to create better expectations. But now you can see that more and more like to inform you about it.” (Mikal Holt Jensen, Head of Environment Department in HORESTA & the Head Secretariat in Green Key)

Each hotel uses different methods to inform and promote green initiatives. Hotels, which did not promote their green initiatives, probably did not know how to promote them or avoided it because guests would expect more by the hotels (e.g., more actions, different prices, or other facilities). However, the green hotels in Denmark are more imaginative now promoting their green positioning, Mikal Holt Jensen said.

(1) The first method is the internet-based signs on the websites. All the examined hotels include their webpages on sustainable management or the environmental policy, as well as pictures and eco-friendly logos. For example, visitors on Guldsmeden Hotels webpage can download the annual sustainability report and be informed about their focus areas. The reports include four key areas with detailed descriptions about green actions, facilities, products and services. Moreover, the last part of the reports represents the past year's improvements.

Unlike Guldsmeden Hotels, Marina Valli in Greece uses the information on the website to prevent potential dissatisfaction for guests who do not want green holidays, as she said. Her hotel's website provides all the green initiatives and invites customers with the same eco-philosophy without, of course, discouraging people with less or no eco-friendly attitude to visit the hotel. As she explained, she wants to eliminate negative experiences for the consumer and clarify that the hotel operates in eco-friendly way. Moreover, Marina Valli explained that the Greek guests usually underestimate the environmental problems or do not align with her eco-friendly decision and require different amenities and facilities in the rooms. Hence, the website, provides all the information about the facilities and amenities (e.g., the guestrooms provide books instead of television) and guests can be informed before they book or arrive at the hotel.

Another example of internet-based communication is the website of Green Solution House in Bornholm, which familiarizes the visitors with an extensive description of 75 sustainability ideas implemented by the hotel. A picture represents each idea/solution with a description of the concept, and website visitors can be inspired and follow them at home. Moreover, the guest who will visit the hotel will obtain more profound knowledge about the place and the property.

Overall, the internet-based method is a powerful marketing tool for green hotels to show the business green position. Moreover, the website visitors can access the information anytime and anywhere, get inspiration, and finally obtain knowledge (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017).

(2) The second method, is also an internet-based method, is the email correspondence. Marilyn Raftopoulos was the only one who mentioned the email conversation as a method to interact and inform the guests. Without, of course, saying that the other green hotels do not communicate via email. Marylin Raftopoulos provides a long description and explanation about the green initiatives in the hotels to visitors.

"I have always thought that they make their first enquiry as they are attracted firstly by our 'eco'/green/natural bias. I send them a long first email explaining, in brief, all of these initiatives then typically, the one person who enquired will be discussing their decision to holiday at Levendis with a partner who will ask questions. [...] I will answer all their questions in detail like this. This means that by the time they arrive at Levendis, such major questions have already been answered."

(Marylin Raftopoulos, owner of Levendis Estate)

In this way, she allows the customer to have more access to the information, while the customer already knows what kind of experience he will live. Any previous interaction predisposes the consumer to the experience and can plan how he will shape the experience. As a result, any prior communication with the company is beneficial for the consumer to create his own experience before the visit (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

(3) The third method is the visible signs, the physical elements in the hotels. The way that green hotels decide how they would like to inform their guests differ in every place. As Mikal Holt Jensen said, the visible signs can be in common areas, in the hotel room, or even in the key card. The Green Solution House placed a huge poster with the title Sustainability and a small text explaining the reason for their green action. Moreover, the Green Solution House made an exhibition where visitors could be informed about the 75 sustainability solutions by the hotels, said Trine Plambech.

“They can actually point you in the direction where you can see yourself what they have done.”

(Trine Plambech, Intelligent Sustainability Manager)

The Green Solution House exhibition also attracted some guests because they were informed about the exhibition and inspired them. The exhibition wanted to educate the visitors about the efforts to become a green hotel, likewise the website of the hotel. The Guldsmeden Hotels used another way to attract guests' attention (figure 2). The wall depicts ten actions of the hotel, encouraging visitors to support and participate in the activities. Furthermore, the hotel chain used the Green Global certificate logo above the ten actions to enhance the effort's credibility.

Each hotel uses diverse visible methods to inform and educate the customers. The visible signs also inspire the guests to participate in the experience when they obtain more knowledge of what the green hotel does and how. They will also prevent questions about the hotel products and services, said Marina Valli. Moreover, the visible signs such as information booklets in the guestrooms, sustainability certificates, and the previous examples increase the hotel's credibility about the products and services (Chan, 2014).



Figure 2 Guldsmeden Hotels, visible sign on the wall (Retrieved from Guldsmeden Hotels Facebook fanpage)

(4) The fourth method refers to direct dialog with the customer. In the question, how Marina Valli communicates the eco-friendly message when the guests are in the hotel, she talked about a book that she had created in every guestroom. This book contains all the eco-friendly initiatives in the hotels. Although, she said about this book:

“I would like to add that a booklet or brochure is not enough. Firstly, it is possible that the guests will not see it at all and secondly it is a bit impersonal. It is an announcement in the entrance that some may read, and some will not. In order to motivate a guest and make him to ask, to suggest, and to participate in the whole project you must contact him. The personal contact with him is significant to approach him and participate (i.e., in the experience).” (Marina Valli, owner of Eleonas Hotel)

The visual signs are physical elements, as analyzed in the third method. However, Marina Valli expressed a different opinion about the visible signs and her effort to motivate the guests. She characterized the visible signs as impersonal elements because they do not create an active dialog between guests and hotels. Firstly, some signs might not be understandable from the guests or do not attract their attention. Secondly, even if the

guests are aware of the actions, they do not participate because they do not know how, when, or why to engage in the experience. Also, some guests do not want to participate in any activity during the stay. Lastly, the visual signs do not motivate all the guests to participate in the actions; by extension, the guests who do not have any motivation, will not participate in the co-creation of their experience. On the other hand, personal contact increases the chances of getting motivated and reach the desirable goal, to participate in the experience.

“If I see during the time that they are eating and someone has a personal interest in what he eats, or about the recipe, then I suggest to them about a possible cooking class and give them more personalized information. In this way, an experience can be created for them.” (Marina Valli, owner of Eleonas Hotel)

Marina Valli recommends that face-to-face interaction is more successful in motivating the guest to engage in the creation of his own experience. When a guest has a particular interest, she tries to attract his attention, understand what he wants, and create a potential solution for both. The guest will participate and gain experience, while the hotel owner will provide the tools to the guest to create his experience.

Moreover, Marylin Raftopoulos mentioned the personal contact also in her interview. The personal connection will increase the interaction level between the green hotel and the visitor. It will generate more questions from the customer side and will encourage him to co-create memorable experiences. Furthermore, the hotel can transfer the knowledge and, finally, educate the customer about the advantages of going green. As Marylin Raftopoulos wrote in her interview, the dialog will increase the opportunities to influence customer's perceptions towards sustainability. Finally, the dialog will increase the chances of the customer participating in the creation of his experience.

“We create the dialogue, promote the green/eco choices we have made and yes, we definitely educate and influence our guests. [...] They also enjoy the blend of knowing that all our services and amenities are there when they want to make use of them.” (Marylin Raftopoulos, owner of Levendis Estate)

(5) The personal interaction between the guests and the hotels also included the employees. The fifth method requires hotel managers to educate their employees about the green initiatives. When the employees are fully informed about the reasons why the hotel follows a sustainability policy, they can contribute more on transfer knowledge and answer the questions (Yu et al., 2017). Trine Plambech and Mikal Holt Jensen mentioned that green hotels should educate their employees about their green actions, products and services. Then, the

employees will be well prepared for the interaction with the guests, and they can influence the creation of their experience.

(6) The last method is the word of mouth.

"The word of mouth works well for us." (Marylin Raftopoulos, owner of Levendis Estate)

Previous consumers' experience can influence future consumers' experience in green hotels (Lorentzen, 2009). Consumers who have visited a green hotel can promote or recommend it to others. Marylin Raftopoulos wrote that loyal guests return to the hotel with their friends for holidays. Also, word of mouth works in the hotel with fellow guests. Marylin Raftopoulos explained in her interview that guests usually talk to fellow guests and exchange ideas and opinions. They take collective decisions, for example, which movie they will watch in the hotel's cinema. Moreover, the receptionist (Anonymous) spoke about the benefit of word of mouth for the business and the fact that the future guests know already about their service from previous consumers. *"Successful experiences are those that the customer finds unique, memorable and sustainable over time, would want to repeat and build upon, and enthusiastically promotes via word of mouth"* (Pullman & Gross, 2004, p. 553).

The six hotels' methods show that the co-creation of experience cannot occur without any previous interaction between the company and the customers. (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The green hotels give access to the information; however, the interaction process is not transparent, as Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) describe. The hotel controls the interaction (i.e., website, email correspondence, visible signs, and personal conversations), giving to the customer what the hotel want. Although, word of mouth by the fellow or previous customers is uncontrollable and has more opportunities for the guests to co-create the authentic experiences. These six methods allow the consumer to control how he/she wants to interact with the green hotel (personalized the co-creation). Nevertheless, the green hotel managers cannot predict what kind of experience the consumer will have.

4.2.2. Collect information

The uncertainty of the experience prediction leads the hotel manager to collect information about their customers. The three interviewees from Greece answered that they offer personalized services based on the information they received from the guest. The first element in the design of experience is the given information by the green hotel. In the second step, green hotels collect information about the guest. The collected information makes the questions targeted; thus, the hotel managers or the employees can provide information about their products or services that suits their needs. The first two answers illustrate the process of collecting information from each guest when he/she arrive at the property. Targeted questions by the hotel side will

generate relevant, valuable information to understand which his /her preference is. Then, the managers or the employees can give relevant information and suggestion. Consequently, the green hotel builds a rapport engaging the customer in experience creation.

“After 20 years, I am capable of understanding what would possible, like each guest. Of course, I make them the usually related question of what they would like to do during their stay and what they have read about the place, but generally, I can feel their preferences. Afterward, I make personal suggestions. I am not going to repeat the same to every guest.” (Marina Valli, owner of Eleonas Hotel)

“To every guest we are different. [...] We want to feel unique and special. [...] I always ask a few questions just to know what kind of information I will provide.” (Anonymous, receptionist)

“Every single service we offer, or physical amenity created within the Estate, is 100% guest-personalized. All were created with the aim of giving our guests a somewhat unique combination of experiences in a natural geographic environment. [...] Without exception, the people who are attracted to our Estate are wanting to spend time with their loved ones in a place where mass tourism does not exist.” (Marylin Raftopoulos, owner of Levendis Estate)

Marylin Raftopoulos referred that their service is consumer-centric for those who want to avoid mass tourism. The hotels understood which element attracts more guests; hence, the design of the experiences had been influenced by this need. Marylin Raftopoulos' approach and explanation on how she and her family designed the experiences by listening carefully to the customers' needs, aligns with previous studies on experience design. As Tussyadiah (2014) argues, the designers of experiences in tourism should identify customers' thoughts and feelings, motivations, values, priorities, and preferences, making a direct connection between the customer and the business. This following review on TripAdvisor it is an indicator that Levendis Estate prioritized customer' needs during their stay demonstrating the environmental values of the company.

“Stefanos & Mal have single-mindedly pursued their joint philosophy of creating a space that takes advantage of the natural environment responsibly & that takes care of every individual need.” (TripAdvisor.com review, 2017)

However, this approach of experience design is in contrast with Marina's Valli words. In the question, if they activities have planned to attract more tourists or to satisfy them, she answered that they never thought what guests want; instead, the criterion was what her husband and she wanted for their hotels.

"I will say that all this is what I and my husband likes. I never started with what they want." (Marina Valli, owner of Eleonas Hotel)

Likewise, to her previous answer, why she chose to have a green business in section 5.1., she points out here that again her values are stronger than the guest's needs and satisfaction. Her eco-friendly positioning guided her decision-making in the design of the experience-centric services. In the question about the Olive harvesting experience, the main experience in the hotels, she said that no one has never participated in this experience. As she explained, the olive harvesting takes place every September when the hotel has significantly fewer guests. Moreover, the olive harvesting activity is an authentic experience that takes place in real, with her husband, who is a farmer and the workers early morning hours, while the guests were sleeping. The activity was not appealing to the guests at that time, and it forced her to design a more theatrically Olive experience in the following years.

"Many years passed until I realized that by pressing them, you could not really give them any experience. You have to wait for them to come to you." (Marina Valli, owner of Eleonas Hotel)

The lack of interest in the Olive picking experience can be seen as a lack of personalized experience design. Even if the authentic experiences are more valuable because they are memorable and unique events for people, the green hotel could not motivate the guests to participate (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). In comparison to the previous example at Levendis Estate, Eleonas Hotels focused more on the owners' expectations rather than guests' preferences and satisfaction.

4.3. Front-line employees

The research found that front-line employees' role is equally crucial to the creation of valuable experiences in green hotels. Employees are also part of the experience design and a valuable source for the hotel manager to improve guests' satisfaction (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Sørensen & Jensen, 2015; Hwang & Seo, 2016). The research detected four steps from green hotels to engage the front-line employees (i.e., employees who have direct communication with the customers) in the design and delivery of experience-centric service.

(1) Educate train the employees

The hotel employees' education is part of the Green Key certification, as mentioned by Mikal Holt Jensen, Head of Environment Department in HORESTA & the Head Secretariat in Green Key. Hotels organize seminars to enhance employees' knowledge about the hotel's sustainability policy, explaining their values and strategy. Four out of five interviewees referred to the employees training by the green hotels. Previous studies suggest that hotel managers should train the staff about the eco-friendly program by building employee commitment and improving employability and marketability (Chan et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2017). In this way, they will be fully informed about the products and services in the green hotel. Guldsmeden Hotels have trained the staff to tell an engaging and exciting story about their products. In this way, they can involve a positive dialog with the guests, said Trine Plambech, Intelligent Sustainability Manager. Moreover, the green hotels train their staff to confront the guest's irritation, and inconvenience for the implementation of green actions said the same participant.

(2) Engage the employees

Acknowledging the importance of eco-friendly practices and their role in the hotel, the employees are more enthusiastic, bringing new ideas to the hotel manager, said Trine Plambech, Intelligent Sustainability Manager. As she noticed, the employees of Guldsmeden Hotels were inspired by the green actions and spent the personal time to search new green ideas for the hotel chain, and then contact their manager to represent their suggestions. The receptionist (Anonymous) gave another example of employees' suggestions and involvement. The top management decides what the experience will be about, but the employees choose how they will design it based on the collected information by previous interaction with the guests. This example demonstrates the role of front-line employees in the design of experiences when the managers are unable to engage in planning. In addition, the comment shows that employees needed more time to convince managers of their ideas.

“The library was my idea. I was insisted on buying a bookcase. They did not want to spend money on it. However, I made it! [...] The herb was out chief's idea. [...] He suggested it, the gardeners planted them, and the guests enjoy them. [...] We all contribute to these experiences. We all want happy and satisfied guests. The bosses decided some actions but we have taken over the implementation. They may tell us what they want, but we choose how. We communicate every day with guests; we know their personality, what they like.” (Anonymous)

(3) Employees interact with guests

The experience economy and marketing view front-line employees as actors who trained to be part of the staged experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). However, customers and employee communication and interaction cannot be admitted as staged, because every time the persons are different and the dialog. Personalized the service and the experience green hotels through employees build a rapport with the guests wrote Marilyn Raftopoulos, the owner of Levendis Estate. Levendis Estate is a small family business with all the employees

being in touch with the guests every day. The hotel employees are all over the hotel and the farm, allowing guests to approach them any time.

“Everyone in our family will informally meet with each guest almost every day. They will be on their way to the pool, taking a walk around the grounds, walking up the stairs for breakfast and as we are all working around the Estate each morning we will usually meet up with most people which gives them the opportunity for more questions as they get to know us and for us to explain our initiatives.”

“It’s a good feeling to be able to influence their thinking! They ask lots of questions, e.g., why we clean out the animal sheds each day and add the manures to the compost pit, why does the pool taste like salt, are these straws made of paper, how do you make soap out of olive oil, can I pick some tomatoes, etc. etc. All these kinds of questions lead back to green/eco and they always see the reasons why it should be so. It’s also fun to make statements such as ‘we never need to go to the supermarket’, they will ask how come and then we can explain that we make all we need – preserve our own foods, make our own cleaning products, disinfectants, soaps and body care products from our herbs, olive oil and aloe.” (Marylin Raftopoulos, owner of Levendis Estate)

Trine Plambech also narrated an event, which happened at Guldsmeden Hotels during the project *Grøn omstilling i hotelbranchen*. The front-line employees had to deal with the guests’ frustration for not providing air conditioning in his guestroom. The employees had been training to explain the green initiatives and why air conditioning does not include in the hotel’s facilities in that way, where the guests could understand. The front-line employees achieved to communicate the eco-friendly message, provided alternative solutions to the guests.

“They were the American guests, who used to having air condition everywhere they are. They find it as a bad service if there is no air conditioning in the room. Guldsmeden, they have decided not to have air conditioning because it uses so much energy. They had to train their employees to have a positive dialogue with the guest about the fact that they do not provide air conditioning in the rooms because the guest just expects it. They have to tell them something. They offered the service to open their windows when the guests are in town. [...] it seems that they actually managed to explain it in a way where the guests can understand, even though they are from American, they are so used to air conditioning.” (Trine Plambech, Intelligent Sustainability Manager)

The two examples show the employees are an essential part in the creation of experiences. Sørensen and Jensen (2015) discussed the role of the employees in improving guests’ experiences if they focus on the experience value. When the front-line employees move away from the standard service and change their

understanding of the consumer, they will become part of the experience for the consumer and help to co-create a memorable experience.

(4) Employees impact

The last step, which completes the front-line employees' engagement in the design of guests' experience, is their behavioral attitude. Trine Plambech, Intelligent Sustainability Manager, and Marina Valli, owner of Eleonas Hotel, noticed that employees with eco-friendly attitude at work, transfer this knowledge at their homes. The sustainability is also a way of life and influenced Marina Valli's employee beliefs. Her employee does not view daily green practices as tedious task, but as part of her daily work.

4.4. Opportunities

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the reasons why a hotel applies green practices vary. In addition to the obvious economic benefits such as reducing energy consumption and operating costs, and social responsibility by hotels, the research results have identified a more favorable outcome for going green hotels and designing experience-centric service.

The green positioning and application of sustainable practices in hotels influenced customers' perceptions of green hotels. The project *Grøn omstilling i hotelbranchen* demonstrated that sustainability efforts by Guldsmeden Hotels and Green Solution House had positive results on guests' opinions, receiving the green practices as caring and social responsibility by the hotels. Moreover, the hotels' environmental efforts influenced the guests' experiences, and it received an extra benefit that makes their accommodation even better (Rørdam, & Plambech, 2017c). Green hotels, which inform the customers about their sustainable efforts, and successfully transfer the knowledge to them, can generate positive outcomes. The creation of new and different experiences during the stay could be a valuable source for green hotels to increase their brand image. In the question if the green practices, increase the image of the hotels in Denmark, Mikal Holt Jensen, replied:

“As we have seen before, it could be an add on an extra image; an advantage is that they do something for the environment or the Green Key, is something that the managers can do to improve the image.” (Mikal Holt Jensen, Head of Environment Department in HORESTA & the Head Secretariat in Green Key)

The implementation of environmental policy in hotels can be an added advantage for the hotel manager as a strategy to increase the image of the business. It is clear that guests who are informed about the hotel's sustainability actions view the efforts and the actions positively. Moreover, the increase of brand image for the hotel motivates the hotel managers to follow a similar strategy to improve the image and create a competitive

advantage from their competitors. Hence, going green is beneficial for the hotel manager to enhance the hotel's brand image and attract more customers (Yu et al., 2017).

Another opportunity for green hotels, closely related to brand image, is the customers' loyalty. However, loyalty in the hospitality industry usually interprets as repeating visits and preference to one hotel rather than other hotels.

“All our guests are attracted to the Estate by our strong organic/eco/natural environment passion. Over the years, families who first holidayed with us with 5 and 6 year old children still holiday annually with the children now bringing partners. Many families are with us annually and have become personal friends of our family.” (Marylin Raftopoulos, owner of Levendis Estate)

In this example, the green guests were attracted to Levendis Estate because of the hotel's eco-friendly choices. Moreover, the guests were attracted because they share the same eco-friendly values with the owners. The repeating visit and word of mouth by Levendis' consumers strengthened brand loyalty, increased guests' recommendation, and built a trusting relationship. Consequently, the green hotel achieved to create a meaningful relationship with its consumers, and the interaction between the business and the consumer created a better experience for both. Any previous communication establishes a rapport with the consumer, allowing him/her to create with his imagination what kind of experience he wants to have during the stay.

Furthermore, the project *Grøn omstilling i hotelbranchen* discovered that many green initiatives in Guldsmeden Hotels did not require any active participation by the customers. The management team had designed everything in a way that guests did not have to do anything without compromising the quality of service and products (Rørdam, & Plambech, 2017d). As a result, the hotel chain had to find ways for customers to support their sustainability actions. Moreover, the hotel chain wanted to engage actively and educate the customers about sustainability. The hotel chain conducted guests' interviews during the project *Grøn omstilling i hotelbranchen*, and the results showed that they have difficulty talking about sustainability with the customers. Therefore, they turned to the children, opening a dialog through a paint book. The idea behind the design of the book was the children's questions about sustainability. Inevitably, children should turn to their parents to help them complete the book (Rørdam, & Plambech, 2017a). The book was like a calendar, and each month introduced one theme, for example, food waste. The families could take it back home and continue to work on it. The book had positive results for the customers as it motivated the children to talk more about the environmental problems with their parents and inspired them to live more sustainable, said Trine Plambech, Intelligent Sustainability Manager. Moreover, the hotel chain enhances its brand image showing social responsibility.

The sustainable book for families is an example of experience co-creation by a green hotel. The hotel chain merely focused on the customers and allowed them to create their own experiences by using the book in their

everyday lives. The interaction and the co-creation of experiences took place in the hotel and continued at home. Experiences in a hotel as a physical place also inspire consumers to keep them active at home.

“A lot of guests were inspired by the solutions that they have chosen at the hotel. They [Green Solution House] actually made it very easy for the guests to take ideas and bring them with them home.” (Trine Plambech, Intelligent Sustainability Manager)

Another opportunity for the green hotels to co-create unique and memorable experiences are the activities in Leventis Estate in Greece. The hotel is attracted to guests with eco-friendly values as the owners. The design of the customer journey involves the guests in the creation of their own experiences. An example of co-creation is the breakfast, the animals, the organic grocery, and homemade natural products. The owners and the employees are consistently in interaction with the customers, transferring the knowledge about sustainable living.

4.5. Challenges

The experiences in green hotels occur from the interaction between the consumer and the eco-friendly initiatives and actions. However, green hotels have to confront a few challenges when they plan to include the customer in the creation of his own experience.

Going green is not an easy decision for the hotels. The green hotels usually have to deal with guests' dissatisfaction, disagreement, or lack of awareness. The research identified and categorized into three groups the challenges by hotels, which offer green experiences. The categories are connected directly or implicitly with guests' dissatisfaction and guests' experiences.

The first group of challenges refers to direct dissatisfaction for the customers. As Yu et al. (2017) argue, not all green practices contribute to guests' satisfaction. Some actions by the green hotels are not considered eco-friendly or are admitted as marketing strategies to promote their eco-friendly image and attract more tourists. Two online reviews on TripAdvisor apparently reflect the distrust of the sustainability message for the Guldsmeden hotels in Denmark:

“Even though it is called itself a(n) “eco” it is changing the towels every day. They say that they recycle but it is not clear what they recycle. We would not call it “eco”, just because it is buying green energy and offers organic food. We think they could be more upbeat, sustainable and changing our habits or inspiring to change habits”. (TripAdvisor.com review, 2018)

“The eco message is also not terribly convincing, there are taxidermy animal heads in the stairwell on every floor and the lifts are lined with animal skin. [...] Then there are use paper cups, napkins and table settings. The toilet paper is 100% recycled and the hand towels are classic bleach white paper... and so on. The eco-friendly message comes across as marketing.” (TripAdvisor.com review, 2018)

In this case, the customers' reviews show that Guldsmeden Hotels did not achieve to convince its customers about their green position. The reviewers were aware of the hotel's actions, but their experience generated negative feelings. According to previous research, customers who paid more to stay in green hotels but received lower-quality service that they expected, tend to create negative feelings about the hotel and feel that the hotel takes advantage of the green practices (Yi et al., 2018). Moreover, what is clear is that the customers, who expect more than the ordinary sustainable initiatives by a green hotel, do not admit some green actions as eco-friendly anymore. Similar to the previous discussion at the beginning of the chapter about hotel decision-making towards sustainability, the customers require more effort and, by extension, unique green experiences.

In addition, the decision-making to follow sustainable management in the properties and create green experiences is another challenge for green hotels. The project *Grøn omstilling i hotelbranchen* reported that guests who had sufficient knowledge about the hotel position and actions in Green Solution House, they had deliberately made this choice to stay in this hotel (Rørdam, & Plambech, 2017b). In contrast, customers who are not aware of the green position or are not interested in the green or are not environmentally conscious show disinterest, discontent, and annoyance. The following three quotes by Trine Plambech, Marina Valli and guest review on TripAdvisor support this result.

“Many of the guests, they also have many business guests, use the hotel in a different way [...] they were not as interest or opened towards the exhibition because the purpose of the stay was completely different.” (Trine Plambech, Intelligent Sustainability Manager)

“We are not all the same, all need to have the same love, neither mood nor sympathy towards the environment. We are all different. [...] Some guests just wish to relax under the sun and do absolutely nothing, and even though, for some reason, they have chosen to come to our property. Now which is the reason, I do not know. They do not really contribute actively. On the other side, there are the ones that not only chose to come to us but also bring suggestions and propose to us what else we should do to, or how they say "Everything is great, in which way could I contribute?". Last, there are those who read our booklet, get informed, and act without further asking.” (Marina Valli, owner of Eleonas Hotel)

Trine Plambech, during the fieldwork in the Green Solution House, noticed that many customers, especially the business customers, did not show any interest because they did not choose the hotel for the sustainability solutions. In this case, the hotel is solely an accommodation provider for the guests. In contrast, she notices that leisure guests were more open to the exhibition. Business guests tend to avoid participating in hotel activities because they do not have the need to co-create their experiences at that time, but they prefer quick and standard service (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015).

Marina Valli, during the interview mentioned twice, “we are not all the same,” referring the customer of her hotel. She categorized their guests into three groups, the green customers, the customers who are informed without further action, and those who do not care. Moreover, she mentioned that the Greek tourists are less environmentally conscious than international tourists are. This statement complies with previous finding in tourism literature that customers, who underestimate the environmental problem, pay significantly less attention to the green effort by the hotels (Han and Yoon, 2015; Yu et al., 2017).

Furthermore, sustainability managers should consider that customers display a higher level of pro-environmentalism at home than in a hotel during the stay (Baker et al., 2014). An online review by a guest stayed in a Guldsmeden Hotels is parallel to the theory.

“I was given a room with a small table fan. (no aircon -eco friendly?) .Therefore requested for a change of room as the room was very hot and no proper air ventilation.” (TripAdvisor.com review, Guldsmeden hotels, 2019)

The guest expressed his frustration with the hotel amenities, putting above all comfort and pleasure during the stay. According to Baker et al. (2014) customers who do not follow green practices in their everyday lives, tend to not participate in green activities while staying in hotels because they (i.e., green activities) decrease their experiences. The quality of the experiences is closely related to the customer’s focus (Yu et al., 2017), which in the TripAdvisor review the focus was on the hotel amenities. Moreover, Yu et al. (2017) argue that customers’ perceptions of green practices are marketing strategies without any benefit for the customers. According to Han et al. (2009), green marketing does not only promote green initiatives for the company. In addition, the sustainability managers and front-line employees should inform the guests about green actions and motivate them to follow these practices in their everyday life during the visit to the hotel and when they leave.

However, hotels that promote green actions have to overcome one more challenge. The refusal/ rejection by non-green customers. In the question, does the company promote its green orientation to the guests, the receptionist in Greece replied:

“No. They have to ask us. I will not inform them immediately [...] they (i.e., the company) do not promote because they know they will lose some guests.” (Anonymous, receptionist)

The hotel company in Greece became environmentally friendly a few years ago; however, the guests are not aware of that change, unless they ask for more information from the employees. In this case, green customers could accuse the hotel of misleading information and lose credibility.

The second group of challenges in green hotels refers to hotel employees. Trine Plambech, Intelligent Sustainability Manager, and Marina Valli, the owner of Eleonas Hotel, spoke about the difficulties of finding and maintaining the employees. Hotels with sustainability values and practices tend to recruit easier new employees and keep them longer, said Trine Plambech. However, the hospitality sector was struggling to maintain the employees an extended period a few years ago, and hotel companies with temporary employees spent more time on staff training, said Trine Plambech. For Marina Valli, staff recruitment is not an easy process. As she explained, she would like to have in her team people who align with her eco-friendly values.

“I face difficulties find staff that I can train accordingly with my philosophy.” (Marina Valli, owner of Eleonas Hotel)

The third group of challenges in green hotels refers to hotel partners in Greece. In the question of how many experiences are provided by external partners, the results showed that green hotels have difficulties collaborating with local stakeholders in Greece. As they explained, most of the activities outside of the hotel are not eco-friendly (Anonymous, receptionist; Marilyn Raftopoulos, owner of Leventis Estate), which is also a challenge for green hotels that affect their brand image.

5. Findings

This research has identified three key elements regarding *how green hotels design and co-create experience-centric services with the consumers*: (1) *Promote green brand positioning* (2) *Collect information about the consumer* (3) *Give information to the consumer*.

(1) Promote green brand positioning.

The data collection results show that four out of five green hotels have strong green brand positioning. The green hotels use internet-based, visible signs methods and personal dialog to promote green positioning to the consumers.

All green hotels use the internet as a primary marketing tool to promote their values and actions and increase consumers' knowledge. The findings align with previous studies in the Sustainability Marketing strategy characterized the internet as an effective tool to target green customers and show the company's positioning (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). Moreover, the green hotels provide an extensive description of the green actions and activities on the websites allowing consumers to have access to their information. As a result, the consumer is able to collect more information about the hotel green experiences before the experience occurs.

Furthermore, green hotels use visible signs in hotels. Visible signs can be found in the common areas and the guestrooms. Each hotel uses a different way to promote green brand positioning. Moreover, the promotion with visible signs transfers the knowledge to the consumers allowing them to choose to participate in the creation of the experience.

Besides the internet and the visible signs, green hotels use personal interaction between the green hotel (managers and front-line employees) and the consumer to promote the green brand positioning. The promotion and implementation of green actions by hotel employees eliminate the hotel's negative impact while reassuring the guests that the hotel is green (Mishra, & Gupta, 2019).

(2) Collect information about the consumer.

The second key element that green hotels use to design and co-create the experience with the consumers is the collection of consumers' preferences and needs during the stay. The interaction takes place through active dialog between the green hotels and the guests, targeting the hotel side's questions to collect as much information as possible. The collected information encourage the green hotels in personalizing the service and by extension to design personalized experiences.

Moreover, before the design of any experience-centric service, hotel managers and employees collect information to understand which green initiatives/activities are meaningful for the consumers. Any previous interaction between the green hotel and the customer is beneficial for both, as the interaction process in an

ongoing situation that establishes a rapport. Obtaining deeper knowledge about the consumer's journey, the green hotels meet consumer's expectations and satisfy them through the experience (Berry et al., 2002).

(3) Give information to the consumer.

The last key element is the message given by front-line employees or hotel managers to the consumers, after collecting relevant information for the consumer. The front-line employees have been trained by the green hotel managers to enter into a productive dialog with the consumers. So, they can add an extra touch to the consumer experience. The information message contains a) answers to guests' queries, b) in-depth knowledge about the green experience, c) motivation to engage in the creation of the experience. Moreover, the information by the employees is personalized based on consumer behavior and preferences.

Moreover, the information provision can be accomplished through the specially designed message (i.e., signs) in the hotel, educating and motivating the consumer to involve in the experience.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. Personal reflection

My professional experience in the hospitality industry for seven years in Greece and Denmark motivated me to examine in-depth the notion of experience marketing in the hotels. Moreover, because five out of seven years were in two hotels with sustainable management, the research drew attention to green hotels and not to any other kind of hospitality.

Based on my previous knowledge as a front-line employee, the creation of experience value in the green hotel is challenging and a long-lasting procedure for both sides. I believe that hotels with clear environmental policies, actions, and goals can create more influential experiences for guests. The example of the receptionist (Anonymous) is close enough to my previous professional experience in Greece. The company did not have any specific plan or guide to educate and motivate the guests to participate in any green activity. It was up to the employee's decision if he/she wants to inform the guests on how they can participate.

On the other hand, the Danish approach to sustainability in hotels is a well-established method following specific guidelines from the top management to the employees. The staff is trained at regular intervals, is informed about the objectives and receives instructions without saying that the staff cannot act spontaneously when interacting with the guest in the hotel. Moreover, the company allows the employee to participate with his own ideas and suggestions on how to improve the customer experience.

The hotel customers in Greece are aware of environmental issues, however, it was challenging for me to inform them about the green activities. Customers' willingness to participate can be seen from the low levels of participation during their holidays. Another challenge that influences the hotel's guests to participate in green experiences is the country's overall eco-friendly profile image. The national tourism organization in Greece promotes the country as an idyllic place for relaxing holidays close to the sea. In contrast to the Danish advertisement and actions, where customers are aware of the environmental program in Denmark. Furthermore, I have noticed that Greek customers in Greece do not involve in the creation of experiences with an environmentally friendly message expressing their dissatisfaction because they lose part of the luxury of hotel accommodation. Unlike Greek customers in Denmark, the participation level is higher, and they perceive it as an extra service.

Overall, the two countries use the same method to involve consumers in the creation of the experience as the research results. However, the level of promotion is significantly different between Greece and Denmark, as well as the front-line employee role in design planning. Hotel managers in Denmark encouraged the consumers and me to engage in the design process, whereas the hotel manager in Greece focused more on the outcome for the consumer.

6.2. Conclusion

This thesis tried to fill the literature gap in hospitality marketing, examining the problem of design and co-creation experience-centric services in green hotels. Structured and semi-structured interviews conducted representing five cases from Danish and Greek green hotels. Moreover, online data were collected using the netnography method.

The analysis of the data presented the reasons why hotels are turning to sustainable tourism and how the interviewees perceive this change. Furthermore, the research identified six methods for the green hotels to inform their customers about the green policy, products, and services before, during, and after the visit. Moreover, it represented how green hotels collect information about their customers to offer personalized customers experiences. In addition, the role of front-line employees is influential in the design of consumers' experience, as they are the link between the green hotel and the consumer. Finally, the research described the opportunities for green hotels to design experience-centric services with consumers; and which are the challenges to confront when they create experiences with an eco-friendly message.

The main findings in the design and co-creation process in green hotels are: (1) the promotion of green brand positioning by the green hotels, (2) the collection of personal information about the consumers' preferences and needs, and (3) the provision of information by the green hotel to the consumers.

Concluding the part of experience design in the co-creation procedure, any previous interaction before the experience occurs is required between the consumer and the green hotel, because the co-creation of the experience takes places before the actual experience/event. In contrast to Pine and Gilmore's suggestion about the customers' participation only during the event, the notion of co-creation recognizes the consumer as an equal partner allowing him to participate in the creation of his experience (Prahalad, & Ramaswamy, 2004).

This research discussed how the going green paradigm in hospitality industry could motivate the customers to participate in green practices before, during and after the visit. However, the customers' participation requires a procedure by the green hotels. As it has been argued, each customer is unique with different needs and desires; therefore, the challenge for the hotels is to engage each customer in the creation of experiences.

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8. Appendices

8.1. Appendix 1

Thesis interview question and further instructions to all interviewees. All participants received the same letter with the instructions and the questions before the interview.

PLEASE SPEND FEW MINUTES READING THE NOTES BEFORE ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

- ❖ All the questions refer to sustainability (green) initiatives by your hotels.
- ❖ All the questions refer hotel customers as guests.
- ❖ The term “experience-centric-service” refers to those services for which customers experiences is at the core of the service offering.
- ❖ The context of experience service consists of the physical and relational elements involved in the experience environment. It includes the physical setting, the social actors, and any social interactions with other customers and/or service facilitators.
- ❖ Customers’ engagement can be emotional, physical, intellectual or spiritual, depending on the level of customer participation and connection with the environment.

Structured questions:

Q1: Please describe you current job position.

Q2: How guest-personalized are your experience-centric services? Moreover, what kind of experiences are your guests typically seeking in your hotel?

Q3: Describe one of the core green experience-centric service provided by your hotel. (i.e. service that satisfy the need of the customer with positive environmental impact, for example bike tours, guestroom design and amenities, organic food etc.) Which is the motivation to design this experience, the results (e.g. repeating visit, positive performance impact etc.) and its key characteristics?

Q4. To what degree are your guests involved in your sustainability actions. Which is the guest impact? (e.g. emotional effect, motivation to follow the same green practices at home, disagreement with your environmental policy).

Q5. How the green experience-centric service add (or not add) value to guest’ satisfaction and loyalty?

Q6. How the experience-centric service add (or not add) value to your green practices?

Q7. How many of your green experience are provided by external partners? Describe the experiences provided by external partners. (External collaborations i.e. F&B supplier, hotel amenities, fitness experts, car or bike rental, tour guides, NGOs, winery, event planner, etc.).

The following three questions refer to your employees who directly interact with the customers.

Q8. Do the experience-centric service require front-line employees' engagement with the guests? If yes, which is their role and their relationship with the guests?

Q9. To what degree front-line employees are involved in your experience-centric services. Give at least three examples describing how front-line employees engage in the experience.

8.2. Interview 1

Name: Trine Plambech

Occupation: Manager – Intelligent Sustainability Principal Green Urban Designer, Alexandra Institutet

Date: 29/04

Location: Copenhagen, Denmark

Via: Phone

S: As I told in the e-mails, I would you to talk about the research in the Guldsmeden hotels and the Green House Solution.

T: Yeah.

S: Ok. In your research you reported many and different green actions by the hotel company. For example, the half croissants in the breakfast where guests can take as much they want but in practice this is save costs and minimize the food waste, or the decision to have only organic drinks in the bar, or do not renovate the bathrooms and so? Is there any particular reason behind those actions? As observer, what did you notice?

T: They have a clear strategy and their management has decided that they would like to become a greener hotel more sustainable, which means that they will try to find all the way to lower the use of resources. There is all kinds of resources water, energy. In relation to the kitchen, it is about minimizing food waste. Therefore, they have been analyzing the whole process of the hotel and identified areas where they can lower the use of resources. When it comes to renovating, it is a huge waste of resource to tear down. For example, a bathroom instead of put a completely new one, renovate what you already have, you will lower the pressure on the environment a lot.

Therefore, that is kind of a pair of glasses. They put on, looked, and analyzed their business all the way through. They came up with these new solutions on how they could run the hotel in a in a more sustainable way. Is that well, does it answer your question? So please ask again if I am not.

S: Yes. I would like to know more, if you notice, if you have been there in the area during the research, and if also you observe because I think if you were there before you write your report, probably you saw some actions. If also you took part in some activities, like if you had breakfast, for example, something that you could participate. How the hotel make you to think also in a more sustainable way? Do you felt that they want to transfer the environmental knowledge of the hotel to the guest?

T: I follow I think your question and this was actually one of the things that we were looking into in in one of the recent projects were their actions at the hotels with inspire that is to kind of do it at home, or be more sustainable in their behavior after the visit at the hotel. What we saw at the hotel, especially the hotel at Bornholm, the Green Solution House, was that not all guests, but quite a lot of guests were inspired by the

solutions that they have chosen at the hotel. The hotel they have actually made it very easy for the guests to take ideas and bring them with them home. The hotel actually have made a little exhibition area where many of the solutions are described at big boards with the pictures and everything illustrating each of the solutions. They can actually point you in the direction where you can see yourself what they have done. In Green Solution House, I think they have made a link change to the website.

S: Yes, I know. I have contacted them and asked for an interview. They have 75 sustainably action.

T: Yes. Exactly!

S: It is impressive. I know exactly what do you mean about the Green Solution House.

T: Okay. Well, that is great. Because then my point is that we interviewed guests, and we actually found out that that some of the guests they come to the hotel because they see it as kind of a showroom for new solutions. They looked that they have used this kind of solar panels or the green wall or whatever they were interested in, and then they took the information and, and transferred it. I do not know how much but they, they clearly said that they could take ideas with them back home. Of course, many of the guests, they also have many business guests, use the hotel in a different way, more like 'I come in the afternoon, I need to get some food and sleep and a shower and then I am out again early in the morning'. They were not as interest or opened towards the exhibition because the purpose of the stay was completely different. But I think many of the leisure guests found it very inspiring. We actually tried at the Guldsmeden hotel; we tried to make a little picture book for children. Because we thought that okay, maybe if we open the dialog with the children, then they can maybe become motivated in sustainability and they can have this dialog with their parents when they are at the hotel. Did I send you this?

S: No.

T: I will do it now. Because that is another example of how you can involve your guests. Because, of course, it is extremely positive that the hotel itself lower the [...] on the environment. Tt is even better if we can see that that the guests also get inspired to do, to live a more sustainable life when they come home. But what was so, I do not know if this is relevant for your study, what we found is that employees were extremely inspired by it.

S: That was actually my next question, if you know about the employees, if they can influence the guest experience. How important is their role? Because I know that, some hotels train the employees about the philosophy of the company, what they want to transfer to the guests so the guests can have a holistic experience about the hotel.

T: Yes.

S: Working in a green hotel, I have been trained as employee how to be involve in a dialogue with the guest. I was thinking about the Guldsmeden example at the bar, instead of say "We don't have Coca-Cola" they can say "We can offer you something different, an organic cola" and you can add something more in the guest stay. But please keep going what you were saying about the employees.

T: Well, I think you already got a lot of the knowledge that I would talk about because I think it is actually positive that we can see. That was from one of the studies that we saw that many employees, they actually transferred many of the solutions to the private homes. We noticed that they want more food that is organic, that they were much more aware of lowering their food waste. They were thinking about not buying so many new clothes, they were thinking about energy, renovating their private homes. We actually saw it quite clear in relation between being employed at a hotel where they worked with sustainability and the behavior that they had at home as well. And that is quite interesting, It was not the purpose. This just happens because people are employed at the hotel. They sounded so inspiring. And they also said that a lot of their ideas for being more sustainable at the hotel actually comes directly from the employees. In the evening, they stay at the hotel even if they do not work. They have free time. They google for information, most sustainable napkins or sustainable candles or whatever. They actually can come into the office next day and say, now I have an even better solution. Should we try that? And that is also, I think, very personal to that you get at this something that engage people and employees in a very strong way. And as you probably also know with the hotel industry is that they, at least before the crisis, had a very difficult time finding employees. It is a business where people do not stay very long. So they struggle about finding people and training them and then daily had to start over and over again. But the researches said that hotels that were sustainability, they have much easier in recruiting new people to work there and they keep them much longer.

S: I did not know that. But now I can understand it because I am thinking about hotels' recruitment in Greece. They do not train us; sometimes you work for a company but you do not know much about it. Probably it is because many hotel job in Greece are not permanent, are seasonal jobs and people go there just to have a job and for the money.

T: That is also, why it is so important to involve the employees, because it is the things that I just told you, but also because that the employees are often the link to the guests. If there was another thing at Guldsmeden Hotel, which I had not described it, so I am just explaining it to you. They were the American guests, who used to having air condition everywhere they are. They find it as a bad service if there is no air conditioning in the room. Guldsmeden, they have decided not to have air conditioning because it uses so much energy. They had to train their employees to have a positive dialogue with the guest about the fact that they do not provide air conditioning in the rooms because the guest just expects it. They have to tell them something. They offered the service to open their windows when the guests are in town, so the room can be naturally ventilated when the guests are out and about to explore. But if it starts to rain, then the employees know that they have to run-up to the room and close the window. Moreover, in the evening, if it was difficult to sleep, they provided a fan, to have a little bit more circulation in the air in the room. And it seems that they actually managed to explain it in a way where the guests can understand, even though they are from American, they are so used to air conditioning.

With the air conditioning, it is only or primarily the American guests who expect air conditioning. Then for all the other guests it is easier to explain to people that they do not have air conditioning here at the hotel. They just accept it. They had to train them (i.e., the employees). But this leads me to a point that might also be

interesting for you, and that is that some of the things that they do at a hotel is maybe not necessary. We had an example from Comwell Hotel where for many years they have served a huge amount of bacon and scrambled eggs at their breakfast. They would like to have only organic bacon, and that is much more expensive. So they have to lower the amount of bacon. It was actually a waiter; he said that guests would never accept less bacon. They come here and they look forward for that bacon. And then they actually did a little experiment where they served scrambled eggs in a little glass jars. They had a little piece of organic people at the top. Guests could, of course, take as much as they liked. However, it looked very delicate. Finally, they found out that the guests love this even more. They said [guests] "This is a much more delicate. And I like this". "We are serving eggs and bacon much more" [Comwell hotel said]. "You see, huge plates of bacon was actually a little bit disgusting" a guest said it. That is quite interesting. That is something you sometimes use you as an employee. Think that this is what the guest demands. But when you try something new, it is an extra turn out that the new solution is even better. Therefore, you have to keep experimenting and you have to keep talking to your guests because the guest might find it even more delicious or whatever it is the new solution. Can you follow? Do you know Cowmell?

S: Yes of course. I have also collected some data for my research from their website. But of course I did not know about the bacon.

T: Sonia, I have a meeting soon, but you welcome to call me again if you need anything else.

S: Well, thank you so much. Bye.

T: Bye. Have a nice day.

8.3. Interview 2

Name: Mikal Holt Jensen

Occupation: Head of Environment Department in HORESTA & Head Secretariat in Green Key

Date: 30/04

Location: Copenhagen, Denmark

Via: Phone

S: Can you tell about your job position?

M: I am Program Manager in HORESTA, the hotel organization of the Denmark, are you aware of that?

S: Yes, of course.

M: I am in charge of a sustainable work in the hotel and in tourism industry. Moreover, at the same time I am in charge of program called Green key. It is an international eco label organization that awards the hotels, which do an extra effort to protect the environment. Then I have also been one starting to get started with new programs for restaurants and tourism organizations. Equally, belong for those as well. However, a lot of my job is to go to the hotel and help them be sustainable. They a lot of the hotels in Denmark is part of Green Key. And the thing is that they have to follow the criteria of Green Key and I helped them to fulfill the criteria and help them to make progress in the environment to work. I visit the hotels, talk with them, and ensure that they comply with the criteria but also talk with them about how they can improve. We have developed tools for them so that they can make improvements at the hotels.

S: Okay. So, when you visit the hotels, do you also discuss with manager how they will transfer maybe this knowledge to the guest or how they will convince the guests to use their initiatives? Or maybe how they will make them to get involved in this?

M: Yes. It is also part of the criteria that they should work with should inform the guest about environmental actions. For example, to inform about public transportation, they have to work on towel reusing program. They are not using too much towels, and sorting of the waste. The waste that they have, for example, in the hotel room how they can sort them. So those elements are parts the program and we try to help them to improve them that as well. And to say about how to inform the guests, also concerning food waste. At the moment I am making a new system for waste sorting. Therefore, the hotels can inform especially the employees, but also the guests as well how to use it. A lot of the element is try to communicate. As part the Green key you have to follow that you also have to inform about what you do and that you are part of Green Key as well.

S: How do they inform the guests? Does this comes automatically when the guests arrive in the hotel? Or do they provide some information in the room, or in the reservation?

M: Yes. Some of the information, it depends on the hotel. Because there is a lot of there is a lot of different way of doing it. Some are really important part of their, their program to inform all over about the environment and some ideas for some, yes, and some they add on. But most, they should have it be in the public area when you arrive, there should be some information that is part of the green Key. You should also could be informed on the hotel room, but it can also be part of the solution way it is the screen that they have. It could also be that part as well. Sometimes they write it in the mail in confirmation. Sometimes they have the information on a key card. There are many different ways, which they communicate it. Some have the information on the buffet. Sometimes they have the information about that they have the organic foods. There are many ways that they can inform it and some of the places are quite creative about this. So they can they do different ways. But it is must that they do something and inform about it, that a must part of being part in the Green key. I see now that more and more, actually want to inform about it. There has been a period where they, they maybe did not want to inform so much about it because they were not sure if they were doing it. They did not want to create better expectations. But now you can see that more and more like to inform about it.

S: Can I ask something else about the green key? Is it mandatory also to train your staff?

M: Yes.

S: Okay and the company so should make some workshops or provide some seminars to the employees how they have to do it or what they are doing?

M: Yes.

S: Let us go again to you visit at the hotels and talk about when you visit the hotels. In your visits, do you only check if they fulfill those criteria? Do stay in hotels and you can experience some of their services?

M: As a controller?

S: As individual.

M: As part of the Green Key, normally the way that it functions, is that I work with, they apply, they send authentication and, and documentation to me. Then I visit the place, and have a meeting with the hotel manager or the in charge of the environments, or it is often the same person. Then we talk about what they should do and what they how they can improve. Then I go around and go around the hotel and we look at rooms, we look at the restaurants, we look at the garbage area, we look all over the hotel to see how they comply with the criteria. If they are not complying with some of the criteria, they should make sure that they do that. Afterwards, send in information about that. But of course, when I visit them of the first time they cannot inform about Green Key and have Green Key materials before they have the Green Key certificate. They have to accomplish it first, before they can inform about it. I visit them afterwards, approximately about a year later to make sure that they inform and do it property. Then it has they should have a visit every third year. Some of the visits are actually staying on the hotel, some of the visitors participating in the conference to see if they comply with the proper job, and sometimes it is a meeting with them again.

S: But from what you say, I think also you are getting involved in the design on what they are doing, when you provide your knowledge and maybe your recommendations. Because also you are helping them to provide better service.

M: Yes, that is part of my job.

S: Do you think that those green practices add value to the company?

M: In general?

S: In general, yeah.

M: As we have seen before, it could be an add on an extra image; an advantage is that they do something for the environment or the Green Key, is something that the managers can do to improve the image. What we see now is actually that it is turned around so the customers and especially business customers expect that they care and they do something for the environment. Actually, you can end up not being chosen if you are not doing it, or people can be disappointed or [people] could have negative thoughts and being concerned about not doing anything. Therefore, they have to. That part of the trends has changed. So now, most hotels actually should do it. There are somebody that do some extra and what we can see is that they actually get more motivated. When they see that the guest likes the initiatives that they take, they get more motivated, will want to do more. It is kind of a process. Sometimes when you start working, maybe you think that you are pushed into it. But afterwards when we find out that there is so much energy in it, and a lot of the staff is also be active and engaged then actually, it is a positive thing. So even though that you should only get the label, but then you actually start a process where you think all the things that you do, and a way you engage the staff.

S: Do you know the percentage of Green Key hotel holders in Denmark?

M: Actually in Denmark, we made a report about how many of the hotels that are part of it but so if we see about the 562 hotels in Denmark with more than 40 rooms. We see that it is about 30% that is part of Green Key. 23% of the hotels in Denmark that are part of Green Key. If you look at the for example, in Copenhagen area, it is a lot, bigger than 50% of the hotels are part of the Green Key. So it is a lot in the big cities that are really a lot of them. But if you also look at the amount of room that has Green Key, then you can see actually it's more than 39% of all rooms in Denmark with ecolabel.

S: I think the time is up. Thank you very much for your time.

M: Good luck with that.

8.4. Interview 3

Name: Marina Valli

Occupation: Hotel Owner, Eleonas Hotel

Date: 30/04

Location: Evia, Greece

Via: Skype

The original interview was conducted in Greek language.

S: Would you like to introduce yourself?

M: Yes, my name is Marina Valli and I am Eleonas Hotel owner.

S: Thank you. I have notice on the website that the hotel consists of 10 rooms. It is a small hotek. I have also read about the philosophy that you have chosen to follow. Would you like to elaborate regarding the idea behind the creation of the Eleonas hotel and the beginning of the project?

M: Firstly, we decided to leave Athens and live in the countryside. In a property that is owned by my husband. This property was already used for organic farming. The philosophy it was aiming in the environmental protection was, first of all, a personal one and not a professional, and that is a point in which I would like to emphasize on. Shortly after our arrival, we noticed that several of our friends were coming to visit us and discover the place we were living on. We wondered about taking advantage of it and create a place where we could host out friends. Our first thought was about our friends. We preserved the same philosophy that we had with our friends, one of the hospitality. We did not start with the idea of creating a clientele or some kind of a marketing plan. That came long after, 20 years later. And we observe its results. Back then, we just made a pleasant time in it, as in the end it also became our home and last but not least, we also wanted to delight the ones that would come directly in touch with nature. All of the rooms lead to a garden; all the doors of the property lead to nature. There are no fences. Everything is designed in a way that you can always have direct access to our property land and environment.

S: So you mentioned that this is your philosophy and in that, way you started getting involved with sustainability. It is a personal matter and something that you try to pass to all the visitors.

M: At this point, I would like to mention that we did not have a specific plan since the beginning, so the building surely does not bear modern technologies, as it is 20 old. But additionally, back then, we acted with the basic knowledge that we had about it. There was no one to advise us. It was solely our desire to build it in an environmentally sustainable way. It was not also on trend at that time as it nowadays. We tried to economize as much as we could in all the goods, as energy or food and this applies until recent times.

S: In the e-mails I have sent to you, I mention several times the term “experience-centric service,” which I am not sure how comprehensive it is.

M: So, the way I perceive it is that there is not any specific organized activity that someone can make a reservation for it. We do not have this here. We tend to suggest activities after we have also come to know a little bit better about our guests. When a guest arrives, we tend to follow a process, if even the guest desires it and does not want to go directly to his room. Therefore, before we show each guest its room, we take some time with him to get to know each other better and treat him something to drink. I, myself, I am always there and I deal with the check-in and the way I have the change to meet and talk personally with our guests. After 20 year, I am also capable of understanding what would possibly like each guest. Of course, I make them the usually related question of what they would like to do during their stay and what they have read about the place, but generally, I can feel (i.e., understand) their preferences. Afterward, I make personal suggestions. I am not going to repeat the same to every guest. So if for example, there is a family with children staying, I am not going to suggest them visiting the steep path, that is dangerous—the same with older people. To every guest, I would suggest the path but with variations according to the dynamic of the guest.

S: I have also noticed on your website that you have been awarded several sustainability certificates. Do you promote them? Is there anywhere written, so they can read and learn about the practices you follow in the hotel, for example, regarding the waste separation or the water and energy consumption?

M: Sure. I have a booklet, similar to a photo album that it is placed to every single room. I have made it personal and the entire above are mentioned are inside it. It includes all the information regarding the site; they visit to all of the things mention above. For example, the fact we have place if the tap an element that can blend the water with the air so that there is pressure but the water runs less, or that we have decrease the volume of the thermostats. These are some of the information mentions in the booklet, so that the guests from the outside are informed about these practices and also prevent questions like “why the bottle if water cannot be filled” in while they have it underneath. Or “why I cannot change the temperature.” It has mainly to understand and follow these practices. This information can also be found on our website so that we can prevent potential guest that will not be satisfied by following our philosophy. Because we are not all the same, all need to have the same love, neither mood nor sympathy towards the environment. We are all different. So we would rather have a guest with the same “mood” (i.e., mindset) as us and so consequently follow our theory. In addition, similar announcements can be found both inside the rooms and in the common areas.

S: So, these announcements are placed in public because they are imposed by green organizations, such as the Green Key.

M: I think those specifications were announced later. We had already placed them before the requirement.

S: I am asking because in Denmark are obligatory.

M: Yes, it is obligatory, but I can say that I was already prepared, even before those specifications and I was already fulfilling them.

S: When the guest reads all this information on this booklet, do they approach you personally and discuss it further with you? Do they wish to learn more about them? For example, do they ask if they can participate in some activities on the farm or help with the olive trees, so they can contribute to the whole philosophy and experience of the hotel?

M: I will say one more time that we are not all the same people. Some guests just wish to relax under the sun and do absolutely nothing, and even though, for some reason, they have chosen to come to our property. Now which is the reason, I do not know. They do not really contribute actively. On the other side, there are the ones that not only chose to come to us but also bring suggestions and propose to us what else we should do to, or how they say "Everything is great, in which way could I contribute?". Last, there are those who read our booklet, get informed, and act without further asking.

S: This is what I am trying to examine. The fact that you have created this booklet for your hotel is, in fact, experience for the guests. Something they will remember. I also examine how much the guests involved are. You mention that some is indeed participate actively and some passively.

M: At this point, I would like to add that a booklet or brochure is not enough. Firstly, it is possible that the guests will not see it at all and secondly it is a bit impersonal. It is an announcement in the entrance that some may read, and some will not. In order to motivate a guest and make him to ask, to suggest, and to participate in the whole project you must contact him. The personal contact with him is significant to approach him and participate. Alternatively, to volunteer to do something. For example, there are guests, mostly the Scandinavians, "if you do not assist the opening the door, they will not open it by themselves", meaning that they will indeed apply with the rules, but they will not ask you furtherly how they may be useful themselves. I am close to them, close enough not to invade their personal space, so that if they ask or if by chatting with them, the conversation will lead to the point that I tell them that they can participate and be active. Another example, we do not really do any kind of cooking class, but if someone wants, we are open to it. If someone, a North Europeans for instance again, if they do not see it written somewhere, they will not ask for it either, and I cannot say to them that I am free wherever they wish to. If I see during the time that they are eating and someone has a personal interest in what he eats, or about the recipe, then I suggest to them about a possible cooking class and give them more personalized information. In this way, an experience can be created for them.

S: You also mentioned that you are always present and talking with the guests. Do you have employees? Do they communicate in the same way as you with the guests?

M: I face difficulties find staff that I can train accordingly with my philosophy. Two-three years ago, I was looking for employee; someone that I interviewed told me that no one is visiting my hotel because you want everything to be in your own way. Therefore, I answered her, "yes, that's true." So, due to difficulties in finding staff compatible with my values and philosophy, only one person is working for me.

S: So might people with the same mindset as you, they could "fit" better to Eleonas philosophy.

M: The relationship with the staff it is always of that kind. We are very small hotel. As I mentioned before, I am always in the property, and it could not be a common employees-employer relationship. We are very small hotel. We are family here. We spent together all the holidays, Christmas, Easter, birthday celebrations. All of these were celebrated in the hotel. The person on my staff is being in the hotel for 10 years now. The one that left was three years here. Nothing happened; it was her decision to leave. I was looking for the past three years to hire someone else, but since I could not find anyone, we are just the two of us and we get it through just fine. The only problem is that by working many hours, I cannot spend enough time with the guest and I do not want that. This year I would have someone on my staff that is only speaking English. It is not that just only she wants to work, she wants to here. She specifically told me that she chose me for what I offer and the way I am working. So that would be the ideal employee. She may not come this year, because of the situation, but I am hopeful for the next year. Therefore, you can see that someone cannot work on my side if he/she is not having and sharing the same philosophy as us. The woman I have on my side all these years, she has been trained in a way that also has the same attitude in her own home.

S: This is very important, yes!

M: Yes, because it is not just an image, it is a lifestyle, and it is essential to embrace it. Separating and managing food waste might consume more time. She does it without thinking that it is a waste of time. It is in her beliefs. She does it without thinking that it is a waste of time.

S: Good! Let us go back again for a while in the experiences that the hotel offers. Would you like to talk about some activities written on the website? I would like to learn more about the olive experience.

M: I would like to clarify something. The website provided much information about several activities, but in reality, way less are happening in action. I do not mean that all the things we mention are lies; I mean that we write all of the possible ones, but it is impossible for all of them to happen for the same people and simultaneously. A guest surely will not do all of these activities mentioned because, as I also said before, we are all different people. Not all have the same need. Now regarding the olive picking, no one has ever come to collect olives. They could participate a possible activity in it. Moreover, let us mention that it is not formed to be as it happens in reality, but it would be presented more theatrically.

S: So you created an experience, something for guests during their stay. But why no one had never asked this experience?

M: The olive picking is happening in late September when we do not have any more customers in the property. Therefore, when we open our agricultural business, because we wanted, we characterized our company as of this kind. When the first guests arrived in the hotel, I was waited in the beginning for them to wake up. So that I could show them around the property and the daily activities, we had to do. The guests would not wake up, and when they would, they would go directly for breakfast. After that was 11:00, it was already late as all the chores around the property were already be done earlier. During the summer season the workers were waking up at 5:00, so by the time the clients would have finish with the breakfast and all, the workers were also about to finish their work and head back home. Many years passed until I realized that by pressing them, you could

not really give them any experience. You have to wait for them to come to you. All these years, no one has explicitly visited for the olive picking.

I decided I had to create something else to live an experience, something that troubles me. I will explain later why. I created something that may seem a bit childish. I named it "The olive experience." I have created a tour around the property. I give them a phone with the GPS coordinates to find the path and later an olive which I have hanged some cards with some information. I could have communicated them, but because I am not sure when exactly they would wish for this conversation to happen. I give them their freedom. So they walk through the whole property, they see the signs about the history, the organic farming, about the varieties we grow and the way they learn the essential information. It is a big tour that takes them some time, and they are independent to do the tour as they wish.

S: Very interesting!

M: The problem is that the application I was using is not working anymore. Now I have to find another one that is ready of course because I am unable to create my own. That is something that is really difficult for me. The other thing that we also do is a tour with a guide. For this they need to be formed 4-5 people at least. Stefanos, who is the farmer, makes these tours. He talks to the group about the olive and agriculture. But they don't see the picking of the olives. Regarding weddings, because it is an activity on the website, if someone wants to organize their wedding in the property, they also have to respect and follow our philosophy. Someone wanted to have a wedding with 400 people here. That is impossible. Only a small wedding can be here (i.e., ceremony and a few guests).

S: You can promote this kind of event also abroad; this philosophy is widely acceptable for internationals.

M: The problem with this is that we do not provide a catholic priest. I did a small research about this; I mention it on the website. If someone is indeed interest, I will send an email and I will try to solve the kind of issue.

S: Does the same apply to yoga, hiking, and other activities?

M: Exactly.

S: Is there any specific planning regarding how these activities are taking place? And did the guests ask for them or you pre-organize and plan for them?

M: Usually, someone asks for any of these activities, so we add them to our planning and website. But also it is not possible to add and accomplish all of them that being asked. For example, about yoga, it would be great to have a permanent instructor and whenever they ask for it, it would be possible to happen. But it is impossible because there is not even any instructor in the area. Therefore, it has to be asked in advance. It should be an agreement before with the guest and then I have to find an instructor.

I would like to refer to something last but not least, as we are talking about the experiences that the hotel should offer to its guests. I would like to say that this is not our job. Our job is hospitality. The experience that we offer is a collaboration; and here lies the difficulty in Greece. Meaning you have to find a partner that

matched with your way of thinking and that will look after them like you. I do not say that he will tell them the same things, but he will have the same hospitality and service perspective. So, here in Greece hotels tend to do all by themselves because they cannot find these kind of collaborators. Me as an owner with ten rooms and not always fully booked, as we are not in a high touristic area, I cannot do all of those things. I was forced to create some activities by tourist agencies.

But as I can see, the demand changed and I think that it is maybe better to have an employee for the check-ins and the checkouts, and I could personally do all the rest. For the next year's season, I am thinking about following this direction.

S: Because the hotel is small and the service is more personal, I would agree with your statement. You could be closer to the guest, talk with them and be 100% satisfied with the accommodation, amenities and experience there. You can surely try this next year.

M: Though I, myself, these 20 past years, I have participated in numerous seminars as I had no previous knowledge. I created the website alone, I did the marketing on my own, and I find and check all my partners before I created the activities that will lead to my guests' experience. Moreover, I experienced all the activities and practices before announcing them to the website and offering them to my guests.

S: Do you think that the customers, who participate in these activities, follow your philosophy of respect for the environment? Also, do you think these practices add more value to your brand image?

M: I believe that because we have communicated all this before the customer comes they come ready. I do not need to persuade them to do something about everything I say about foreigners, not Greeks.

S: Can I ask something else? Is there a difference in how aware are the foreign customers and the Greeks?

M: Enormous. Very easy answer.

S: When you plan these activities, such as the tour of the property, the main reason is to attract more Greeks and learn from the activities or to satisfy the foreigners.

M: Again, I will say that neither is the answer. I am checking the box that says other. I will say that all this is what I and my husband like. I never started with what they want. That is why I communicate so much, what I want. It is not at all proper marketing, but because I am all day there, I cannot do something that I cannot support or people who cannot match my philosophy. Therefore, this is a huge problem and dissatisfaction [for me]. And that is one reason I am really going to stop faster than I might be physically doing business. There is no response from the Greeks. We do not follow instructions. We want everything in our own way, and there is no consciousness of environmental protection. I would not think of any of this. It takes you a while to make decisions. I will keep my ideology. I have a notebook since we opened I have written the basics (i.e., sustainable initiatives in the hotel). I will never change that. The market business may push me somewhere but they cannot change me. Let us say putting an espresso machine was what I did. I did not want to serve another coffee apart of the Greek coffee and the filter one. It did not bother me. I did not pass the red line, as the said in politics. However, the demand was huge, although I will insist on many things.

S: Dear Marina, I think our time is over now. I would like to thank you for your participation.

M: My pleasure. Good luck with it. All the best.

8.5. Interview 4

Name: Anonymous

Occupation: Receptionist

Date: 30/04

Location: Skiathos, Greece

Via: Skype

The original interview was conducted in Greek language.

S: Are you ready?

A: Yes.

S: I would like to introduce yourself first before we start with the questions.

A: [...]

S: Let us start with the first question on the list. How guest-personalized is your service? Moreover, what kind of experiences are your guests typically seeking in your hotel?

A: Our goal at the hotel is one. We want our guests to feel like home, like his/her home while being on holidays even for a few days! Always our welcome is very friendly and familiar, because we have many guests who revisit us every summer. I believe our check-in process is the most personalized service in our hotel. Even if it is your first time to our hotel or you have been many times in the past we have many repeat guests all these years, the goal is the same. The goal is the same for everyone. During the check-in process, we offer free welcome refreshment and upon arrival in the guestroom, we provide our own wine with some fresh fruits complimentary. To every guest, we are different. I mean we want to feel he is unique, and we are here for him/her. This is the reason why we call them with their names, for example Mr. and Mrs. Smith. We know their names, who lives in every suite. We want to feel unique and special.

S: But this service is the same for everyone.

A: Not exactly! When the guest arrives, we give him the option to choose what he would like to drink. The same also about the wine. For example, we have the red wine in the suite; he is welcome to get a white one, if he does not like the red wine. Moreover, during the check-in process we give different information about the island. Usually, when the guest comes for the first time, I want to give him an overview about the hotel. I always ask few questions just to know what kind of information I will provide. Many guests over the 60s ask alternative activities on the island. Beside popular activities for every tourist. We suggest to walk in the mountains or to learn new and different things about Greece and the island.

S: Are most of the guests Greek or internationals?

A: Internationals, we have few, few Greeks.

S: Which is the capacity of the hotel? What kind of tourists visits your hotel? Families? Elderlies? And what kind of experience do they look for in your hotel?

A: We have 21 suites. What they would like to live because usually it spreads from mouth-to-mouth this the best advertisement, is the friendliness, the hospitality in our hotel. They look for a relaxing place, without any events, many people. The privacy we offer. The design of the hotel allows this privacy because the suites are individuals, like apartments. Everyone comes to experience this tranquility. We have couples; most of them are in their late 30s to late 70s.

S: Before we discuss your green services, do you know why the company has an environmental policy?

A: The Company right now owns five hotels in Greece. One of the hotels is on the most sustainable Greek island, or at least they promote like this. I do not know if it is true, but it might be one reason why the company changed its values. When the two oldest children of the CEO, a family business, came back to Greece after their studies in the UK and the USA, they started to get involved more in managing the company. I guess another reason is this because they are young and they had been educated abroad. Moreover, the hotel is within nature. It is surrounding by trees, olive trees. In general, the island is very green (i.e., flora, not sustainable orientation) and has six award beaches with blue flag. I cannot say if it is their ideology. Still, I think they changed towards sustainability because it is a community demand and to attract more tourists. More tourists with this mentality.

S: Does the company promote its green orientation to the guests?

A: No. They have to ask us. I will not inform them immediately because we focus more on the experience and the service. But if they ask my colleagues or me, we will inform them. We have the note in the rooms if they read it. But no they do not promote because they know they will lose some guests. Many people required third keycard, when they go to the beach or to town because they want the air conditioner in operation.

S: Can you give me a few more examples about your green experience-centric services?

A: Yes. We have natural beauty products in the guest bathrooms. A few years ago, we used to have Apivita, now we provide Korres. A few years ago, they could buy the products in regular sizes from the reception. All the products are Greeks, natural products in the recycling package. We want to introduce to our international guests the beauty of Greek products, so they can buy them later at the airport or in the town. Because I work at the hotel from the second year of its operation, I know that the company wants to introduce Greek products. For this reason, we have our own wine in the room complimentary. They will taste it, because who says no to free wine, and then they can ask it at the bar and during the lunch or dinner.

Every suite has flowers, trees or herbs at the entrance or around. The guests can taste fresh fruits directly by the tree. I mean, you can grab it. The design of the landscape makes you feel close to nature, even if the hotel provided luxurious service and amenities.

An example is the suite 301. This suite has a garden full of rosemary. Then, we thought it would be an excellent idea if we use it for food. Since then, around the swimming pool area and around some suites you can find herbs. We do not have to buy parsley anymore. We have our own. The guests really like it! Not because they are beautiful or because of the smell. But they say they feel cozy, like being in the countryside. They really respect our effort; we do not have labels "do not cut" because we have noticed that the care. Some of them, not all, but yes, they care. They water the plants, and we say please you are on holiday you do not have to. At the end of August, we have fresh figs from the trees. Our guests can taste them. The first time the guests do not know them, so we want to introduce the hotel through our eyes. Something else is the furniture repair, I am not so sure if this counts as green action. The company does not buy new chairs, armchairs, etc. unless the previous is totally destroyed and cannot repair it. Moreover, for the furniture in the rooms, at the reception and on the balcony. Some guests are very enthusiastic about the decoration and the design; some others say we need a renovation and more modern furniture. They are not old, are classic. The hotels exist almost 12 or 13 years. Ok, then they were new, now are used.

S: Do they reward your actions? Or do they disagree with any of your environmental activities? In the service context.

A: I believe they like it. However, the architecture of the hotel is different from other hotels. It is built on a hill and it has many steps, we do not have a lift. Many guests complained about the steps, but we give them two options depending on the level of their suite. We have two entrances, one down to the main road, the reception and one at the top. We divide the area in two, so depends on the suite level, we advise accordingly. Moreover, we say it is good exercise. The property has Cycladic architecture. A lift will definitely change this ambiance. It is the most common complaint about the lift. They wanted to make it easier for them. In addition, some they see it as exercise. The same was about the A/C. They were 50-50. Some want to use it in 16 degrees and sleep with duvet, while others do not care.

S: In this case, how do you respond?

A: We ask to respect the environment and the climate.

S: Does it work?

A: ...

Moreover, because of the location of the hotel, we advise walking to the town. In general, we encourage them to walk. The city center is only 1km from the property.

S: If you have to choose the main experience-centric service in your hotel, what could it be? Why is this experience memorable? How do you engage the guests in this experience?

A: We have a library you can name it lending. Guests can borrow a book or donate a book to our library and another guest can read it. We have play card, board games and backgammon. They can learn to play backgammon. They are very excited about it. They say I learned to play backgammon!

S: Can you tell me more about the library? Can everyone take a book?

A: Ok, it is a bookcase. It is a private service only for our guests.

S: Why did you create this concept?

A: It started many years ago. Few guests had left some books and we thought it would be nice to leave on a desk while others could have it. We did not want to throw them out. We considered many might do not have any book and just happened one day when a guest came to me and asked if we have any literature book. Some guests left 2-3 books on departure and just happened. We thought it would be a really nice idea to promote a recycling message. Read it-Lend it. We started with 2-3 books, and now we have more than 200 books. Now they choose what kind of book they want to read. We have books in different languages and we have guests only for one week in the hotel, they were reading by the pool and they take more. They said, "I have read it in one day, I came to take one more." We encourage our guests to donate their books if they do not want to take it back home because someone else might want it. Instead of buying a new book only for your holidays, they can borrow it from us. Of course, they can take it home. Some people exchange their books with one from our library. Some books as full of body oil and sun cream, or we have two or three copies from a book, but we keep them. Because it is something that can be used repeatedly. Some guests leave the books at the check-out and they ask, "can I leave those books? It was a good one but I will never reread it, I will place it in the bookcase for the next".

S: Ok thank you. How many of your green experience is provided by external partners? Can you describe them?

A: We have many non-eco-friendly activities on the island. Most of them are not eco-friendly, but we have three green. The sailing with a sailing yacht. One of our external partner sails with the wind. They can visit the neighbor island or go for the round of Skiathos. It depends on the weather and the wind. Because they sail with sails. The second activity is in nature. Our guests can learn more about the island's herbs and flowers by walking in rugged areas with an expert about the island's flora or an experienced tour guide. Should I tell you if they were satisfied when they returned?

S: If you think that, it is essential for the overall experience in your hotel, yes. Did these external experiences influence your green value?

A: Usually, when they had this experience with nature, they asked what else we could suggest. Something similar. If they had been to hiking experience, for example, when they returned, they asked if you have any other recommendations to be closer to nature. But they do not ask these excursions so often.

S: Are there any other activities where guests involve? Apart from the towels or bed sheets.

A: The towers, the bedsheets. Recycling the plastic. If someone asks us to print something for him and he does not want to throw it out, he can ask to recycle it.

S: Being at the reception, which is your role? I mean, do you involve in these experiences?

A: Absolutely, yes! The library was my idea. I was insisted on buying a bookcase. They did not want to spend money on it. However, I made it! Moreover, in every suite, we have a welcome note for the guests. We created with my ex-colleague; it is about the hotel and the area—the local history.

The herb was out chief's idea. He wanted fresh herb for dinner but could not wait for the next day's delivery if he did not have anything. He suggested it, the gardeners planted them, and the guests enjoy them.

S: So, some experiences required front-line employees' involvement.

A: Yes. We all contribute to these experiences. We all want happy and satisfied guests. The bosses decided some actions but we have taken over the implementation. They may tell us what they want, but we choose how. We communicate every day with guests; we know their personality, what they like.

S: Last question. Do you think such green environmental practices by your hotel have a positive impact on your green value?

A: Many guests feel like at home because we follow the same practices. For example the recycling. They do it at home, and they do it during the holidays.

S: But you do think green experience-centric services add value to your hotel?

A: I guess so. I think yes because of the reviews, their satisfaction. While they were leaving, they expressed how much they liked this experience. I think that was for me. I do not know what else I can say. I do not know how I can help you more.

S: I will respect that. Thank you for your time.

8.6. Interview 5

Name: Marylin Raftopoulos

Occupation: Hotel Owners, Levendis Estate

Date: 06/05

Location: Ithaca, Greece

Via: Mail

S: Please describe your current job position.

M: My husband and I began creating Levendis Estate in 1995 on a small piece of land, which he'd inherited. Our original idea was to build four traditional houses within the olive grove, which our four children could use in the future, and do this in a sustainable and eco-friendly way. We continue to work this way, but back then, a friend suggested we rent them during the summer season. We put a small advertisement in an English magazine and attracted 7 families in 1997. Since then the entire concept has grown, rather 'organically'! We gradually bought adjoining lands and increased the size of the property to 20+ acres; we added what was originally to be a laundry, but we added the facility of a breakfast/coffee shop to that building. Guests enjoyed this amenity so much that it now has a library and an organic grocery too, whilst the laundry has been moved to a new building. In 2002, we added a salt-water swimming pool and outdoor cooking and dining area; the next year a large vegetable garden; and not long after an outdoor platform, which is an al fresco lounge room, a cinema and a yoga platform. In 2004, a friend offered her services as a masseuse and so yet another outdoor pavilion was constructed. Her massage therapies are the most popular service we offer, apart from the coffee shop!

Our two youngest children ('youngest' being 35 and 32!) now work with us. Our daughter is our chef for breakfasts; she also prepares, cooks and delivers evening meals to guests if they wish, or they can request marinated BBQ foods to cook themselves; and she has recently also taken the role of being the main 'hostess' to our guests, whilst our son is the grounds man and animal care. Oh yes, we also have a small farmyard with chickens, 2 sheep, a goat and a donkey. Of course, kids enjoy helping in the farmyard in the mornings, but originally our idea was that animals are totally necessary if you are farming sustainably. We have a mulching machine so that prunings from our olive trees and gardens are mulched and composted in a large pit. To this, we add manures from the animals and lawn clippings. Then each winter we are able to feed all our gardens with a thick layer of natural compost. We also harness all rainwater for use in the gardens and, using gravity, we pipe drinking water from an underground spring to the four houses. This means no electricity is used to pump water around the Estate.

As I said above, all this has developed quite organically, many additions have been the result of guests' suggestions; others are things that we have wanted to add for the enjoyment of our guests – and ourselves! The result is that during May, June and September we attract mainly middle-aged couples and families with

pre-school children, whilst during July and August our guests are families with kids around 5 – 15 years of age. All our guests are attracted to the Estate by our strong organic/eco/natural environment passion. Over the years, families who first holidayed with us with 5 and 6 year old children still holiday annually with the children now bringing partners. Many families are with us annually and have become personal friends of our family. Sorry, it seems I have not answered your question, but have headed off to tell you about the history of Levendis Estate. My role is to take care of all administration and guests' contacts before and after holiday. I also manage all supplies required, from gardening and farming supplies to foods for the preparation of meals for guests, and oversee our housekeepers work to ensure it's as perfect as possible. During the winter months, I make supplies of preserves, body care products and castile soaps for our guests. All are created from vegetables, fruits, olives and herbs we grow. This all started as an extension of what I've always done for our family, but has now grown to take up quite some time! My husband, meanwhile, is our designer, builder, plumber and the backbone of the Estate!

S: How guest-personalized are your experience-centric services?

M: Every single service we offer, or physical amenity created within the Estate, is 100% guest-personalized. All were created with the aim of giving our guests a somewhat unique combination of experiences in a natural geographic environment.

S: What kind of experiences are your guests typically seeking in your hotel?

M: Without exception, the people who are attracted to our Estate are wanting to spend time with their loved ones in a place where mass tourism does not exist. They are wanting to relax in a natural environment where they have all the services and amenities of a five-star resort, yet these are offered within a peaceful and tranquil environment which also provides them with organic produce and wellness services plus fun for their kids. They also enjoy the blend of knowing that all our services and amenities are there when they want to make use of them. There is nothing formal or routine about a Levendis Estate holiday – each guest choosing what they want to do/use and when; or often couples will want to do absolutely nothing except relax within the Estate and perhaps eat out every second night, which is what many do. Couples are usually not so social with other guests as families are, they will have breakfast, maybe do an hour's yoga and then read by the pool all day and order a meal from our Chef for their evening meal.

S: Describe one of the core green experience-centric service provided by your hotel. Which is the motivation, the results of this experience (e.g. repeating visit, positive performance impact, and financial impact etc.) and its key characteristics?

M: It may seem an odd answer, but the amenity most enjoyed and most used by every single guest is our salt-water swimming pool. It was added to the grounds four years after opening the Estate to guests and we made the decision rather unwillingly – not really understanding why people would want a pool when the beautiful sea is just 200m away! You could say that it's a core green experience for our guests. We use natural salt water; we designed it using the proportions of ancient Greek temples, set it on the edge of an area of forest overlooking the bay below and chose a color that reflects exactly the color of the sea below. The pool definitely

brings families back to Levendis. Parents enjoy its relaxing atmosphere (rather than the noisy, crowded pool experience of larger resorts), they enjoy the social aspect of being in the company of other guests (though all our guests are very sensitive to the need for quiet relaxation of other guests) and of course, all the kids are having lots of fun playing with each other.

From the pool, all the kids will often disappear to explore the forest, play games in our nearby outdoor lounge or feed the donkey, leaving parents to chat, read and relax.

S: To what degree are your guests involved in your experience-centric services. Give as many examples as possible, describe how your guests engage in the experience.

M: My answer to Question 4 explains the pool experience. The next most popular service is our morning coffee/breakfast shop, which I described in Question 1. All guests have breakfast here almost every morning, and often families will become firm friends as a result. Kids will raid our games box and invent board and card game competitions to play each morning, they might plan their days so that two families will go boating for the afternoon and then perhaps enjoy dinner in the villages together. The pool and the breakfast shop, along with the tranquil natural experience of a family holiday at Levendis, definitely bring repeat business, as I mentioned above. They also bring us business because on a second holiday a family will often bring another family, or even their entire extended family with them. In this way, our need for advertising is almost nil, apart from our web page. Word of mouth works well for us. It's also very interesting that people who have holidayed with us previously will very often recommend our services/amenities to new guests, e.g., over breakfast it's not unusual for us to hear their conversations recommending to each other our masseuse's work, a boating day, the kids will chatter about what movie we might be showing that week (we have a weekly cinema night at our outdoor lounge platform), or which soap or body lotion they like the most, etc. So all guests naturally become very involved and engaged in all our services/amenities.

S: How the experience-centric service add (or not add) value to green practices of the hotel?

M: I think the best example of this is our farm as I described above. The way we run the Estate is entirely green in every aspect but having the farm means that we can provide organic foods/meals from produce we grow, we make fruit and vegetable preserves and body care products, operate and provide services that are entirely natural and organic. It's also very heart-warming to see how interested children are in this aspect of our Estate. Most are from European cities and many have never seen fruit on trees, a vegetable garden, collected fresh eggs from the nests, fed a donkey. They are so entertained and interested in all this that they happily leave their mobile devices alone for days on end! – And that's a huge thrill for everyone in my family!!!

S: How many of your green experience are provided by external partners? Describe the experiences provided by external partners. (External collaborations i.e. F&B supplier, hotel amenities, fitness experts, car or bike leasing, tour guides, NGOs, winery, event planner, etc.)

M: External partners provide us with the services of boat hire, full day captained boat excursions, scuba diving and kayaking and walks/treks along the island's footpaths. I do not think any of these could be described as

green experiences. Perhaps the scuba diving and kayaking and the walks guide's work which are natural experiences, unlike boating, which consumes petrol!

The following three questions refer to your employees who directly interact with the customers.

S: Do the experience-centric service require front-line employees' engagement with the guests? If yes, which is their role and their relationship with the guests?

M: Seven of us are involved in our experience-centric services (i.e. the five people in our family, our housekeeper and masseuse.)

Our daughter and son-in-law operate our on-site Coffee Shop, which opens daily for 3 hours during the morning for guests to enjoy organic breakfasts, visit our library or organic grocery, book a restaurant/boat/day trip/scuba dive/kayak/walk or simply enjoy a coffee and chat with other guests. It is the social center of the property and yes, our daughter's suggestions and advice is vital to the choices our guests will make and their experience of holidays at Levendis and on our island. Her knowledge of the island is detailed! We also invite kids to breakfast before parents if they wish. We find lots of kids enjoy the independence of announcing to their parents 'we are going up for breakfast' then making their own choices from the menu. They build quite a personal rapport with our daughter and son-in-law.

Our Masseuse has a lifetime of experience and is extremely skilled in various modalities. Regular guests never miss their chance for a relaxing massage or a therapeutic serious 'workout' for remedial purposes. She knows masseuses in various countries and will often refer our guests to someone in their home country to continue massage therapies she has started. Our massage pavilion is located in the forested area of the Estate under the shade of large Mediterranean cypress trees and above the bay below. Guests very often comment that the setting makes the massage a total renewal of all senses!

Our son takes care of the farm part of the Estate. Kids who want to help with animal feeding chores in the mornings will set a time and place to meet him and they will all go together to do the chores. It's a highlight for many kids (and often for parents too!) and once the animals are familiar with them, they will come to the gate any time of day when they hear the kids calling them, especially if the kids bring 'treats'! This all adds to the delights of holidays for the kids, but also gives them independence to do things without the need for parental guidance – which parents enjoy too!!

Our housekeeper takes care of thoroughly cleaning our houses each day, but she also checks kitchen supplies, takes orders from guests if they would like to have items from our organic grocery shelves, skin care products, new beach towels, etc. etc. Although her English is very limited she has no trouble communicating with our guests, with the help of a big smile and lots of chirades!!

My husband and I take care of the vegetable garden watering and pool cleaning/maintenance each morning, chatting with guests as they pass by, and we're always at the coffee shop for an hour or two each morning to socialize with guests.

S: To what degree front-line employees are involved in your experience-centric services? Give at least three examples describing how front-line employees engage in the experience.

M: I think this is answered in Question 8 above, but if you'd like more info. please let me know.

Further communication 11/05

S: Dear Marilyn,

Thank so much for answering my research questions. About the last questions and the frontline employees. Could you tell me if you create a previous dialogue with the guests before experience takes place? Or any kind of interaction between you and the guest before, during or after the visit.

For example, does the staff promote the green initiatives? Or does the staff educate the guests about the positive impacts of these initiatives in their lives? Or do you educate them with further notes in the common areas or in the rooms?

An example could be a guest complain about the a/c. The guest asks why don't you provide this service and the employee explains why they didn't install a/c because it's harmful for the environment and then explains more about the sustainability positioning of the hotel. (In this example, the employee creates an active dialogue, promotes the green positioning and educates the customer).

M: Hi Sonia,

Your example with the air conditioning question is exactly the way we operate with all our guests, i.e., we create the dialogue, promote the green/eco choices we have made and yes, we definitely educate and influence our guests. A few examples of how we do this:

As I do all the administrative work, answering initial enquiries is part of my daily routine. Most of the time people will email me two or three times after, I have answered their first enquiry. I have always thought that they make their first enquiry as they are attracted firstly by our 'eco'/green/natural bias. I send them a long first email explaining, in brief, all of these initiatives then typically, the one person who enquired will be discussing their decision to holiday at Levendis with a partner who will ask questions. Then follows a second email of course. Typically, this email will be asking details such as "Why don't you have air con?" "Can you tell me details about your wellness services?" "What food choices will we have and how much will they cost us?" "What is the age of other kids at Levendis at the time we'll be there?" etc. So, to take your air conditioning example, I explain (exactly as you have below!) but also tell them about typical temperatures, the fact that our houses are oriented to the north-east so that our afternoon sea breeze fans the hillside and goes in the front windows and out the back windows and that the houses are all 100% insulated to keep them cool and they are shaded by trees too. I will answer all their questions in detail like this. This means that by the time they arrive at Levendis, such major questions have already been answered. The next information they have comes

from the detailed compendiums in each house. These also explain every initiative we operate with and why. Most guests read these on their first evening at Levendis.

Everyone in our family will informally meet with each guest almost every day. They will be on their way to the pool, taking a walk around the grounds, walking up the stairs for breakfast and as we are all working around the Estate each morning we will usually meet up with most people which gives them the opportunity for more questions as they get to know us and for us to explain our initiatives. Our daughter 'fields' most questions and gives out most information as guests are enjoying their breakfast, and on most days my husband and I will pop by the breakfast shop for our own morning coffee. We can often be there for 1 – 2 hours because the kinds of people who holiday at Levendis usually have lots in common with our family. First questions are usually 'how long have you lived on Ithaca' and 'how long have you had Levendis'. Then there are long stories about our family history (i.e., moving from Australia to Greece), the fact that I am a farmer's daughter and my family's farm was organic/green, we grew our own food, had our own animals, recycled everything, collected rainwater, used our sewerage system gray water, etc. etc. and so were about 90% self-sufficient. As that's what I know best, it's what we re-created when we started to build Levendis. Most parents/adults ask the questions re green initiatives and are happy with our replies. However, what's the most fun for all of us is socializing with the kids whilst they help us tend the animals or if they come to the breakfast shop before their parents in the mornings. They have lots of questions as most are city children. They love the large grounds and their freedom here at Levendis and as they are so comfortable in the surroundings, they feel free to chat with all staff. It's a good feeling to be able to influence their thinking! They ask lots of questions, e.g., why we clean out the animal sheds each day and add the manures to the compost pit, why does the pool taste like salt, are these straws made of paper, how do you make soap out of olive oil, can I pick some tomatoes, etc. etc. All these kinds of questions lead back to green/eco and they always see the reasons why it should be so. It's also fun to make statements such as 'we never need to go to the supermarket', they will ask how come and then we can explain that we make all we need – preserve our own foods, make our own cleaning products, disinfectants, soaps and body care products from our herbs, olive oil and aloe.

Sorry, I'm writing too much again!! But let me know if you want more info!