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Internship-oriented Project

*Hotel staff perceptions of the Green Key eco-label and sustainability
practices: The case of a certified Copenhagen hotel*

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Table of contents

Introduction	2
Context: The Green Key Certification.....	3
Literature Review	4
Eco-labels: benefits and challenges to its implementation in hotels	4
Eco-labels and environmental practices: a staff's perspective	5
The Green Key eco-label and environmentally friendly practices	7
Methodology.....	8
Philosophy of Science.....	8
Research approach, methods, and strategy	9
Data Collection	9
Data analysis.....	10
Trustworthiness of the research	10
Limitations.....	11
Findings	11
Staff Information and Participation in Sustainability Matters	12
Environment and taking care of the world: the importance of the Green Key certification..	13
Contribution to Sustainability	14
Challenges to Achieving Sustainability.....	15
Discussion.....	16
Staff involvement and participation on sustainable practices.....	16
Perceptions of the Green Key eco-label.....	18
Conclusion	20
Bibliography	22
Appendices	25
1. Host Institution Statement.....	25
2. Professional Learning and Competency Development Report	26
3. Early Career Plan	28
4. Interview Guide	31
5. Interviews' Transcriptions	31
Figure 1. The Green Key logo.....	3
Figure 2. Green Key criteria areas	3
Figure 3. List of respondents	10
Figure 4. The GK flag outside the Copenhagen hotels	10
Figure 5. Recycling bins from one hotel during one GK control visit.....	15

Introduction

The concept of sustainability in tourism emerged almost 50 years ago, shortly after the UN defined the term Sustainable Development in the Brundtland Report as a process to "meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future" (WCED, 1987, *Meeting Essential Human Needs* section, para. 2). As the adverse effects of tourism at environmental, sociocultural, and economic levels became increasingly known (Archer, Cooper, & Ruhanen, 2012), sustainability evolved from a buzzword to a fundamental item in tourism agendas worldwide (Jenkins & Schröder, 2013).

In the hotel sector, sustainability has been described as a paradox between the willingness to protect the environment and society and an incentive to consumerism (Jones, Hillier, & Comfort, 2016). Nonetheless, the hospitality industry's sustainability concerns and increasing pressure from consumers have led to a growing interest in voluntary tourism eco-labels worldwide (Jones, Hillier, & Comfort, 2016; Iorgulescu, 2020).

However, "obtaining and maintaining a sustainability certificate is not free for businesses", as Tasci (2017, p. 378) emphasises. The author refers not only to financial efforts but also non-financial, recognising that introducing environmentally friendly practices at hotels often puts more pressure on staff (Tasci, 2017). Despite a growing interest in eco-labels (Iorgulescu, 2020), hotel staff perception of eco-labels and environmentally-practices remains an under researched topic in the tourism literature (Chan, et al., 2014).

Throughout her internship at Green Key International, the author of this study had the opportunity to engage in multiple conversations on the impact and importance of the Green Key (GK) certification for establishments across the globe. Financial concerns were often discussed with GK National Operators, who run the programmes at a national level. Although staff involvement is the first criteria section of the GK programme (Green Key, 2022a), concerns about staff awareness of sustainability were never expressed by National Operators.

Considering all the above, this project aims to explore hotels' staff perceptions of the GK certification scheme and its impact on their everyday tasks. Drawing on qualitative data from five interviews conducted at one hotel in Copenhagen, Denmark, and the researcher's own experience during its four-month internship at GK International, the following research questions were formulated:

How is the GK eco-label and the sustainable practices it promotes perceived by staff members of a certified hotel in Copenhagen? and How does it impact their daily working routines?

Context: The Green Key Certification

Created in 1994 in Denmark, the GK label (figure 1) is the “leading standard of excellence in the field of environmental responsibility and sustainable operation within the tourism industry” (Green Key, 2022b, para1; Green Key, 2022c). Being the most widely spread voluntary eco-label (Iorgulescu, 2020), the GK certification is currently present in over 60 countries, in more than 3600 establishments, including hotels, smaller accommodations, camping sites, restaurants, conference centres or holiday parks (Green Key, 2022a, para1).



Figure 1. The Green Key logo

Prior to receiving a GK certificate, establishments undergo a strict assessment to validate whether the site is complying with the criteria (Green Key, 2022d). Furthermore, all certified establishments are regularly audited by third-party entities to prevent green washing (Green Key, 2022d). After verifying that the establishment complies with the criteria, the certification bodies, either the GK National Operator (which manages the programme at a national level), or the third-party auditor, certify the site for another year (Green Key, 2022d). The GK International head-office, in Copenhagen, where the author of this study did her internship, acts as the certification scheme owner.

For each of its categories (hotel, restaurant, smaller accommodations, holiday parks, etc...), the GK criteria is organised in 13 areas or sections, equally relevant in the certification process (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Green Key criteria areas

As this project aims to explore the staff’s perception of the GK certification, it is important to understand the requirements of the eco-label regarding staff involvement.

According to the GK criteria for staff involvement, every GK establishment is expected to name one environmental manager and create one green committee, formed by representatives of all departments, who meet regularly to decide on sustainability matters (Green Key, 2022d). Finally, the GK expects all staff members to receive training regarding the eco-label and the sustainable practices they must implement (Green Key, 2022d).

Literature Review

As this project seeks to investigate the perceptions of eco-labels and sustainable practices by hotel staff, the following literature review will firstly introduce the emergence of environmental certification schemes in tourism, as well as the benefits and barriers to eco-labels implementation. Since there is a limited body of literature on staff's perception of eco-labels, the second part of this chapter takes into consideration employees' attitudes towards green practices in general. To conclude, previous research on the GK eco-label, conducted in the Netherlands, is introduced.

Eco-labels: benefits and challenges to its implementation in hotels

The emergence of eco-labels has been described in the tourism literature as the consequence of two main factors: the increasing global awareness of the negative impacts of the tourism industry and a growing interest in eco-conscious travels by the public and the private sector (Chen & Chen, 2012; Fukey & Issac, 2014; Iorgulescu, 2020).

Although transportation (particularly aviation) is considered the most significant contributor to greenhouse gases in the tourism sector, the accommodation sector also plays a considerable role when it comes to resources consumption, with hotels being considered the highest energy consumers in the service sector (Lenzen, et al., 2018; Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018; Iorgulescu, 2020). Interestingly, the rise of eco-labels has been particularly evident in the hospitality industry (Iorgulescu, 2020). Several authors estimate that there are currently 140 to 200 voluntary eco-labels or certification schemes worldwide for the hotel sector (Iorgulescu, 2020; Suchera & Arulappan, 2020). Some of the most popular eco-labels for hospitality businesses are Biosphere Tourism, Green Globe, Green Key, Earth Check and Hilton Stay (Iorgulescu, 2020).

But what characterizes an eco-label? For Sucheran and Arulappan (2020), an "eco-label certification is a voluntary procedure that assesses, monitors, and provides a written guarantee that a business product or service conforms to a particular requirement, and a business that meets the certification criteria is awarded the eco-label" (p. 981). The authors consider that eco-labels also act as a validation of how a business conducts itself at environmental, social, and economic levels (Sucheran & Arulappan, 2020).

There are several reasons hotels pursue certification schemes in tourism, namely a genuine concern for the environment or to improve consumers or investors' satisfaction (Geerts, 2014; Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2016). However, financial savings and competitiveness remain the top motivations for hoteliers to pursue a certification scheme for their hotel (Fukey & Issa, 2014;

Geerts, 2014; Iorgulesco, 2020). Financial savings can be achieved by adopting certain eco-practices at the hotel, which reduces resource consumption (Sucheran & Arulappan, 2020).

Another added advantage of having an eco-label is the public recognition that it brings to the hotel (Tasci, 2017; Tippett, Ytterdal, & Strand, 2020). Several authors mention how certification schemes are often used by tourism enterprises as marketing tools (Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2016; Tasci, 2017; Tippert, Ytterdal, & Strand, 2020).

Nonetheless, there are certain barriers associated with the adoption and maintenance of eco-label certifications, which can be either financial or non-financial (Suchera & Arulappan, 2020). While application fees or investment in new technologies can present a financial barrier for businesses to adopt or maintain their eco-label, there are many other challenges, including limited time for staff to adapt to new tasks (Khatler, et al., 2021), and lack of information given to employees (Fukey & Issa, 2014; Sucheran & Arulappan, 2020).

Sucheran and Arulappan (2020) emphasise the issue of unclear responsibilities from staff members, who are frequently asked to “wear two different hats and have two sets of work responsibilities to serve the eco-label” (p. 983). Furthermore, the authors consider that extra workload can lead to a decrease in staff’s regular performance (Sucheran & Arulappan, 2020). As Choy, Cheng, & Yu (2021) point out, environmentally friendly tasks do not always translate into employee-friendly practices (Choy, Cheng, & Yu, 2021).

[Eco-labels and environmental practices: a staff’s perspective](#)

Despite the idea that the lack of participation and knowledge from staff can pose a major threat to the successful implementation of green certifications in hotels, this topic remains under studied in the tourism literature. Most studies encountered during this project’s research focused on the consumer’s perception of tourism eco-labels or analysed the financial benefits of adopting tourism certifications (Lo, Chan, & Zhang, 2014; Capacci, Scorcu, & Vici, 2015; Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2016; Penz, Hofmann, & Hartl, 2017).

Other studies explored staff perceptions of environmental policies or programmes but did not refer to eco-labels specifically (Chan et al., 2014; Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018). Nonetheless, Chan et al. (2014) stress that hotels’ staff awareness of green practices has been ignored in the tourism literature. The author emphasises the importance of identifying and studying staff’s behaviour, intentions, and support towards environmental practices since a successful implementation of these actions relies on them (Chan et al., 2014). The same opinion is shared by Sourvinou and Filimonau (2018), which consider that staff “may, deliberately or accidentally,

disengage with environmental management interventions (...) due to the skill gap, value-action gap, and poor attitudes” (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018, p. 651).

Extra workload and lack of time

As referred to previously, the adoption of hotel certification schemes often translates into an extra workload for employees (Sucheran & Arulappan, 2020). In his study on the impacts of green practices on hotel staff, Chan et al. (2014) provide some examples of the extra tasks often required from employees: using duplex printing, adjusting the temperature of guests’ rooms, searching for environmentally friendly cleaning products or equipment, and turning on and off cooking appliances when needed.

Sourvinou and Filimonau (2018) consider that tasks such as recycling and turning off the lights are often “manual, unpleasant, repetitive and/or laborious” (p. 658). As stated by the authors, the repetitive nature of tasks can lead to discontentment, even when staff holds a positive attitude towards environmental practices (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018). However, the authors believe that staff can more easily adopt such tasks by having their efforts praised and recognised or by being given gratuities (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018).

Change of behaviour and suspicion of the quality of green tasks

On another note, Fukey and Issac (2014) argue that staff often oppose new environmental practices that require a change of behaviour and processes they believe affect the quality of the products, such as composting or recycling (Fukey & Issac, 2014). Nonetheless, the researchers noticed that younger and more educated staff show more commitment toward eco-policies, which they justified with the higher environmental awareness from younger generations (Fukey & Issac, 2014).

Staff training and awareness

A relation between resistance to comply with sustainable practices and staff’s insufficient knowledge about sustainability was found in literature (Fukey & Issac, 2014; Choy, Cheng, & Yu, 2021). In their study on housekeepers’ perceptions of environmental practices in Hong Kong, Choy, Cheng, and Yu (2021) argue that certain actions from staff members can jeopardise hotels’ efforts toward becoming more sustainable. The authors recall the case of one hotel, where housekeepers continued to change the guests’ towels daily, despite the establishment having a towel reuse policy (Choy, Cheng, & Yu, 2021).

Considering that staff members are often the main stakeholders implementing sustainable practices, Fukey and Issac (2014) defend that employee awareness is fundamental for the

success of hotels' eco-strategies and stress that regular communication and staff training on the benefits of these practices must be provided. Referring to Freeman's stakeholder theory (1984), Khatter et al. (2021) highlight how all individuals' interests and actions should be considered to achieve sustainability, including hoteliers, staff and consumers. Furthermore, the author reinforces that an organisation should involve stakeholders rather than only shareholders (those at the top) (Khatter et al., 2021).

Support and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction has also been considered a determinant factor for staff's acceptance of environmental practices (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018). Sourvinou and Filimonau (2018) argue that employees who perceive their tasks contribute to society and the environment tend to be more satisfied and motivated. The researchers further cite Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (1957) as an opportunity to understand staff's behaviour towards their organisations. Considering that cognitive dissonance occurs when actions are not aligned with an individual's thoughts (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019), Sourvinou & Filimonau (2018) defend that employees perceive their work more positively when working for a company that contributes to the society and environment. In their study of an environmental programme implementation in a London hotel, the authors concluded that staff was willing to perform extra working tasks when it aligned with their personal beliefs and the hotel's eco-commitment (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018).

The Green Key eco-label and environmentally friendly practices

Despite the existence of the GK certification scheme since 1994 (Green Key, 2022a), studies based on the eco-label are still scarce. Previous studies on the GK focus on comparisons between eco-labels in South Africa (Sucheran & Arulappan, 2020) and Scandinavia (Gössling, 2006), or study the application processes of establishments (Huuhka, 2018).

A recent study conducted by Mzembe, Idemudia and Angel (2021) explored the adoption of the GK scheme in the Netherlands from an organisational and managerial perspective. Although the focus was not on the hotels' staff's perception of the certification, the authors interviewed more than 20 employees from different certified establishments, therefore collecting interesting information (Mzembe, Idemudia, & Angel, 2021). Moreover, the discussions on the GK certification touched on topics such as adopting new environmentally friendly practices and technologies and staff training (Mzembe, Idemudia, & Angel, 2021).

On the adoption of new green practices, two of the managers interviewed explained that a series of decisions had been taken to comply with the GK criteria, including the replacement of all lights

for LED light bulbs and the introduction of only certified fish on the menu (Mzembe, Idemudia, & Angel, 2021). Regarding staff training and awareness of the certification, one of the managers shared that every new employee received training on the accreditation (Mzembe, Idemudia, & Angel, 2021). Furthermore, Mzembe, Idemudia and Angel's study (2021) show that all hotels followed the GK mandatory criteria of having a green team at an internal level. However, not all hotels were successful with their green teams. The authors report that one interviewee considered that some managers did not support the green team (Mzembe, Idemudia, & Angel, 2021).

Methodology

In this chapter of the project, the author will elaborate on the research process and the philosophical assumptions that guided her. The author was inspired by her experience as an intern at GK International, in Copenhagen and by the existing gap in the tourism literature regarding staff's perception of sustainable practices and eco-labels (Chan et al., 2014).

Philosophy of Science

Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2016) have defined philosophy of science as "a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge" (p. 124). It is particularly relevant to understand how authors perceive knowledge and reality since their perceptions help to shape how research is conducted (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). Researchers differentiate between two basis of philosophical perspectives: ontology and epistemology (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Pasian & Turner). Ontology refers to the nature of existence, or in other words, to what reality really is (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Pasian & Turner, 2016). According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), ontology also impacts the formulation of the research question.

As the project aims to explore the perceptions of hotel staff workers on sustainability practices and the GK eco-label, the author has taken a constructivist perspective, recognising that social entities (in this case, the hotel) are constantly being constructed by the views and perceptions of social actors (staff members).

While ontology represents the theory of reality, epistemology refers to studying knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). An epistemological approach provides insight into the researcher's perception of what is true or not and how knowledge is acquired (Pasian & Turner, 2016). This project follows an interpretivism epistemology, acknowledging that the hotel staff interviewed may perceive what truth is different and interpret certain situations

according to their knowledge and the context they took place (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

Research approach, methods, and strategy

This research takes an inductive reasoning approach as data guides the formulation of theory (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, inductive reasoning is also adequate for studies with a small sample of respondents, which is the case of this project (Bryman, 2012).

This project hopes to contribute to the yet limited tourism literature on perceptions of sustainable practices and eco-labels (Chan et al., 2014) by presenting a case study on hotel staff's views and behaviours towards the GK eco-label. As Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2016) describe, "case study research sets out to understand the dynamics of the topic being studied within its setting or context" (p. 184). In this case, the authors aim to explore the dynamics of sustainable practices and the hotel staff that executes them.

Data Collection

To better analyse staff's perceptions on sustainable initiatives and the GK eco-labels, this project uses qualitative research methods to gather secondary and primary data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Secondary data consisted mainly of access to GK documents, which elaborated on the eco-label structure and hierarchy, the criteria, and the certification process. They were facilitated by the author of this study during the internship and provided a better understanding of the GK operations.

Primary data collected included five semi-structured interviews with staff' members from a GK certified hotel in Copenhagen and observations gathered during the author's four-month internship at the GK International head office. After sharing her ideas with the GK International team about developing a case study on staff's perception of the eco-label, the author of this study was asked to initiate contact with GK Denmark (HORESTA). The organisation, which runs the eco-label at a national level, contacted three contacts of GK certified hotels that could potentially integrate this internship project.

However, all three hotels declined their participation, with two arguing that they had other several tourism eco-labels at the hotel and that their staff did not distinguish the different labels. The third hotel considered it too soon to participate in the project since they had just recently received the GK certificate.

Finally, the author of this study was put into contact with another hotel manager in Copenhagen that agreed to participate in the project. To preserve the privacy and identity of

the hotel staff and the establishment, all participants' names and the hotel's name and location were removed (Figure 3).

Respondents	Occupation	Company	Nationality
1	Cook	In-person	Danish
2	Technician	In-person	Danish
3	Receptionist	In-person	Danish
4	Housekeeping Manager	In-person	Danish
5	General Manager	In-person	Danish

Figure 3: List of respondents



Figure 4. The GK flag outside the Copenhagen hotel

Prior to the interviews, an interview guide (Appendix 4) was prepared based on the GK criteria list. Besides the interview guide, the researcher also prepared a digital version of the GK criteria areas to question the participants about the eco-label (Figure 1).

The five semi-structured interviews took place after Easter at the hotel's lounge and lasted for approximately 30 minutes each.

Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and later transcribed to facilitate analysis (Appendix 5). After, thematic analysis was used to help find common themes and patterns among the respondents' answers. Four main topics emerged from coding: Staff Information and Participation in Sustainability Matters, Opinion on the Green Key Certification, Contributing to Sustainability, Challenges to Achieving Sustainability.

Trustworthiness of the research

Bryman (2012) argues that reliability and validity are critical elements for the quality of research. Reliability refers to whether the same results can be achieved if the study is replicated (Bryman, 2012). However, as the author points out, this can be particularly challenging to achieve in some qualitative studies, as participants' views are bound to time and the context in which they were collected (Bryman, 2012).

As for validity, it helps to measure the accuracy of the data collection methods (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). To ensure a project's validity, triangulation of research methods is often used (Patton, 1999). As hinted throughout this chapter, the author achieved triangulation by collecting data from interviews and observations during her internship and the two control visits and secondary data from GK's documentation.

Limitations

There were several limitations found during the process of data collection. Firstly, the author faced several barriers when reaching out to GK certified establishments for interviews. Since the authorisation and the initial contacts to hotels had to be done through a third entity (GK Denmark), it meant that some time was lost. Furthermore, several GK hotels in Copenhagen declined to collaborate, which led the author to pursue a new alternative.

Another limitation encountered had to do with a language barrier. Some of the participants considered that they had some difficulty expressing themselves in English since they do not use the language often in their daily work. Moreover, the small number of respondents also posed a barrier since the saturation effect did not occur (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018).

The author also considered that there was some non-intentional lack of transparency during the process of choosing the interviewees from the hotel since it was never mentioned that the respondents would be part of the green group of the hotel, created to comply with the GK criteria. The author wonders if different results would have been achieved with staff that did not participate in this group.

Finally, the lack of literature on the hotel's staff perceptions of eco-labels and environmental practices made it challenging for the author to compare the findings to other cases.

Findings

In this section of the essay, findings emerging from primary data analysis are presented. The information is organised in different sub-chapters, that were named after the themes found during the coding process of the interviews (Figure 5):

- Staff Information and Participation in Sustainability Matters
- Opinion on the Green Key Certification
- Contributing to Sustainability
- Challenges to Achieving Sustainability

Findings also reflect the author's observations throughout the interviews with five hotel staff members, as well as other remarks from two control visits to two hotels in Copenhagen.

Staff Information and Participation in Sustainability Matters

Considering that staff members' knowledge and involvement in sustainability initiatives are imperative criteria for hotels to receive the GK certification, this was considered a relevant topic during interviews. When asked about their introduction to the eco-label at the hotel, most respondents described that their initial briefing happened either through conversations with supervisors at the beginning of their training period or through workshops held by the sustainability group of the hotel. Several respondents explained that they continue to attend several workshops focused on environmental topics, such as waste management or water-saving techniques. According to the respondents, these workshops are organised by the hotel's sustainability group and target particularly the members of this group.

The general manager, Respondent 5, explained the importance of having a green unit at the hotel, constituted by staff members from all departments:

The employees that participate in the group sometimes change, but we always have someone from each department because they work as a type of ambassadors. They have two tasks. The first is to find out what can they do, within their working area, which has a sustainable benefit. The second is to be an ambassador of the sustainability group (Respondent 5, 2022).

As mentioned in the limitations, it was throughout the interviews that the author of this study realised all interviewees were members of the hotel's sustainable group. All five respondents considered that the existence of this group was not only helpful for acquiring new knowledge in areas such as carbon emissions, weighing waste and reducing single-use plastic but that it also provided them with a space for creativity and problem-solving. "We do a lot of brainstorming within this group. (...) There are new regulations now [about waste in Denmark], so we have been discussing that" (Respondent 2, 2022).

All five interviewees considered to be informed and involved in the sustainable initiatives of the hotel, with two establishing a direct link between their presence in the green group and their awareness of the hotel's initiatives regarding sustainability: "I feel informed, especially since I

am part of this group (Respondent 1, 2022)". Respondents 3 and 4 also believed that their opinions were valued inside the group.

All in all, the respondents considered to be informed and involved in sustainability matters and attributed it partially to their participation in the sustainability group.

Environment and taking care of the world: the importance of the Green Key certification

During the conversations with five respondents, they often used the same expressions to describe their views on the GK eco-label. "We must take care of the world" and "We have to be part of the society" were some common expressions from interviewees when discussing the importance of GK. In addition, Respondents 2 and 3 considered that the certification helped the hotel to set an example for others in the hospitality sector.

Interestingly, one participant had contrasting views on the importance of the certification for guests. While almost all respondents considered that it was a quality seal for guests and a determinant factor when choosing an accommodation, Respondent 4 had the opposite idea:

I think it is important, but I don't know if the guest checks if we have a certification. I don't know... If I book a hotel is not one of the things I would look for (...) (Respondent 4, 2022).

As indicated in the previous chapter, the author of this study also had the opportunity to participate in control visits at two other GK certified hotels Copenhagen, during her internship period, which allowed for interesting conversations with two general managers. Speaking of the importance of the GK certification for his hotel, one of the managers confided that his initial interest in the eco-label had to do with cost-saving. However, it was the pressure from corporate guests that drove him to finally apply for the GK certification.

His views on the GK certification align with those of Respondent 5, the manager of the hotel where the interviews took place. For Respondent 5, the certification is a type of validation which is recognized by the industry and guests in Denmark all over the world. "Having the Green Key certification validates that you are serious about this work" (Respondent 5, 2022).

While discussing their opinion about the international eco-label, the participants were also asked to reflect on the 13 GK criteria areas that were previously referred to in introduction (Figure 1). The objective of this exercise was to assess which values of the GK criteria were considered the most important for each respondent.

During their personal reflection on the GK criteria areas, three out of five interviewees considered social-related areas to be the most significant for them, more specifically, Staff Involvement and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In the first case, respondents 2 and 5 considered that it was not possible to evolve and adopt a sustainable journey without the hotel staff's involvement. The general manager, Respondent 5, reinforced that staff members were more aware of the challenges of their own departments when it comes to sustainability; therefore, they were also more willing to solve issues when they were involved.

The other two participants chose the waste criteria as their personal focus, justifying their choice with the current challenges faced by hotels in Denmark with waste management.

In conclusion, the hotel staff described the GK eco-label as a driving factor for eco-driven guests, a quality seal in the sustainable tourism industry, and an opportunity to implement change and take care of the environment. While looking at criteria areas, participants emphasised the importance of staff involvement and social responsibility.

[Contribution to Sustainability](#)

Throughout the conversations with the hotel's staff, their contributions towards sustainability were discussed. Although all participants were part of the green group and affirmed to be highly engaged in environmental initiatives, some showed difficulty in finding examples of their contribution to sustainability at the hotel. Respondent 2 firstly concluded that he did not contribute much, but later provided several examples: "I mean, I recycle. People here throw everything out of the cars in the parking lot. I pick it up and separate it. Also, we use this environmentally friendly fuel for the lawn mowing" (Respondent 2, 2022). Another respondent also showed some difficulty in identifying her daily routines that helped to reduce the hotel's impact:

What do we do in the rooms? Nothing about sustainability. Of course, when we got the GK at the beginning, I changed all cleaning products to eco-label ones, and we have also eliminated the miniature amenities. We follow a reuse towel policy (...)
(Respondent 4, 2022).

Other participants were quicker to point out some of the sustainable initiatives that they contributed to. Respondent 1, for example, highlighted her decision of serving smaller portions at breakfast to avoid food waste, while Respondent 4 explained that she reused papers from the front office to create small notebooks. Furthermore, Respondent 4 affirmed that her biggest task with regard to sustainability was to inform guests. However, according to the

interviewee, guests were more often curious to learn about the hotel's sustainable policies or initiatives rather than the GK certificate.

Challenges to Achieving Sustainability

Both in interviews with hotel staff and conversations with the two hotel managers during the control visits, concerns were expressed about the new waste management laws and the changes it will cause in hotels.

It will be a difficult task for us in the housekeeping department. Because the girls [housekeepers] will have to take the trash from the room to other place, and we will need more space in the trolley. It takes time and space", clarified the housekeeping's manager (Respondent 4, 2022).



Figure 5. Recycling bins from one hotel during one GK control visit

Concerned about the necessary time to adapt and comply with the new standards in the hotel kitchen, Respondent 1 affirmed: "I work as a cook, and there are a lot of different types of plastic in the kitchen (...) and to know what type of plastic is around the meat, around the veggies. When you are busy in the kitchen, you cannot ask the chef to consider 'What kind of plastic is this... Everything happens too fast", stressed Respondent 1 (2022), adding that more space will also be needed in the kitchen to accommodate the new bin fractions. Respondent 2 noted that the new legislation will not only require new internal procedures (where to put the bins in the hotel) but that accommodating new rules also implies more expenses.

To resume, the main challenge to sustainability mentioned by staff members referred to the introduction of new legislation in Denmark that will require new procedures to be adapted by hotels. They expressed how these changes can be time, space and money consuming.

Discussion

In this chapter of the project, the relevant literature on eco-labels and sustainable practices will be contrasted with the findings resulting from five interviews with hotel staff and two control visits in two GK certified establishments in Copenhagen.

Staff involvement and participation in sustainable practices

As firstly mentioned in the literature review, the lack of awareness and involvement from staff in sustainability matters remains one of the most significant barriers to the successful implementation of environmental practices (Chan et al., 2014; Fukey & Issa, 2014; Sourvinou and Filimonau, 2018; Suchera & Arulappan, 2020). Lack of knowledge about sustainability practices can sometimes lead to malpractices in the hospitality industry, as it was shown by Cho & Yu (2021) in the case of housekeepers in Hong Kong. Furthermore, it can determine the success or failure of an organisation's sustainable strategy since employees are usually responsible for executing environmentally friendly practices (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018).

In the case of the Copenhagen hotel, all five interviewees affirmed to have been initially briefed about the GK eco-label and the establishment's sustainable practices. Moreover, the participants considered to be highly informed about new initiatives because they were part of the environmental group of the hotel, where topics such as carbon emissions, reducing single-use plastic, and, more lately, recycling were discussed.

While reflecting on the importance of staff involvement for a hotel's successful environmental policies, Respondent 5 (hotel manager) observed that the staff involved in the green group were important sustainability ambassadors in their own departments. Not only were they asked to brief other colleagues on the green group's work, but they also helped to improve sustainability inside their departments. Respondent 5 further considered that, by being involved in sustainability matters, employees were more engaged in finding solutions.

Despite the green group creation being an imperative requirement for all GK establishments worldwide, this high level of staff involvement, as seen in the Copenhagen hotel, may not be transversal to all accommodations. As shown before, in their study about the GK eco-label in

the Netherlands, Mzembe, Idemudia & Angel (2021) recalled the case of one employee that pointed out the lack of support by the general manager to the green team.

As Khatter et al. (2021) argue, organisations, namely hotels, can successfully use the stakeholder theory since it underlines how organisations should involve all stakeholders, including those at the bottom, and not only investors and hoteliers. Furthermore, by involving staff in sustainability decisions, the Copenhagen hotel also recognises their important role within the organisation.

Still on the topic of staff involvement, in the Copenhagen hotel, participants were asked about their engagement in sustainability practices during their daily work. Although they had affirmed to be highly involved and knowledgeable about the recycling challenges the hotel was facing, several respondents showed some difficulty in identifying other sustainable practices they executed. Respondent 2, for example, claimed not to contribute much to sustainable initiatives at the hotel. However, later he referred to daily picking up the trash left by guests in the parking lot and sorting it out and mentioned how he only used LED lights and a special fuel (eco-friendly) to mow the lawn.

A similar reaction was observed during the conversation with Respondent 4, who firstly considered not contributing to sustainability, arguing that, as housekeepers' manager, she was only involved in supervising the operations. However, she later recalled purchasing new cleaning products before the hotel received its first GK certificate and added that the hotel followed a reuse towel policy.

While reflecting on the new Danish regulations on waste management that will take place from January 1, the same respondent considered that new requirements will likely be a burden for her "girls" (Respondent 4, 2022). Respondent 1 also referred to the new recycling rules on separating waste in more fractions as a new challenge in her daily routine.

In the literature, extra workload and lack of time have been described as barriers to a successful implementation of sustainability (Chan et al., 2014; Suchera & Arulappan, 2020). Sustainable repetitive tasks have been referred to as "manual, unpleasant, repetitive" for hotel employees (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018). Despite their uneasiness about the new waste management laws, the Danish staff did not seem to consider sustainable tasks a burden. Respondent 3, for example, proudly exemplified her efforts toward sustainability, claiming to reuse paper from the reception and transform it into small notebooks, turning off the lights, and recycling both at the hotel and her home (Respondent 3, 2022).

Although Sourvinou & Filimonau (2018) believe that repetitive tasks can often lead to discontentment, even in the case of supportive staff, they consider that their dissatisfaction can be reverted through the recognition of their efforts or through rewards (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018).

In addition, Sourvinou & Filimonau (2018) emphasise the importance of job satisfaction to staff support of environmental initiatives at hotels. Their reflections on cognitive dissonance theory resonate with what was observed by the author of this study during interviews. As shown in the literature, the staff is more willing to support new changes in the organisation when it aligns with their beliefs (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018). As stated throughout this chapter, the Copenhagen hotel's employees considered to be highly involved and showed genuine interest in reducing the environmental impact of the hotel.

All in all, it is possible to conclude that the respondents from a GK certified Copenhagen hotel were highly involved in the sustainability initiatives of their organisation. To comply with the GK criteria, the hotel in question has created a green group, where staff from different departments contributes with suggestions for environmental issues and solutions.

Although the four respondents and the hotel manager considered to have a good understanding of sustainability, it is impossible to determine whether this is a generalised feeling at the hotel since only staff from the environmental group was interviewed. While extra workload and job dissatisfaction have been reported in the literature as a consequence of sustainability initiatives and implementation of eco-labels, the employees from the Copenhagen hotel showed opposite attitudes, as they seemed genuinely satisfied with their contribution to the environment. Nonetheless, they seemed concerned about the new law on recycling and the time they would need to adapt to the new rules.

Perceptions of the Green Key eco-label

Since no study was found on the perception of the Green Key certification by hotel staff members, the literature reviewed on this topic focused mainly on the perceptions about eco-labels and environmental practices in general. Several authors referred to how hotel managers often perceived green certifications as cost-savings solutions or as a way to be more competitive (Fukey & Issa, 2014; Geerts, 2014; Iorgulesco, 2020). This idea resonated with what was observed during one control visit to a GK certified hotel, where the general manager confided that his initial motivation for applying for GK was due to this being a good tool for reducing resource consumption. Another hotel's manager, Respondent 5, described the GK certification as a validation of a hotel's commitment to sustainability.

As mentioned during the findings, most respondents considered the GK as a certificate that helps the environment and contributes to a better society. Respondent 3 explained that she usually introduced the GK label only when guests asked about it: “I usually tell them the GK is important for us because we want to be part of the change in sustainability as an organisation” (Respondent 3, 2022). The same participant considered, however, that often travellers were more curious about the hotel’s sustainable initiatives over the eco-label. Interestingly, the hotel manager (Respondent 5, 2022) also affirmed that the sustainable initiatives in the hotel were not executed to comply with the GK, but rather because sustainability was already part of the establishment’s DNA.

While most participants perceived the GK eco-label as a quality seal for guests, one of the respondents showed an opposite view, doubting whether the certification was a determinant factor when choosing an accommodation (Respondent 4, 2022).

Despite showing some difficulties in providing more clear explanations about the GK certification, all respondents could recognise the certificate logo and some of the ideas associated with it. As explained throughout the findings, participants were asked to reflect on the 13 GK criteria sections and choose the most relevant for them. Three out of five participants highlighted the importance of staff involvement and CSR, agreeing that staff awareness was the first step toward successfully implementing eco-labels and sustainable initiatives.

To conclude, all interviewees seemed to perceive the GK certification as a positive environmental tool for a better world. Moreover, by looking at the criteria sections of the GK requirements for hotels, three participants also highlighted the social aspect of the eco-label, which focuses on staff involvement in sustainability. It was also mentioned by the general manager that, nowadays, sustainable practices are so aligned with the hotel’s philosophy and its employee that they are not executed just to comply with the GK’s criteria.

Conclusion

This project aimed to determine the perceptions of staff members from a GK certified hotel in Copenhagen. To explore this matter, the following research questions were developed: *How is the GK eco-label and the sustainable practices it promotes perceived by staff members of a certified hotel in Copenhagen?* and *How does it impact their daily working routines?*

To answer the research questions, the author gathered primary and secondary data, including five interviews with staff members from a certified hotel in Copenhagen, observations during the author's internship at GK International, and documentation on the eco-label. In addition, the relevant literature on eco-labels benefits and barriers and staff's perceptions of certification schemes and environmentally friendly practices was reviewed.

The literature reviewed indicated that certification schemes can be particularly effective in reducing a hotel's environmental impact and costs but can also be used as marketing tools to attract consumers. However, several authors recognised that the implementation of eco-labels often faces several resistances from hotel staff caused by extra workload, unclear responsibilities, lack of training and unawareness of the importance of contributing to sustainability (Fukey & Issac, 2014; Suchera & Arulappan, 2020; Choy and Yu, 2021). Nonetheless, Sourvinou & Filimonau (2018) found that employees are more likely to support changes when they recognise their company's efforts toward the environment and society and when it aligns with their own beliefs (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018)

Our findings on the case study of the hotel staff from a Copenhagen certified hotel showed that employees were highly supportive of the environmental practices. They perceived the GK certificate positively and considered it a tool that can help the environment and society. In addition, they felt proud to work for a hotel that was taking the lead on sustainability in the hospitality industry. These findings aligned with what Sourvinou & Filimonau (2018) documented, suggesting that staff from the Copenhagen hotel recognised their company efforts.

In addition, all staff members considered to be adequately informed about the GK certificate and the hotel's sustainable practices. It is important to recognise that all staff members were part of the green group of the hotel, which can help explain their awareness of the sustainability initiatives and the GK certificate. The hotel manager also argued that environmental practices are already so integrated into the hotel that everyone executes them without associating with the GK certificate.

The findings also highlight how some respondents had some difficulty in acknowledging their roles in contributing to sustainability through their daily practices. They did, however, consider that new tasks that required more time and attention would have to be implemented following the upcoming Danish law on waste management. This aligns with what was suggested in the literature, that new tasks often demand more time and a change of behaviour/tasks from staff.

Despite some limitations, namely the small sample of respondents, this study hopes to contribute to the limited literature on staff's perceptions of eco-labels. Since the successful execution of sustainable practices is highly dependent on staff's work, it is suggested that further studies explore this issue with a larger sample of respondents. The author believes that this study can also help the GK International office and the certified establishments understand how hospitality workers perceive its certification so that more attention is given in the future to criteria on staff's involvement in sustainability.

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Appendices

1. Host Institution Statement

Aalborg University
Tourism Master Programme
Host Institution Statement



Student Name Marlene Rendeiro
Semester 9th
Student Number 20201171
Student E-mail Address mrende20@student.aau.dk
Name of the Internship Organisation Green Key International
Address of the Internship Organisation
Foundation for Environmental Education, Scandiagade 13, 2450 Copenhagen SV, Denmark
E-mail and Telephone Number of the Internship Organisation finn@fee.global

- The purpose of this declaration form is to certify that the Student has fully completed the required minimum of hours of internship experience for the 'Tourism' program and the work tasks according to the internship contract approved by the Tourism coordinator prior to the internship.
- This form must be signed and dated by both the Internship organisation contact and the Student intern.

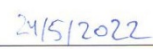
After the completion of the internship, the Study Board for Cross-Cultural Studies, Aalborg University will send the internship contact a link to a short questionnaire and kindly ask you to provide a feedback on how your student intern has performed and contributed to the company/organisation which you represent.

We would like to thank you and your company/organisation for providing this opportunity to our students. This opportunity is highly valuable to their studies.

I confirm that Marlene Rendeiro has completed an internship at Green Key International [FEE], equivalent to at least four months, of full-time work:




[Finn Bolding Thomsen, Green Key International Director]



Date



[Marlene Rendeiro]



Date

2. Professional Learning and Competency Development Report

Total keystrokes: 6671

Evaluate your internship with an emphasis on career-relevant issues

Overall, I would describe my internship as a great valuable experience, that allowed me to get in-depth knowledge on eco-certifications operations and particularly on the importance of educating for sustainability. At the beginning of the internship with Green Key International (programme run by an NGO, the Foundation for Environmental Education – FEE), not only was I adequately briefed on the certification and the range of tasks I would be doing, but I was also invited to participate in important meetings.

I integrated quickly with the team and felt very welcomed and heard every time I suggested ideas for projects. I participated in every weekly meeting at the office, where members from all departments of the Foundation for Environmental Education shared the projects and tasks they were working on. This meant I had the opportunity to learn from very experienced professionals, that have been working in different areas of environmental education for many years. Through our meetings and discussions, my knowledge of the tourism field and sustainability expanded. I learned about the difficulties of implementing tourism certifications and how they can vary depending on the country or destination pursuing the eco-label, but also about the importance of having a strong network of stakeholders that can come together in decision-making processes.

As communications assistant my tasks focused initially on creating content for the GK website and other social media platforms. But as the internship progressed, I was given more autonomy and the opportunity of elaborating reports on control visits from establishments, as well as to help organising webinars, and to develop the entire concept and logistics of one future competition to be held on social media. I engaged daily with certified establishments and members from the network, helping them with issues related to the programme's internal database or doubts about the certification. I enjoyed the internship the most when I was doing tasks such these, where I was given freedom to communicate with other stakeholder and to participate actively in strategies and projects.

I also faced a few challenges. After two years of pandemic, I had to rediscover how to work again in an office and which routines boost my energy and concentration the most. Moreover, I realized my previous knowledge about eco-labels was very limited. For example, at the

beginning it was challenging to adapt to a new lexicon, and to hear many names of stakeholders and projects that I had no knowledge of.

Reflect on what you expected before the internship – both professionally and personally - and what actually happened?

I had high expectations before the internship and, gladly, most of them were achieved during this experience. As I knew FEE and the GK programme had a privilege connection to several relevant international organisations, I was expecting that I would have the opportunity to engage and participate in meetings with these stakeholders. Thankfully, throughout the internship, I was always included in important meetings where I had the opportunity to observe and absorb knowledge from these big players in the tourism industry. I was not expecting, though, that I would have the opportunity to attend to many interesting meetings and webinars about the hospitality industry and sustainability.

Other of my expectations was that I would get in-depth knowledge on the benefits, barriers and characteristics of eco-labels in tourism, during my internship. Not only I acquired those, but I was also able to watch, first-hand, how much global interest there is in sustainable eco-labels.

On the personal side, I have also learned more about my passions and skills throughout this internship. I learned that I feel the most motivated when I am surrounded by passionate professionals, who do not hesitate in sharing their knowledge with you. I realised how important teamwork and a great working environment means to me. Moreover, I re-discover myself at work, learning that I am a semi-structured professional that needs organization, but that I am also enthusiastic about exploring my creativity.

What professional and personal skills and competences did you develop during the internship?

Considering my background in communication, I was able to use many of the skills I had previously acquired. My knowledge of social media content and planning, and of platforms such as Wordpress and Squarespace were particularly important since I held the position of Communications Assistant during my internship. Also, my previous interview skills were particularly relevant every time I had to collect information or interview stakeholders for the GK's website. As I had not worked in this area for two years, it was also extremely important for me to reuse some of my communication skills, as it gave me more confidence to return to the labour market.

Nonetheless, I have also acquired new skills and competences. For example, I learned to navigate new digital tools (Linkedin campaign, Facebook Metabusiness, Podio, etc...), and planned and executed several campaigns on social media to engage audiences to participate on webinars or competitions. In the future, I believe this experience can be particularly useful for findings jobs in the digital marketing area in tourism.

Reflections on networking and the contacts and relations that were built and how the network can be maintained for later use.

The internship at GK International has been extremely important for the development of a professional network. Although my professional network has just started forming now, I believed the internship has worked as a platform for me to showcase my work and interests to other stakeholders. Since I started this experience at GK International, I have established relevant connections on LinkedIn with members of several companies that work with the international eco-label, from hotel's establishments to tourism international agencies. I have been indeed encouraged by my internship coordinators to establish these connections since, according to them, they can later play an important role in my job search.

In addition, this internship experience has presented me to many other interesting organisations, that are equally committed in generating a positive impact in tourism. It has further opened my mind to different types of professional roles and positions, such as eco-label coordinator and sustainability manager of a hotel. I believe all these contacts and knowledge obtained will be extremely valuable while I seek for employment in this area.

3. Early Career Plan

Total keystrokes: 6326 characters

What are your core skills and competences?

When I graduated from my Communications bachelor (with a specialization in journalism) ten years ago and started my first internship in a national newspaper, in Portugal, I acquired my first professional competences. I learned how to conduct interviews, how to write in an informative and journalistic way, and I developed a critical and curious mind. With the digitalization of media, and newspapers and magazines starting to have an online presence, I acquired new skills, which included working with platforms such as Squarespace and Wordpress, editing videos, managing, and planning social media content, and writing to a completely new audience. Later

on, I started a new job in the communications department of a hotel, where I also engaged and planned other journalists' travels and helped to provide information about the establishments.

Although communication has always been where I feel the most comfortable working in, in recent years I have discovered a true passion for sustainability, particularly in the hospitality sector. Throughout my journey in AAU's Tourism Master programme over the two last years, I reused many of my skills from previous jobs: I have conducted news, researched and analysed data. I also became even more proactive, since in a foreign country, without any professional network, I initiated multiple conversations with stakeholders that I wanted to interview for the semester projects.

If anything, these past years taught me that I can be an extremely focused and a resilient professional. In my part-time student job, without any previous experience, I have learned how to communicate with guests, to provide a good service, and how to solve problems in stressful situations. Once again, communication proved to be my strongest competence. Finally, this last internship in Green Key International has introduced me to the challenges of an NGO and has taught me how to better manage the available resources and to be more creative. For example, without financial means to promote an important webinar campaign, together with my colleagues, I decided to create a series of posts and emails targeting our NGOs network all around the world and asked them to support us in the campaign promotion.

[What kind of tasks would you like to work with in your future career?](#)

Reflecting on my future career, I think it is important to acknowledge that our academic experiences can have a great impact in how we imagine our professional life in the future, as it can push us to discover new passions and interests. While starting the Tourism Master programme at AAU I was coming from a communications and social media background related to the hospitality field. I imagined myself working for an international hotel chain in Copenhagen, creating content for social media, developing partnerships, helping the hotel to grow in terms of audiences, and analysing data. Over the past years, I have also become more interested in the work of sustainability consultancy for hospitality businesses or programmes. I would like to help other businesses on identifying opportunities for them in the hospitality sector, by facilitating information on different eco-label or helping them to develop their own sustainability programmes. I would like to continue to communicate and to engage with stakeholders at different levels, but also to inform and develop new tools to help the hotel sector to further incorporate sustainability in their DNA.

Organisations relevant to my skill set and interests:

- Green Key International (NGO) – Coordinator of programmes
- Sani Resorts (Private) – Sustainability Coordinator
- Wonderful Copenhagen (DMO) – Digital manager

List of work tasks/Skills to work with these task

- **Coordinating an eco-label programme**
Skills: Having a great knowledge of different eco-labels' operations; Communicate with several establishments interested in acquiring the certificate and overseeing the certification process.
- **Developing and monitoring sustainable strategies for hotels**
Skills: Teamwork skills when working together with hotel staff to promote Sustainable Tourism Development; Critical thinking when developing a sustainability strategy; Research external initiatives that target sustainability in the surroundings of the establishment, and support those initiatives (example: reef conservation; species protection; pollution reduction)
- **Digital marketing, including planning and developing content across different digital platforms; develop of partnerships**
Skills: Social media/digital communication skills; Creativity when developing content; Data analysis to better understand consumer behaviour; Digital platform skills and tools

What are your current challenges in terms of building a career? What are my next steps to support my future career plans?

I feel that my biggest challenges currently relate to language barrier and the lack of a professional network that knows my work and skills. Since I am a foreigner living in Denmark, that still does not master the country's language, I often come across several job ads that require applicants to have proficiency. As this was a challenge I was expecting to face, I am currently having Danish language classes. My goal is to finish the remaining Danish language levels within one year. Furthermore, I am also focusing my job search on more international companies at the moment.

On another note, even though the internship at GK International has allowed me to get in touch with several relevant stakeholders from the tourism industry, I feel that I am still far from having a great professional network that recommends my work and puts me in contact

with potential recruiters. I am thinking of approaching some of these relevant stakeholders I have come across during my internship, and to gain more knowledge on the projects they are currently working on and think how I could be useful in those projects or how could I help them to overcome their challenges.

I also would like to gain even deeper knowledge in the field of sustainability, by investing in some courses (for example, from coursera). Furthermore, I lack some skills in the digital marketing field, that I would also like to explore through courses in areas such as SEO, digital planning and platforms, and data analysis.

4. Interview Guide

1. Can you describe your current position/role at Kolle Kolle, and how long have you worked for the hotel?
2. When was the first time you heard about the Green Key certification? (e.g. before getting a job at Kolle Kolle, when you were hired, etc.).
3. Were you involved in applying for or renewing the certification?
4. How important do you consider the Green Key certification for Kolle Kolle?
5. In your opinion, what are the benefits of implementing sustainable practices at the hotel? And the biggest challenges? (e.g. Do certain actions/tasks take more time; Do they require more effort, etc...?)
6. Can you describe specific changes made in the hotel to comply with the Green Key criteria? Has that also impacted how the hotel staff performed tasks?
7. (Hand the interviewee the Green Key criteria/areas). Is there any area of the Green Key criteria you consider more relevant? Would you like the hotel to focus more on? (Explain to the interviewee that there are no correct answers, but that different people may give importance to different factors)
8. What type of training has been provided to the hotel staff? How do we ensure opinions or suggestions from staff are incorporated into the sustainable action plan or strategy?



5. Interviews' Transcriptions

Staff Information and Participation in Sustainability Matters

Opinion on the Green Key Certification

Sustainable Practices/Actions inside the hotel

Challenges to Achieving Sustainability

Respondent 1 – Cook

1. Can you describe your current position/role at Kolle Kolle, and how long have you worked for the hotel?

I have been working since august last year. I am a cook; I prepare the breakfast. If there are a lot of guests, I start at 4.30 in the morning, I bake the bread, slice the cheese, meat, sweet things. I put it on the buffet, and I make some eggs, I cut bread, and I serve it. I take care of the buffet. When we take it out, I clean everything. And then when we have a lot of guests, I will happen with lunch.

2. When was the first time you heard about the Green Key certification? (e.g. before getting a job at Kolle Kolle, when you were hired, etc.)

I heard about Green Key before joining KolleKolle. Whenever I was traveling and going to hotels, I would see something about not leaving the towels on the floor. I also knew about Green Key because my husband has always worked in hotels, for more than 25 years. We know a lot about Green Key. I cannot remember the first time I heard about the certification.

3. How were you briefed about the eco-label at Kolle Kolle? If yes, what was the training provided?

They asked me if I would join the environmental group. We have an environmental group that works in all sorts of level within the hotel.

Respondent 5: We had an information meeting where we went through all the history, our long Green Key history, we got the certificate in 1996, so we have had the certification for many many years. So, a lot of the things we do are so integrated that does not necessarily mean that we say it is Green Key, is just things we do. But at the information meeting we went through all the history of Green Key, what we are doing now, what have we done in the past, what is the things we want to do in the future.

4. How do you consider the certification important (if you do)?

It is important because we must take care of the whole world. We must do it in a right way. We have to take care of our garbage, we case use the towel a lot of times, we shouldn't throw a lot of food out. And I think it is well important to take care of all our plastic because I think it is a plastic world, we are living in.

5. Can you describe to me a task that you feel contributes to improving the sustainability at the hotel (e.g. explaining something to guests, recycling, and switching off the lights?)

Right now, we are not sorting the plastic, but we are planning to do it, but we have to find out how to do it in Denmark. When we serve food, we try to serve smaller portions so that people eat the all portion and they don't leave something on the plate. We still have a buffet, but we all have this smaller portion. If you serve it in a big bowl, people tend to take too much of that plate and then they throw a lot of food out. When you make smaller portions, they only take what they need.

6. You mentioned the struggles with the plastic. Can you elaborate on those?

Because there is a lot of different types of plastic and Denmark there is not a proper system to recycle all plastic. They have to burn it. It's not only us in the hotel, even at households it is not possible to recycle it. It is a really hard task for us here at the hotel. Because we will need to have the space in the kitchen, but also space for the containers outside. And to know what type of plastic is around the meat, and around the vegetables. When you are busy in the kitchen, can you ask the chef to consider 'what kind of plastic is this'... it goes too fast. So that's the challenges at the moment in terms of sustainability, it is sorting the waste. We recycle metal, pap, glass, and porcelain.

Respondent 5: Because the regulation is not in place yet, we don't know out to sort the plastic.

7. Besides the recycling and small portions, what other things do you do to promote sustainability in Kolle Kolle's kitchen?

We try to buy local Danish food when possible. We have chosen not to get the ecologisk certification because it doesn't make sense to buy eco meat from south America, which you have to transport all the way. The way they produce in Denmark, when it comes to animal production, we know the products are good quality and that they have good welfare for the animals. Therefore, it doesn't have to be transported long distance. So, it is more sustainable. Of course, we cannot get lemons from Denmark, there are some fruits and vegetables from Denmark, but we try to buy the most we can from local producers. If you buy a Danish fruit, it is better than ecologisk fruit from South Europe. There are most pesticides from ecologisk fruit from South Europe than of Danish conventional fruit production. Also, our menu is seasonal, so we buy what is available seasonally.

8. From your own perspective, is there any area of the Green Key criteria you consider to be more relevant? Would you like the hotel to focus more on? There are not correct answers...

Yes, there are (laughing, pointing to the manager).

9. All these areas are important, that's why they are part of the certification, but some people that prioritise different categories. Is there any category you would like to learn more about it?

I would say waste. I talk about it with the chef in the kitchen, how sometimes we do it wrong.

Respondent 5: Staff involvement because we cannot get to our goals, we cannot develop, we cannot invent new things, we cannot comply with the regulation and certifications if we don't involve everyone. I cannot do it on my own. We need to be a team, a group of people who is doing it.

10. You also mentioned the sustainable group. Could you please tell me more about the type of conversations/meetings you have within this group?

We have had a few meetings about how we have weight the waste in the hotel. I've also talked with our technical manager, about our garbage and also the garbage company, that picks up the garbage. We also attended the webinars that Green Key has had, about waste, about climate compass.

11. If you felt you could improve something in the kitchen, who would you talk to?

We always discuss it within the sustainable group and then I talk to the kitchen's chef and the technical manager, and then we come up with the solutions.

12. Do you feel adequately informed about the sustainable practices/actions of Kolle Kolle?

Yes, I feel like I am, especially since I am part of this group.

13. Have you been approached by guests regarding the Green Key certification? If so, what time of questions have they asked? Have you felt comfortable answering them?

I have talked with a lot of people when I am taking the buffet. People have asked for example about the small portions, if it's because of corona. And I say, its also important so that we don't have as much foodwaste. So, we talk to the guests and try to explain that it is related to sustainability.

Respondent 2 – Technician

1. Can you describe your current position/role at Kolle Kolle, and how long have you been working for the hotel?

I've been working here for 12 years, I'm a technician, I do almost everything in the house, the rooms, the conference and the gardens. I mow the lawn, fix the light bulbs, everything that needs to be fixed, and I also welcome all of the conference guests, and fix the PC equipment's.

2. When was the first time you heard about the Green Key certification? (e.g. before getting a job at Kolle Kolle, when you were hired, etc.)

When I started, 12 years ago.

3. How were you briefed about the eco-label at Kolle Kolle?

The first time it was explained to me it was... in every room we have a little note that explains what the Green Key stands for. And then I saw the flag at the hotel entrance. Also, my colleague (my boss) told me about the Green Key, so I paid attention (laughs). I do not remember very well, it was 12 years ago, but he told me that the Green Key it is almost like the Danish label *svanemærket*. You find it in food, everywhere.

4. Since then, what else have you learned about the certification?

More now, since I joined the environmental group. I've been on and off, now I'm on again because we have some new things we need to do, there are new rules and regulation. In this group, we do a lot of brainstorming. It is not easy because we have the guests in the room with a lot of garbage, and we have to sort it, but we don't want our housekeepers to have to go through all of the garbage. Also, from the rooms to the outside bins, it's a long distance. So we are trying to sort that out.

5. So in this environmental group, are you aware of other sustainability practices or challenges from other areas of the hotel, for example for housekeeping?

Right now, I'm fully focused on solving the garbage. Because the guest puts everything down in the same bin. The cleaning woman takes it out and we don't want her to stand and put her hands down and sort it out, because she is cleaning the room, and it's not very nice to put your hands down in people's garbage. So, we are trying to figure out how we can make the guests sort it out. Then, we just need to ship it out to the bin, and we don't have to touch it. But the system does not exist, so we must figure out what to do. Because right now we have 9 or 10 different fractions, iron, plastic, paper, etc... Because put a bin with 9 fractions in a room, it's not possible. So maybe we can have something in the middle of the halls. We are still figuring it. But the cleaning lady still must take it out. From next year, this is mandatory, so we have a short time to adapt. It also costs money, it's not free. The big bins outside are not ready yet, and then they need to be emptied. And there will be different trucks to empty it. 9 different bins, 9 different trucks. You cannot put all the different bins in the same truck. The hotel has to pay this service.

6. How do you consider the certification important (if you do)? Why?

It is very important; we have to be part of the society and environment is a big issue. We have to lead on that. I feel like by having this certification we are contributing for a more sustainable society. I just read in the newspaper that Denmark has already used all of its resources for this year. Sad [pause]. We still have 7/8 months until the end of the year, so right now we are just consuming, consuming, consuming. So we have to do something, we cannot sit in the chair and

do nothing. We have to start somewhere. And I feel good that here at the hotel there is a concern because I want to be part of this.

7. Can you describe to me a task that you feel contributes to improving the sustainability at the hotel (e.g. using clean products, recycling, and switching off the lights?)

Hmm... not so much. I mean, I recycle, and I also go around the hotel area in the morning... People here pigs. They throw everything out of the cars. I go and pick it up, and then I sort out everything in the yard and put it in the right bins. People that are not guests use our parking lot at night, they eat smoke, and then throw things out of window. I usually collect a whole bucket in trash every morning.

8. Do you also have concerns here at the hotel about how many energies you spent?

Yes, we have the environment wall, where we even show guests how much energy we spent. Also, we only drive with environment gasoline, we have some special cans with a more sustainable type of gasoline. We use that in all machines we have, even for lawn mowing.

9. What are for you the main challenges of putting into practice sustainable actions at KolleKolle?

Maybe the people. It's a new way of working. Also, the guests. The way they behave, I don't think there is a new fix, people have to change mentalities. I don't think guests are still in this mindset, they still throw things out as well, here at the hotel or in the conference rooms.

10. (Hand the interviewee the Green Key criteria/areas). Is there any area of the Green Key criteria you consider more relevant? From your perspective, would you like the hotel to focus more on? (Explain to the interviewee that there are no correct answers, but that different people may give importance to different factors)

I think staff is the most important criteria. It has to start with us. If you get that right, then everything will come by itself. If staff is not involved you cannot do anything, if they don't care, then how do you improve? Guest information is also important, but for example staff can inform the guests about everything.

11. Do you feel adequately informed about the sustainable practices/actions of Kolle Kolle and how?

I feel informed, specially since we have this group. It is people from the department, cleaning ladies, receptionist, the director, everyone, a kitchen chef. We meet every month, every two months. And if there are some webinars or courses, we do them together.

12. Is there any system where you can voice your suggestions regarding improving sustainability at the hotel?

Yes, for example my boss and I do a lot of brainstorming together. If I have an idea, we discuss it together.

13. Have you been asked about any guest about the certification?

No, I'm not around the guests that much. Maybe the people in the reception.

Respondent 3 – Receptionist

1. Can you describe your current position/role at Kolle Kolle, and how long have you been working for the hotel?

I'm Laura. I have been here for five months, and I worked in the reception and also help the conference guests. I usually book all the conferences, I answer the phone, and in the future I will do the social media, but firstly I need to learn the conference work better. Right now I work mainly on the front desk.

2. When was the first time you heard about the Green Key certification? (e.g. before getting a job at Kolle Kolle, when you were hired, etc.)

I heard it before. I worked in a different hotel, at Scandic. I think they had the certification because I had heard it before. I knew it was about the environment and that we were doing some things that helped the environment.

3. When you arrived here, were you briefed about the eco-label at Kolle Kolle?

Yes, so far, I have been to two meetings. There were some workshops where they talked about it and also the global compass thing where you learn how to calculate the carbon emissions in the hotel. We have also received a briefing about how to sort the trash and how to save water and energy.

4. Who was in these meetings with you?

My colleagues from the hotel. It was everyone from the Sustainable group.

5. How do you consider the certification important (if you do)? Why?

Not only for me, but also to show the guests that we care about the environment. It's simple that we care and that we are taking a lead on this. It's also important for me that I work in a place that contributes. I have had one guest coming up to me to ask me where he could get a bottle of water, and I told him you can actually drink water from the sink in Denmark and he was surprised. But then he told me, 'It's also good for the environment' and I said 'Yes, it is!'. I usually advise guests to replace some little things... I think about it a lot.

6. Have they asked about the Green Key plaque or certification?

They see it in the door, the flag, and it's very important that the hotel has the certification so that guests now that we care about the environment. I think more and more people will choose a hotel that has the Green Key certificate these days. I think maybe they will think

about it and if the hotel doesn't have the Green Key, that they will not stay there. I think people are more interesting in this.

7. Have they asked about the Green Key certification more specifically?

Yes, some have asked. I just say that we like to lead and be part of the change in sustainability.

People sometimes ask less about the certification, but about our practices. One time, a guest asked about the food and the fact that we have seasonal menu, and that we try to avoid importing food or ingredients.

8. Do the guests from the conference center also ask about the certification?

I think it happens more with the people that stay at the hotel, and they go to see the nature and would like to know more about the hotel. While the conference guests have a meeting, and they leave afterwards.

9. Can you describe to me a task/practice that you feel contributes to improving the sustainability at the hotel (e.g. explaining something to guests, recycling, and switching off the lights?)

So I inform the guests, and more personally, I always carry a bottle of water around. I also switch off the lights and I try to reuse old papers, we cut it in smaller sizes, and transform into notebooks. When I eat, and guests eat, I recycle and separate the food, from paper and card.

But also in my personal life, I for example I try not to use a lot of heat on my apartment.

10. Can you describe to me a challenge that you are facing here or something that you could improve here at the hotel (e.g. explaining something to guests, recycling, and switching off the lights?)

Maybe we could have some flyers to bring more information out, so that people could take it and learn more about sustainability and the Green Key. Or maybe a sign.

11. Is there any system where you can voice your suggestions regarding improving sustainability at the hotel?

Yes, I feel like it is easy here to present my ideas.

12. (Hand the interviewee the Green Key criteria/areas). From your perspective, is there any area of the Green Key criteria you consider more relevant? Would you like the hotel to focus more on? (Explain to the interviewee that there are no correct answers, but that different people may give importance to different factors)

The waste one, because it reminds me of recycling. It is good when we can use things many times, and reuse.

1. Can you describe your current position/role at Kolle Kolle, and how long have you worked for the hotel?

I have been working here for ten years, and I am a housekeeping manager, and I have experience with cleaning for more than 25 years. I manage four girls that work here with us in housekeeping. I make plans for the girls, I check if everything is clean in the rooms, I order supply for cleaning products.

2. When was the first time you heard about the Green Key certification? (e.g. before getting a job at Kolle Kolle, when you were hired, etc.)

I cannot remember, but it has to be when I started here, because before I used to manage cleaning but in schools. I don't remember if we had it already.

3. How were you briefed about the eco-label at Kolle Kolle? If yes, what was the training provided/or How would you describe it to a guest or visitor?

It was a long time ago, but I remember having a meeting about it and how I had to buy some special products, without perfume. It had to be very light products and then I was in the sustainable group where we were five people. We used to talk about the environment. Now there is a new sustainable group here at the hotel, that started around 7/8 years.

4. How do you consider the certification important (if you do)?

I think it is important, but I don't know about the guest if they check if we have a certification. I don't know... but if I book a hotel is not one of the things I would look for. But maybe in the future it will be more common because the world is turning upside down, maybe the guests will be more interested about it. But for me, as a guest, there are other aspects that are more important. But I do think it is still important.

5. Can you explain to me how do you think it is important?

Because now we have to sort out the garbage and people see things another way now, and 10 years ago they didn't think about it. Maybe actually the guests check it out if we have a certification.

6. Can you describe to me a task that you feel contributes to improving the sustainability at the hotel (e.g. explaining something to guests, recycling, and switching off the lights?)

Hmm not so much. At the beginning I had to change the products. Now, we have a note in the bathroom saying 'We don't wash it if you put it up. If you put the towels on the floor, we will give you a new one'. But what do we do in the rooms more? Nothing about sustainability...it's more the products, the textiles. And normally guests do not put the towels on the floor, if they stay here for a few days. But we also have quite a lot of conference guests, so they don't stay a long time. Maybe in the city is different. But there is still a long way to go, people sometimes

don't consider the environment. Ah and we also have products in pumping products, so we don't have miniatures. It's more practical. Also, I think a lot about the girls. They have to clean everyday, and we don't want them to be close to chemicals. Of course, we have to use some stronger products, but it's not that often. So, I feel like we contribute to sustainability in general.

7. And the waste, for example?

Yes, at the end of the year, it will be required that we sort out waste in fractions. It will be a little bit difficult for us. Because the girls have to take the trash from the room and put it in another place. I have just taken a picture of something and showed it to Berit. It's a possibility we are considering. So as you see, it's a bin that has different sections, and we can put it for example in the girls' trolley. In the room, we have to have one bin with some different colours, sections, maybe for food, paper, etc. That is the next step for us.

8. What are the biggest challenges for you when it comes to implementing these sustainable practices?

I don't think the guest will put the waste in the right places, and then we will have to separate it. It will be the biggest challenge for us, this waste separation. Because it takes time and space in the trolley. If we have to have a lot of bags, it will be difficult for the girls. We haven't found the right strategy, still brainstorming.

9. (Hand the interviewee the Green Key criteria/areas). From your perspective, is there any area of the Green Key criteria you consider more relevant? Would you like the hotel to focus more on? (Explain to the interviewee that there are no correct answers, but that different people may give importance to different factors)

So it is difficult. My choice is the Corporate Social Responsibility, I think we are very good at it. For example, two of the girls that work with me they are from the job center. I had two other girls that found other jobs, and then I decided I didn't want to put an add again on Facebook or in a newspaper. I decided to go to the job center, and I found these two very nice girls. Also, right now we have a girl from Ukraine working here, she just arrived because of the war. I feel like we are very good at taking care of people. We are like a small family here.

10. Have you been approached by guests regarding the Green Key certification? If so, what time of questions have they asked? Have you felt comfortable answering them?

No, no one has ever asked me about the certification. But maybe they have asked the girls.

11. Is there any system where you can voice your suggestions regarding improving sustainability at the hotel?

I feel like I am very well informed, but I have been here for many years. When we have meetings here at the hotel and I know what is going on, we discuss ideas. Sometimes I talk

about the trash problems we are going to have in the future, that is a big one right now. In all our meetings.

Respondent 5 – Manager

1. In your opinion, what are the benefits of putting into practice sustainable actions at KolleKolle? And the biggest challenges? (e.g. Do certain actions/tasks take more time; Do they require more effort, etc...?)

Oh, that is a big question [laughs]. The benefits are that the certification helps us to keep focus on the important things. Green Key is not set and stone but is a guideline in which areas we can work with sustainability. At the same time, when we work systematically with the criteria, we also get new ideas. It helps us develop new ideas of what we can do in this place. To have a certification that also gives a certain type of validation or a quality certification, which is recognized in Denmark and all over the world, it shows that we are serious, that we work with sustainability. It's serious, when you have the Green Key certification it validates that you are serious about this work.

2. When there is an audit from Green Key, who does usually provide all information to the energy consumption data greenhouse gases data?

Me and out technical manager.

3. When was the sustainable group formed?

Five or six years ago.

4. What was the idea behind creating the group? Was it because it was mandatory?

No. As I told you previously, I think staff involvement is the key to success. They have their daily work, I don't know what challenges they have in sorting plastic or minimizing food waste, they are working with it every day. So if I come as a manager and tell them they need to do it differently, they don't buy in. But if they came up with the ideas and see how it can work, they buy it much better, instead of having to be forced to do it a certain way. There is one person from every department involved in the group, and we are three from the management group. The employees that participate in the group sometimes change, but we always have someone from each group, because they work as a type of ambassadors. So, they have two tasks: One is to find out what can they do within their working area in their department which has a sustainable benefit, small or huge. But also, to take to colleagues in their own department and be an ambassador of the work we are doing in the sustainability group.

5. Do you feel that it has been fruitful this organisation?

Yes, and it develops ideas. When people come together, and sit and talk, then you have a brainstorm, and someone has a brilliant idea of something that we can do. For instance, we

have this glass marker that was developed four years ago by the sustainable group, that informs how conference guests on how they save water, soap, energy from dishwasher, if they reuse the glasses throughout the day. If they put the glasses on top of the marker, we don't change it, just like the towels.

6. Going a little bit back, what are the challenges of implementing these sustainable practices?

To be honest, it is to make a huge change in energy. If we suddenly were to get solar panels on the roof, or heating pumps, which will save us on gas consumption, however that costs a lot of money. As you know, we have been hit by corona for two years, have been shut down three times, and it is difficult to invest the money at the moment. So I think that is the biggest challenge is to have enough money to do everything that we would like to do. It costs money to save money, but you need to have the money to invest. Because in the daily work with the staff, I don't see any challenges, because everyone is so involved and we have implemented so many procedures during our sixteen years, so it is not hard to do the task because it is part of the working process that we implemented. We don't think about if it's the Green Key criteria, we just do it because it is part of our work.

7. When you say, you have implemented so many procedures throughout the years, could you just give me some examples?

One that we have had for many years, we have been buying almost everything eco, in paper, toilet paper, cleaning products, soaps... We reuse paper, I don't remember any new one. But waste... there is a new regulation coming, but already now, we are already in a good position because we sort so much waste that we will only need to start sorting out five new fractions, because we already sort out waste in 15 fractions. I think it will be 20 with the new regulation. It is plastic, it is batteries, it is electrical appliances, it is bottles, plastic bottles, food, bio. But plastic is particularly challenging. There are the two main goals we have this year: first to be able to meet the regulations regarding waste, and then to work with the Klimate kompass (Klimakompasset) afterwards. Those are the main goal because they have to be implemented by January 2023. The Klimate kompass, we know that in Autumn the state will come out with some laws on how to measure it. I know Green Key is already working with a way to measure it. Until we have that tool, we don't know how to measure it.