

THE ROLE OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYEES AND CLIENTS TO LEARN ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY IN HOSPITALITY

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Abstract

The role of sustainability education in the hospitality industry is becoming increasingly significant, offering opportunities for both employees and clients to gain awareness and adopt sustainable practices. This paper explores how providing sustainability learning opportunities contributes to the industry's environmental, social, and economic goals. For employees, training programs on waste management, energy efficiency, and eco-friendly operations not only enhance their skills but also improve organizational performance. For clients, experiential learning opportunities, such as eco-tours, workshops, and sustainable dining practices, foster engagement and inspire behavioral change toward sustainability. These educational initiatives align with global efforts to promote sustainability and strengthen the industry's competitive edge by meeting the growing demand for eco-conscious services. Challenges, such as resource constraints and lack of standardized programs, are addressed through case studies and best practices. The paper concludes that sustainability education is a critical pathway for fostering environmental stewardship and long-term success in hospitality.

Keywords: sustainability education, hospitality, employee training, client engagement, eco-conscious practices.

Introduction

The importance and relevance of sustainability education in the hospitality industry cannot be overstated. As one of the fastest-growing sectors globally, hospitality has a significant environmental impact, from resource consumption to waste generation. Providing opportunities for employees and clients to learn about sustainability is critical to addressing these challenges and aligning the industry with global environmental goals.

For employees, sustainability education enhances their awareness of eco-friendly practices and equips them with the skills to implement such measures in daily operations. Training on waste reduction, energy efficiency, and water conservation not only improves organizational performance but also empowers staff to actively contribute to sustainability initiatives. This fosters a culture of responsibility and engagement within the workplace, leading to higher job satisfaction and loyalty.

For clients, learning about sustainability through experiential activities such as eco-tours, sustainable dining, or workshops creates meaningful connections between travelers and the environment. These opportunities encourage clients to adopt environmentally conscious behaviors, both during their travels and in their daily lives. This not only enhances customer satisfaction but also positions hospitality businesses as leaders in sustainability.

As consumer demand for eco-conscious services continues to grow, sustainability education becomes a strategic priority. By fostering awareness and action among employees and clients, the hospitality industry can contribute to global sustainability efforts while securing long-term success and relevance in the marketplace.

Results and discussion

Sustainability education in the hospitality industry is emerging as a vital strategy to address the growing environmental challenges faced by the sector. Scholars and practitioners alike recognize that educating employees and clients about sustainable practices not only aligns with global environmental goals but also enhances the competitiveness of businesses (Han et al., 2018).

For employees, training programs focused on sustainability contribute significantly to organizational performance and service quality. According to Jones et al. (2016), such programs, including training on energy efficiency, waste reduction, and water conservation, empower staff to implement environmentally friendly practices in daily operations. These initiatives also improve employee engagement and satisfaction by fostering a sense of purpose and responsibility toward environmental stewardship (Kasim & Ismail, 2019).

Client education, on the other hand, emphasizes engagement through experiential learning. Programs such as eco-tours, sustainable dining experiences, and workshops on local culture and eco-friendly practices help clients understand the importance of sustainability. Gössling and Hall (2019) highlight that involving clients in sustainability initiatives enhances their loyalty and satisfaction while promoting behavioral changes that extend beyond their travel experiences.

Despite its benefits, implementing sustainability education faces challenges, such as resource constraints and the lack of standardized frameworks. Kang et al. (2020) suggest that digital technologies and partnerships with sustainability organizations can address these gaps, making educational programs more accessible and impactful.

The European hospitality industry is increasingly prioritizing sustainability, driven by consumer demand and regulatory pressures. As of May 2023, energy efficiency emerged as the top sustainability investment focus for 58% of accommodation businesses in Europe, followed by waste reduction at 36%. This shift is further evidenced by nearly 60% of European hotels planning to implement more sustainable practices to cater to environmentally conscious consumers. Despite these advancements, challenges remain. A survey conducted in May 2023 revealed varying levels of preparedness for sustainability and decarbonization across countries. For instance, while 58% of accommodation businesses in Italy reported being well-prepared, only 26% in Greece felt the same. Additionally, only 39% of industry respondents perceived non-compliance with the growing sustainability agenda as a high risk within a one to three-year timeframe, indicating a potential underestimation of the urgency required. Consumer behavior is also influencing this trend. Deloitte's 2023 survey highlighted that over half of global consumers (51%) express concern about climate change, with a growing number refraining from purchases due to ethical or sustainability-related issues. This consumer shift underscores the importance for hospitality businesses to adopt sustainable practices to meet evolving expectations.

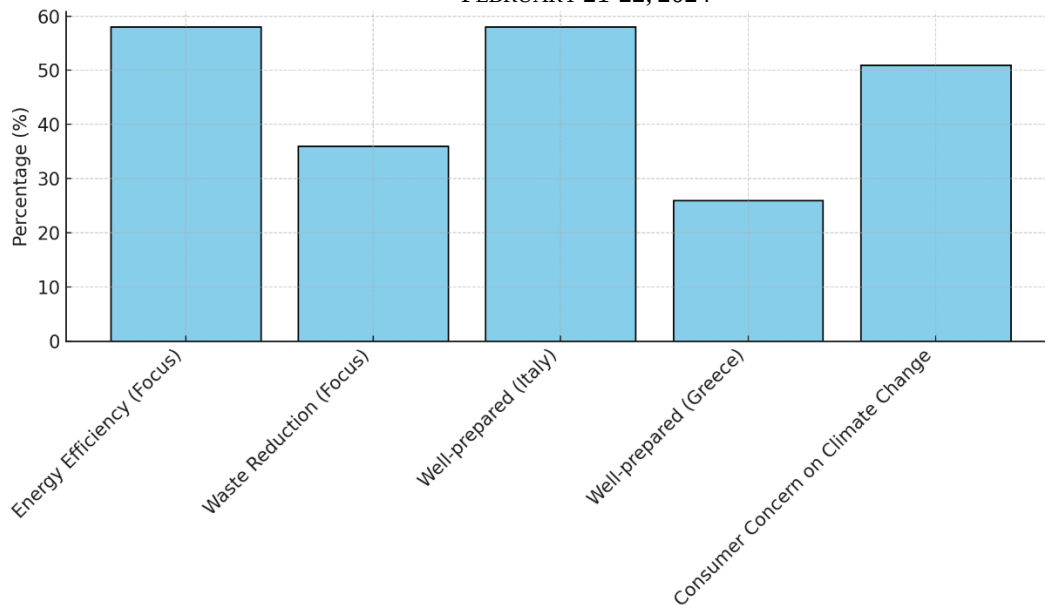


Figure 1. Dynamics of sustainability in hospitality on the European hospitality market (EuroStat)

Figure 1 highlights key areas of focus, such as energy efficiency and waste reduction, as well as the varying levels of preparedness among countries like Italy and Greece. Additionally, it reflects consumer concerns regarding climate change, showcasing the growing demand for sustainable practices in the industry.

Italy's hospitality industry is making significant strides towards sustainability, driven by increasing consumer demand for eco-conscious travel options and regulatory efforts to promote sustainable practices. Travel providers and hospitality businesses are actively implementing eco-friendly policies and activities to align with this growing trend.

However, challenges persist, as many hotels in Italy still face infrastructure limitations, particularly in achieving energy and thermal efficiency. Recognizing these issues, Italy's national tourism strategy places a strong emphasis on sustainability, innovation, and enhancing high-end offerings as key pillars for economic and social growth.

Consumer preferences in Italy are also evolving, with a growing awareness and demand for sustainability in hospitality. This shift is reflected in a heightened focus on environmentally conscious choices, particularly in restaurants and accommodation options. In response, many Italian hotels and businesses are adopting certifications and sustainability frameworks, such as ESG scores and the EU EcoLabel, to validate their green practices and build trust among consumers.

Overall, Italy's hospitality sector is steadily aligning with global sustainability trends, balancing the need to meet consumer expectations with environmental responsibilities. By integrating sustainability into their core operations, Italian hospitality businesses are enhancing their competitiveness while contributing to broader environmental and social goals.

The quality of hotel services remains one of the most critical topics in the hospitality industry, with hotels striving not only to diversify their range of services but also to enhance the quality of their offerings. This dual focus aims to build customer loyalty and maintain competitiveness in an increasingly demanding market. A pivotal factor in achieving these goals lies in providing opportunities for both employees and clients to learn about sustainability. By integrating sustainability education into hotel operations, businesses can simultaneously elevate service quality and address growing environmental concerns.

Collaboration between countries to establish shared standards and evaluation criteria for hotel services, including sustainable practices, can drive significant progress in the hospitality industry.

Training programs for employees on eco-friendly operations and experiential learning opportunities for clients, such as workshops and sustainable activities, play a key role in aligning service delivery with global sustainability goals. These initiatives not only foster customer satisfaction, particularly among eco-conscious international tourists, but also position hotels as leaders in sustainability.

The development of a unified classification system for accommodation facilities that incorporates sustainability benchmarks would represent a critical step forward. Such a system would encourage countries to enhance their hospitality sectors, align with international standards, diversify their offerings, and actively contribute to environmental stewardship, ensuring long-term growth and competitiveness in the global market.

Conclusion

Providing opportunities for both employees and clients to learn about sustainability in hospitality has become a critical factor in enhancing service quality and achieving customer loyalty. By incorporating sustainability training and experiential learning into operations, hotels can not only meet the growing demand for eco-conscious practices but also gain a competitive advantage in a rapidly evolving market. This approach positions businesses as responsible industry leaders while ensuring long-term success.

Integrating sustainability practices into service delivery not only improves customer satisfaction but also contributes to global environmental efforts. Educational opportunities for both staff and guests create meaningful interactions and foster a deeper commitment to sustainability. By diversifying offerings to include sustainable practices, hospitality businesses can attract international tourists, build trust, and establish themselves as pioneers in responsible tourism.

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