



Analysis of Sustainability Perceptions in Uncertainty Times: The Case of Hospitality Students

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ABSTRACT

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This article examines the perception of corporate sustainability of future managers in the hotel industry according to their demographic characteristics in two different uncertainty environments. Data were obtained through a survey launched in 2021 and 2023 completed by 204 and 201 students of tourism and hotel management areas from the same higher education institution. After an exploratory and statistical analysis, this study concludes that the perspectives on sustainability of future hotel managers reach a high degree of consensus regardless of their demographic characteristics and uncertainty environment except for gender. In this case, the differences are statistically significant in the environment of uncertainty originated by a war conflict where the role of women and men is quite different. This work provides a distinct perspective from the previous studies since it analyzes the consistency of the results in different uncertainty contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a strong commitment to sustainability in the tourism sector, compatible with economic profitability, has been displayed; and underlying factors such as environmental preservation, social equity, quality of life and respect for heritage and cultural identity are involved in that commitment [1]. To successfully integrate sustainability into tourism management, stakeholders must participate actively in the process. Therefore, stakeholders must be educated and trained on sustainability aspects, and their preferences and opinions must be incorporated into the decision-making processes, among other issues [2].

This article focuses on key sustainability stakeholders in the hotel sector, such as students who are doing a degree in hospitality and tourism management with sustainability training who, in the coming years, will play a significant role in corporate decision-making processes in the hotel sector. Several studies are worth highlighting on stakeholders' perceptions and expectations regarding corporate sustainability or business ethics [3-10]. However, despite the vital importance stakeholders have in terms of power, legitimacy, and urgency [11], far too little attention has been paid to the impact on sustainability.

Students who choose to do a degree in business management are better aligned with the stakeholder model [5] and perceive corporate sustainability to be key to long-term profitability and company success [3]. Several demographic

factors such as gender and university degree majors can affect this perception. Education on sustainability and age could also explain the differences in perception between undergraduate and graduate students since the latter group of students is older and receives more exposure to ethics education compared to the former [3, 12]. Air or water pollution, working conditions or discrimination are central topics for students from different hospitality and tourism programs at educational institutions [13].

Apart from these studies, there is a lack of research in the analysis of future hotel managers' preferences who have knowledge of sustainability, from a dynamic approach. Therefore, this study seeks to show future managers' preferences in sustainability regarding demographic variables during two moments of uncertainty: a year after the COVID-19 outbreak; and, a year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, that is, right in the middle of the conflict and of a severe human rights crisis. Undergraduate and graduate students (or recent graduates) in higher education in hotel management have been recruited for this research.

This study seeks to make a major contribution to research by presenting hotel future leaders' views on sustainability. Sustainability is a complex concept which has a long-term impact and changes constantly; thus, knowing what perceptions future leaders have been crucial. Furthermore, numerous studies [14-17], from the perspective of the university, have identified companies as key stakeholders. On the other hand, from the hotel perspective, few writers have

treated educational institutions as an interest group to consider. This study provides an opportunity to strengthen relationships between educational institutions and the hotel sector by advancing the understanding of the most relevant aspects for the sector and its future leaders.

Given the current crisis, which has affected different stakeholder groups including higher education students [18], governments and businesses are naturally focused on finding solutions to immediate problems [19]. As a result, sustainability initiatives may not be receiving as much focus. This work may contribute by examining whether these perceptions, in times of crisis, are different depending on respondents' demographic characteristics. These preferences are analyzed in two moments of crisis: in 2021, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and in 2023, a year after the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine.

The overall structure of this paper takes the form of five sections, including this introductory chapter. The second part begins by reviewing the literature and by laying out the research questions. The third section is concerned with the methodology used for this study. The fourth section includes a discussion of the implication of the findings and the last section gives a summary and draws upon the entire thesis.

2. LITERATURE BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

The stakeholder theory [20] refers to the organization as a system of stakeholders, whose continuity depends on the ability to meet its economic and social objectives, which creates value so that each interest group remains in the system. In this theory, the organization is managed to generate benefits for all stakeholders, while ensuring its survival [21]. This theory considers specific interests by visualizing the responsibilities of the various groups that are affected by the organization's activities. Balancing stakeholders' interests, both in the short and long-term, is crucial to company management. Stakeholder engagement plays a critical role in driving business. Companies that fully engage with their stakeholders are in a better position to meet stakeholders' expectations compared to organizations that do not have formal engagement processes [22]. As a result, companies are taking decisive steps to positively involve stakeholders in their activities through a series of initiatives [23].

The success of a company in meeting its stakeholders' expectations depends on several factors, such as stakeholders' power, legitimacy, and urgency, as well as company managers' behavior, values and beliefs [24]. From this perspective, managers are identified as key internal stakeholders since they serve a significant role in promoting corporate sustainability. Quazi [25] argues that the social commitments of companies are rooted in the values, demographics, and managers' personal characteristics, which in turn shape their perceptions and actions related to sustainability. As key drivers of strategic planning, managers possess a deep understanding of the company's plan and priorities.

Moreover, educational institutions are key stakeholders as companies depend on these institutions to train graduates who are qualified to work [26]. Education is a major driver of moral and ethical development of students who will become the top managers of the future. Educators and professionals in the hospitality industry should promote the development of future leaders and managers [9]. University-industry collaboration is

also important in curriculum design in hospitality and tourism education [27]. This ongoing collaboration between the hotel sector and educational institutions is crucial for producing positive change [28]. The international hotel chains Intercontinental Hotels Group, Wyndham Hotels and Resorts, Minor Hotels, or Meliá International illustrate this point clearly since they identify academic institutions as key stakeholders [29-31]. This collaboration plays a vital part in addressing the pressing environmental and social challenges faced by the travel and tourism industry. However, there are few hotels which rarely identify management students as major stakeholders except for Minor Hotels that regard tourism or hotel management students as important stakeholders; thereby establishing communication mechanisms to identify their interests and expectations [30].

Several studies have examined the impact of relevant factors on corporate sustainability; however, there has been little discussion about specific stakeholders' expectations [32]. The upper echelons theory [33] argues that personal characteristics of directors or managers, such as their values and sociodemographic background, can shape their decision-making [34] and, therefore, the sustainability organizational outcomes [35]. On the other hand, stakeholders' attitudes, preferences and expectations regarding sustainability are also influenced by numerous factors, including their age, gender, or educational level [36]. For instance, there has been a lengthy debate on the impact of such factors on the sustainability expectations that tourism and hotel management students hold. Therefore, exploring tourism and hotel management students' sustainability expectations in hotels, as well as considering factors such as their prior experience, educational background and demographic characteristics, is crucial.

2.1 Differences between experienced and unexperienced professionals

Research has shown that more experienced older workers tend to display deeper sensitivity to sustainability issues [37, 38]. In contrast, younger and less experienced workers tend to express less interest in these issues [39]. In management positions, senior managers show a greater interest in the reputation and stability of the company. This typology of workers is usually concerned with implementing actions related to corporate sustainability to reinforce and improve the company's reputation [34]. On the contrary, for younger managers, a high salary or professional development is more important than values such as honor or trust [12]. In the literature, there is no clear consensus since other studies show that no significant differences arise in terms of years of work experience [8]. Tourism and hospitality students were more interested in the environmental perspective of sustainability while industry professionals showed more interest in the economic perspective [7].

Consequently, this study seeks to address the following hypothesis:

H1: *Students' perceptions differ if their professional experience in hotels is considered.*

2.2 Differences between education levels

According to reference [34], highly educated managers in large companies tend to allocate more resources to develop

complex initiatives and generate benefits, rather than maximize benefits for stakeholders. On the other hand, the level of education and training of management personnel is more related to a greater commitment to social issues, compared to other factors such as age [25]. The education level determines managers' attitudes and perceptions regarding corporate sustainability [4]. People who hold a bachelor's degree or higher show a greater concern about corporate sustainability and have more accurate perceptions of sustainability [40], which demonstrates a stronger relationship between sustainable practices and business results [12].

H2: *Students' perceptions differ if their education level is considered.*

2.3 Differences between countries or regions

Scholars have argued that the implementation of corporate sustainability practices could vary among nations and cultures due to the distinct institutional context that might shape overall business systems [41].

When comparing companies in developed countries with those in developing countries, crucial differences arise. Managers' expectations in developed countries tend to match the concerns of the local community, suppliers, and customers, which could respond to the pressure of public opinion [42]. However, such pressure does not exist in the same way in developing countries [43]. There is increasing pressure on corporations in emerging economies to enhance their corporate sustainability agendas due to a growing social awareness based on the lack of appropriate strategies for sustainable growth [44]. Additionally, external pressure from stakeholders at the international level, such as foreign investors, international buyers, media, and international regulatory bodies is intensifying [43].

Based on this discussion, we hypothesize:

H3: *Perceptions differ if students come from more (in this case the Europe and Northern America) or less developed areas.*

2.4 Differences between genders

Gender is a decisive demographic variable which contributes to understanding customers' behavior and attitudes toward corporate sustainability [40]. The female gender, regardless of age and origin, shows greater knowledge, more positive attitudes, and more environmentally conscious behavior. There are gender differences in terms of solidarity and equity factors, where women continually adopt stronger attitudes related to solidarity and equity than male students [45]. Furthermore, on average, male employees are slightly more trusting and satisfied with sustainability performance than their female colleagues, who have higher expectations of sustainability initiatives [36]. Other studies reinforce this idea by arguing that women have a clearer perception of the relevance of sustainability in business compared to men [46]. Some studies highlight that women emphasize altruism, family relationships, and social concerns, while men embrace values such as competition and individual achievement. Concerning the environment, women have a more holistic vision of the world and express deeper concern about this issue than men [47].

Female students of business management programs paid special attention to corporate sustainability. In the context of

tourism studies [9], and were more sensitive to sustainability issues when compared to their male counterparts [48].

Accordingly, the expectations about sustainability students in hospitality management programs have been expected to differ when gender is considered.

H4: *Perspectives differ if students' gender is considered.*

2.5 Differences between ages

Different generations show different lifestyles, different attitudes, and different values [49]. In this sense, business students' age is a determining factor in decision-making and perceptions of sustainability [50]. Companies that are more age diverse in their management teams can benefit from greater resources of information, insights, and experience in global markets, as well as be more sensitive to stakeholder preferences, aspirations, and concerns [35].

The number of business school students who take specialized courses in sustainability is increasing [41]. Different studies show that age can affect individual perceptions and attitudes toward sustainability [25, 50]. Therefore, we pose the following research question:

H5: *Perceptions differ if students' age is considered.*

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 The survey

The study was conducted in the form of a survey to explore future hotel leaders' preferences regarding sustainability materiality in hotels. Data were collected using a self-administered survey, which is a quantitative research method that does not require an interviewer to administer the survey. Respondents read the questionnaire and recorded their answers themselves. This approach allowed us to analyze both objective and subjective aspects that are not directly observable and to gather information from a larger sample of people over different geographical areas in a short period. This method has facilitated the comparison between responses and reduced bias that could result from the interviewers' personal characteristics. However, the response rate for self-administered surveys is lower and there is no personal contact with respondents [51].

The first part of the survey (questions 1 to 5) gathers demographic data from the participants. The second part (questions 6, 7, 8, 9) focuses on forty-one aspects of materiality which include the economic, social, and environmental pillars of sustainability (see Table 1) collected by the Global Reporting Initiative in its standards 100,200,300, and 400 and by the ISO21401 standard (Tourism and related services. Sustainability Management System for accommodation establishments).

In this study, participants were asked to rate responses on a Likert scale of importance from 1 to 5. The survey was carried out online and distributed to students from undergraduate, postgraduate, and master's degree programs at Les Roches Global Hospitality Education in 2021 (referred to as Study 1) and 2023 (referred to as Study 2). The first survey was sent in February 2021 and a reminder was sent in May that same year, resulting in 204 responses. The second survey was sent at the end of 2022, with reminders in March and April 2023,

resulting in 201 responses. The response rate was over 10% in both cases, thanks to the reminders [52].

The validation process of the questionnaire took place over a span of three weeks. A total of thirty participants, of whom fifteen students had some prior experience in the hotel industry and 15 professionals had extensive experience in the same industry, were chosen for the process. All the suggestions and feedback were incorporated in the definitive version that was distributed to the sample.

Table 1. Materiality aspects

Material Aspects	
Economic Pillar	1 Economic Performance
	2 Market Presence
	3 Indirect Economic Impact
	4 Procurement Practices
	5 Anti-Competitive Behaviour
	6 Economic Viability of the Organization
	7 Quality and Guest Satisfaction
	8 Health and Safety of Guest and Workers
	9 Employment
	10 Labor/Management Relations
	11 Occupational Health and Safety
	12 Training and Education
	13 Diversity and Equal Opportunity
	14 Non-discrimination
	15 Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining
Social Pillar	16 Risk of Incidents of Child Labor
	17 Forced or Compulsory Labor
	18 Security Practices
	19 Rights of Indigenous and Native Peoples
	20 Human Rights Assessment
	21 Local Communities
	22 Public Policy
	23 Customer Health and Safety
	24 Marketing and Labeling
	25 Customer Privacy
Environmental Pillar	26 Socioeconomic Compliance
	27 Work and Income / Work Conditions
	28 Cultural Aspects
	29 Health and Education
	30 Materials
	31 Energy Efficiency
	32 Water and Effluents
	33 Biodiversity
	34 Emissions
	35 Effluents and Solid Waste
	36 Environmental Compliance
	37 Supplier Environmental Assessment
	38 Preparation and Response to Environmental Emergencies
	39 Natural Areas, Biodiversity Flora and Fauna
	40 Landscaping, Architecture and Local Construction Impact
	41 Hazardous Substances Management

Source: Own elaboration

3.2 The sample

A sample of 204 participants was recruited in 2021 (Study 1) and of 201 students in 2023 (Study 2). Most of the participants were under 35 years old and more than 75% of the participants had experience in the hotel industry. Although the

participants in both studies came from a total of 48 and 57 nationalities, respectively, most of them were from European countries. Table 2 provides a detailed profile of the participants in both studies.

After analyzing the structure of the sample, subsamples were drawn to compare statistically significant changes in answers to address proposed hypotheses.

The subsamples are the following:

- Experience in the hotel sector: 6 months and less or more than 6 months
- Pursued education level: Graduate or postgraduate (Postgraduate or Master)
- Origin: Europe/Northern America or rest of countries
- Gender: Male or female
- Age: 17-24 or 25-54

Table 2. Sample description

	2021 (n= 204)		2023 (n=201)	
	Counts	%	Counts	%
Age				
17-24 years old	142	69.6%	120	59.5%
25-54 years old	62	30.4%	81	40.5%
Gender				
Female	116	56.9%	118	58.7%
Male	88	43.1%	83	41.3%
Origin				
Europe and Northern America	149	73.0%	127	63.2%
Rest of countries	55	27.0%	74	36.8%
Level of educational program				
Undergraduate	95	46.6%	68	33.8%
Postgraduate	109	53.4%	133	66.2%
Experience in the hotel industry				
6 months or less	100	49.0%	77	38.3%
More than 6 months	104	51.0%	124	61.7%

Source: Own elaboration

3.3 Statistical test

After conducting an initial exploratory analysis, a statistical test has been performed to determine whether there were significant differences between the corresponding subsamples. Upon analyzing the data, it was considered that a non-parametric test would be run since many of the distributions were not normal. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyze two independent groups and was conducted twice at different moments of uncertainty.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main results of the study are presented in the following two sections, focusing first on the descriptive analysis and, second, on the entire thesis.

4.1 Descriptive analysis

Figures 1-5 compare the results of the two studies conducted in 2021 and 2023. Each figure illustrates the students' preferences in sustainability within the subsamples mentioned in Figure 1. In Figures 1-5, yellow, blue, and green represent aspects of sustainability related to the economic, social, and environmental pillars, respectively.

The figures show a strong consensus between the two groups of participants and between Study 1 and Study 2. This suggests that future hotel managers, regardless of their demographic characteristics and environmental uncertainty, highly regard "non-discrimination" (aspect no. 14) as the most important social aspect, followed by "training and education" (aspect no. 12) and "health and safety of clients" (aspect no. 23). The aspects related to "freedom of association and collective bargaining" (aspect no. 15) and "public policy" (aspect no. 22) received the lowest scores, although they were still rated above 3.5 out of five.

From an economic perspective, "quality and customer

satisfaction" (aspect no. 7) and "health and safety of customers and employees" (aspect no. 8) are especially relevant aspects, while aspects related to corruption and unfair competition (aspect no. 5) and "indirect economic impacts" (aspect no. 3) are considered less important.

Regarding environmental aspects, scores vary less; the mean scores per subsample of participants range between 4.2 and 4.6. This suggests that environmental awareness has increased in the hotel sector, especially related to energy issues (aspect no. 31) and water and effluent management (aspect no. 32).

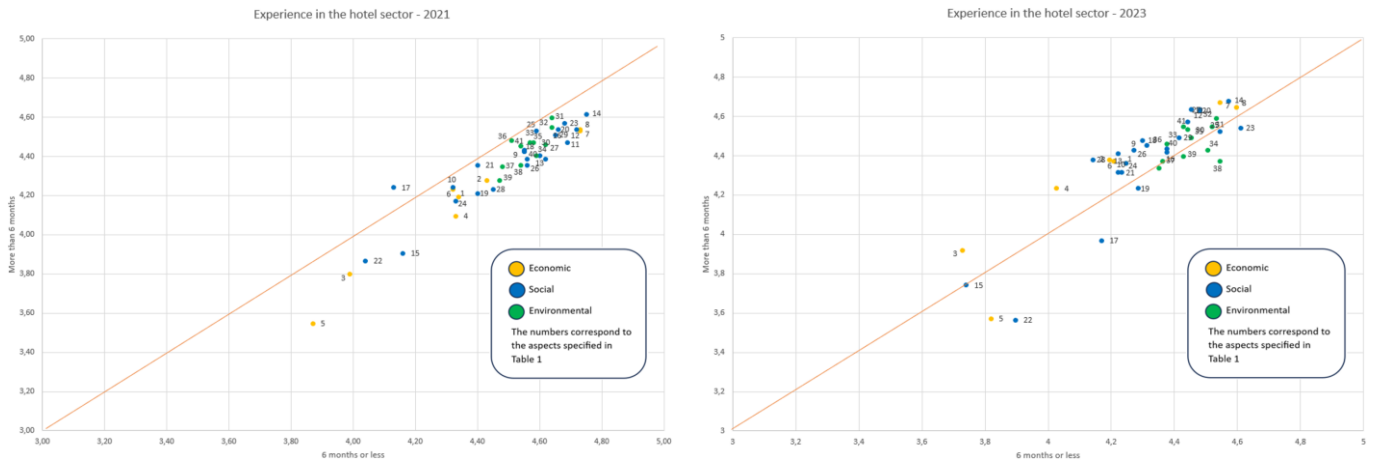


Figure 1. Students' perceptions based on work experience (2021-2023)

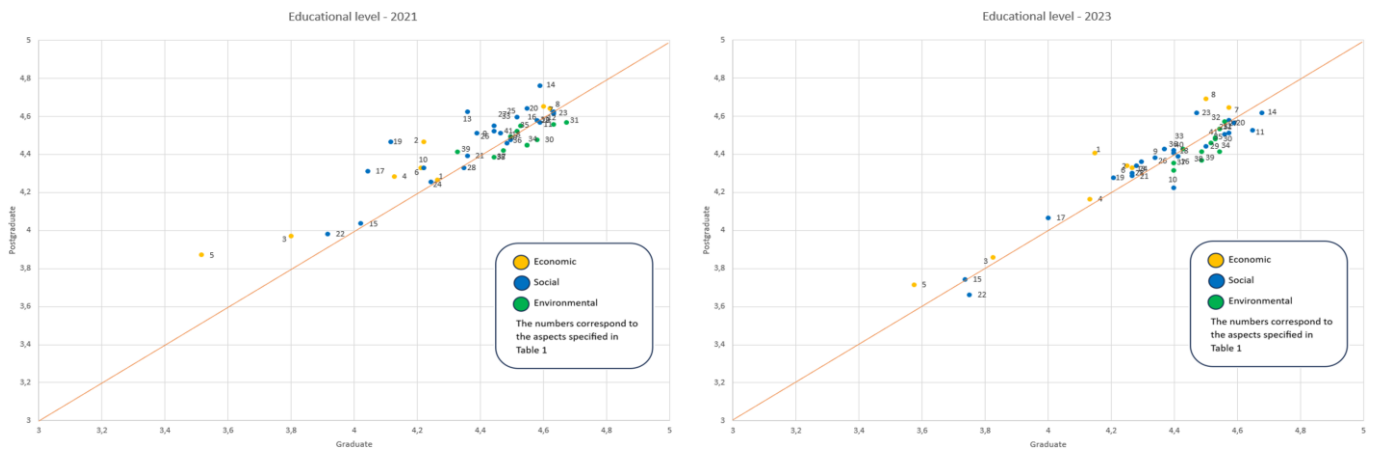


Figure 2. Students' perceptions based on pursued education level (2021-2023)

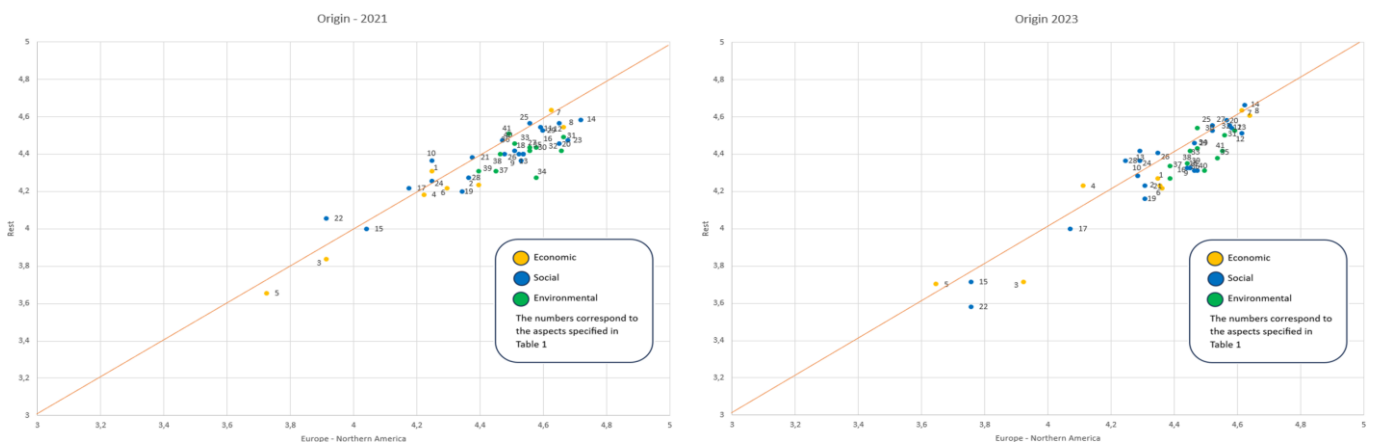


Figure 3. Students' perceptions based on origin (2021-2023)

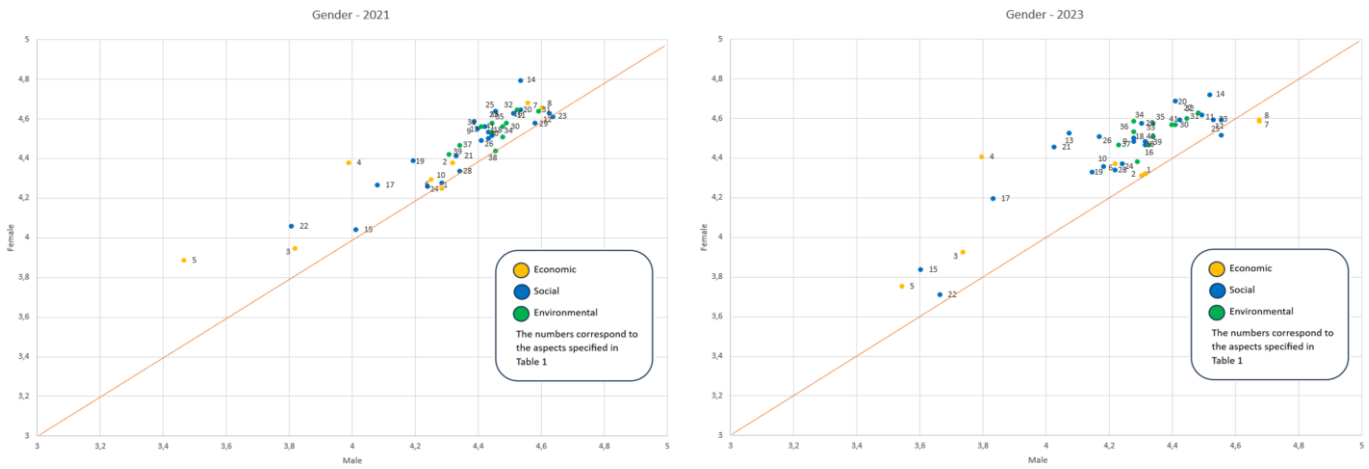


Figure 4. Students' perceptions based on gender (2021-2023)

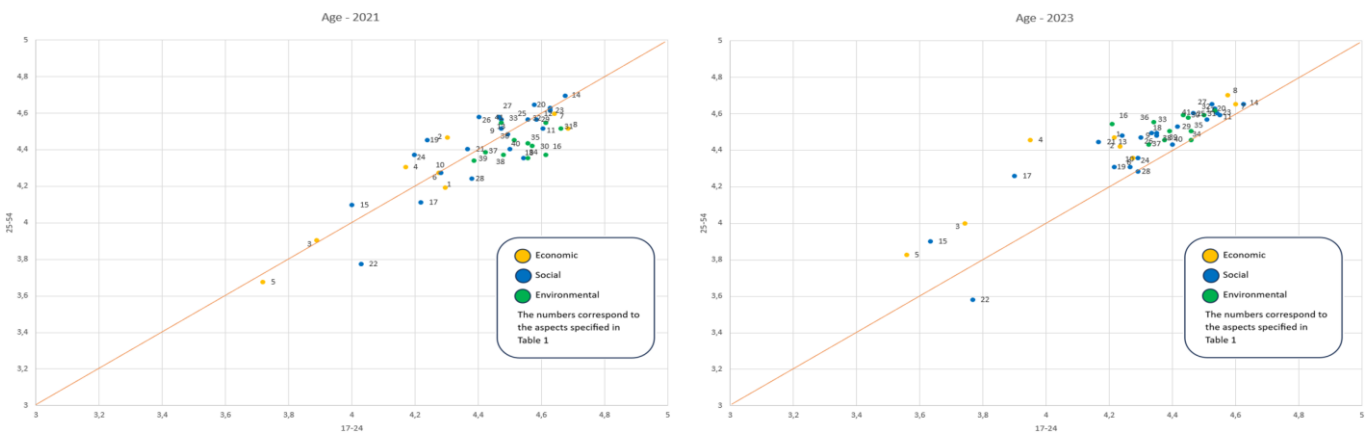


Figure 5. Students' perceptions based on age (2021-2023)

After performing a comprehensive analysis, Study 1 indicates that female respondents who are pursuing postgraduate studies, from Europe or Northern America, and who have little experience show a slightly greater sensitivity towards sustainability aspects. This correlation was observed in previous studies on this subject in developed and developing countries [42] in which the female gender [9, 48] or people who held a higher education degree [40] have expressed deeper concerns about sustainability.

These initial results are unstable in the different uncertainty moments analyzed. In fact, Study 2 has revealed that the best-valued aspects have achieved a lower score compared to the results obtained in Study 1. In Study 2, the slight differences in the mean scores of the evaluations of the subsamples according to the respondents' origin and the education level have not had a clear impact on their perceptions. Interestingly, the results based on experience and age tend to go in the opposite direction to the initial idea, those more experienced and older participants are being valued more positively. However, gender makes differences in the second uncertainty scenario more striking, since male participants have given a substantially lower score than women in several aspects of sustainability. These differences will be examined in the next subsection to assess their significance.

4.2 Statistics analysis

For the sake of exploration and description, this section presents a statistical analysis of the disparities identified in the previous section. Table 3 shows the outcomes of our

hypothesis test, which examines the equivalence of distributions within two situations of uncertainty examined in 2021 (Study 1) and 2023 (Study 2).

Hypothesis 1: Students' perceptions differ if professional experience in hotels is considered.

In 2021, we found empirical evidence which supported only one (“anti-competitive behavior”) out of the forty-one aspects analyzed, which was consistent with hypothesis 1. For the aspect of “anti-competitive behavior”, students with little work experience attach greater importance to this aspect than students with more work experience. However, the findings of the study in 2023 reflected statistically significant differences in professional experience (up to 6 months or more) regarding the aspect of “training and education” (p -value=0.031), which is below the 0.05 threshold. After suffering greater instability (2023), students with more work experience considered that training and educational aspects were more relevant to managing sustainability than students with less work experience. Concerning the remaining forty aspects, statistically marked differences based on professional experience were not perceived. This result does not support previous research [12, 34] that claimed that professional experience does influence the importance attached corporate sustainability. A possible explanation for this might be that sustainability has been integrated into the university curricula, which has resulted in a more heightened awareness and sensitivity among students. As a result, perceptions regarding sustainability have converged, even among those who already had some professional experience.

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U test results

	Mann-Whitney U Test									
	Experience in the Hotel Sector: 6 Months or Less / More Than 6 Months		Educational Level: Graduate or Postgraduate		Origin: Europe/Northern America or Rest of Countries		Gender: Female / Male		Age: 17-24 Years Old / 25-54 Years Old	
	2021	2023	2021	2023	2021	2023	2021	2023	2021	2023
Economic Dimension	Statistic		Statistic		Statistic		Statistic		Statistic	
Anti-Competitive Behaviour	4372**	4378	4235**	4294	3955	4681	4268**	4528	4368	4221
Economic Viability of the Organization	5078	4352	4934	4347	3967	4354	5094	4441	4298	4647
Economic Performance	4781	4324	5092	3891*	3893	4440	4860	4817	4208	4150*
Health and Safety of Guest and Workers	4585*	4662	5035	4074	3972	4613	5053	4795	4017	4482
Indirect Economic Impact	4654	4324	4598	4503	3913	4295	4729	4371	4225	4220*
Market Presence	4767	4168*	4379**	4363	3873	4363	4840	4851	3716*	4205
Procurement Practices	4605	4224	4630	4497	4028	4360	3973***	3234***	4012	3425***
Quality and Guest Satisfaction	4741	4372	5159	4316	4085	4578	4837	4854	4375	4852
Social Dimension	Statistic		Statistic		Statistic		Statistic		Statistic	
Cultural Aspects	4574	4124*	4978	4458	3891	4210	4982	4452	4059	4827
Customer Health and Safety	5004	4647	4838	4033	3626	4514	4984	4634	4280	4607
Customer Privacy	5009	4752	5134	4431	3999	4387	4530*	4810	4084	4763
Diversity and Equal Opportunity	4824	4157*	4528*	4295	3973	4361	4713	3740***	4003	4289
Employment	4783	4105*	4860	4407	3654	4391	4547	4355	4165	4602
Forced or Compulsory Labor	4881	4604	4437*	4281	4093	4646	4816	4132**	4280	3804***
Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining	4594	4760	5155	4497	4008	4608	5052	4361	4070	4114*
Health and Education	4961	4601	5068	4500	4057	4428	5100	3934***	4350	4509
Human Rights Assessment	4961	4395	4794	4501	3584*	4509	4836	3998***	3977	4612
Labor/Management Relations	5047	4496	4928	3941	3666	4507	4957	4159**	4233	4680
Local Communities	4984	4362	5044	4401	4065	4672	4892	3727***	4129	4125**
Marketing and Labeling	4771	4303	5025	4386	4036	4477	5058	4406	3725*	4638
Non-discrimination	4821	4400	4621*	4359	3922	4629	4316***	4354*	4117	4824
Occupational Health and Safety	4535*	4195*	5044	4111	3910	4620	4798	4455	4291	4781
Public Policy	4775	4075*	5161	4333	3707	4395	4633	4722	4002	4531
Rights of Indigenous and Native Peoples	4719	4658	4256**	4259	3834	4373	4655	4349	3843	4425
Risk of incidents of Child Labor	4869	4740	4967	4320	3821	4516	4760	4632	4155	4196*
Security Practices	4997	4238	5160	4518	3873	4538	4650	4122**	4190	4412
Socioeconomic Compliance	4760	4216	4682	4321	3974	4432	4937	3903***	3562**	4365
Training and Education	4687	4062**	5122	4503	3965	4652	5044	4755	4043	4406
Work and Income / Work Conditions	4609*	4260	4985	4277	3809	4436	4634	4424	3938	4441
Environmental Dimension	Statistic		Statistic		Statistic		Statistic		Statistic	
Materials	4964	4390	4758	4364	3822	4320	4791	4380	4140	4495
Biodiversity	4870	4658	5091	4499	3719	4497	4650	4384	4319	4498
Effluents and solid waste	4955	4650	5068	4405	3783	4491	4632	4060**	4223	4575
Emissions (the discharge of substances)	4788	4630	5003	4189	3406**	4626	4785	4096**	4067	4633
Energy Efficiency	5005	4566	4766	4315	3545*	4667	4767	4236*	4114	4633

Environmental Compliance	5118	4611	4765	4488	3937	4343	4623	4021**	4391	4261*
Hazardous Substances Management	4973	4575	5160	4391	4083	4542	4849	4315*	4018	4293*
Landscaping, Architecture and Local Construction	4597*	4474	5128	4392	4043	4349	5066	4313	4334	4693
Impact Natural Areas, Biodiversity Flora and Fauna	4589*	4764	4889	4350	3938	4543	4725	4591	4339	4684
Preparation and Response to environmental emergencies	4723	4340	5027	4506	4038	4616	5002	4477	4255	4550
Supplier Environmental Assessment	4937	4648	5067	4519	3693	4690	4629	4081**	4320	4646
Water and Effluents	5106	4536	4943	4359	3366**	4686	4685	4412	4287	4751

*p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01.

Hypothesis 2: Students' perceptions differ if their education level is considered.

In 2021, the participants' (undergraduate or postgraduate) education level showed statistically important differences only in three aspects: "market presence", "anti-competitive behavior", and the "rights of indigenous and native peoples". In these three aspects, it is observed that postgraduate students give them greater relevance than undergraduate students. Interestingly, the results in 2023 did not empirically support hypothesis 2 on any aspect of sustainability and, therefore, hypothesis 2 was rejected. An explanation for this could be that the integration of sustainability, together with the challenges of the 2030 Agenda, is being promoted as a transversal competence throughout undergraduate, master's, and postgraduate levels, which has diminished the difference that could exist.

Hypothesis 3: Perceptions are different if the student comes from more (in this case Europe and Northern America) or less developed areas.

In Study 1, only two out of the forty-one aspects related to environmental sustainability, "emissions" and "water and effluents", offered empirical evidence consistent with hypothesis 3. In this case, it is the Europeans and North Americans who give greater importance to these aspects compared to the rest of the students. However, when the study was repeated in 2023, no substantial differences arose in any of the forty-one aspects of sustainability when considering participants' origin. This result does not support some published studies [41] which claimed that participants' origin would affect their responses. This result may be because all the participants in the study were students from the same educational institution and who, therefore, acquired the same knowledge. Another possible explanation is that general sustainability principles in their education programs are considered rather than the needs of specific regions.

Hypothesis 4: Perspectives differ if students' gender is considered.

In 2021, our study found that only three out of forty-one aspects, "procurement practices", "anti-competitive behavior", and "non-discrimination" offered empirical evidence which supported the hypothesis. In 2021, the aspect of non-discrimination is the one that has the greatest importance for women, and it has a statistically lower value in the case of men. In Study 2, a total of thirteen concept, mainly related to social and environmental aspects demonstrated

empirical evidence supporting Hypothesis 4. In this sense, it is observed that women attach greater importance than men to these environmental and social aspects. This aligns with previous studies [9, 49] that suggest differences in perceptions of sustainability between genders. For instance, there is a study, which argued that women were more concerned about environmental sustainability than men. It is worth noting that compared to the pre-Ukraine conflict study, our results indicate a greater discrepancy in perceptions of social and environmental aspects between genders, highlighting the impact of the uncertain environment in 2023.

Hypothesis 5: Perceptions diverge if students' age is considered.

According to this study, the results do not differ significantly if the age variable is considered. In fact, in Study 1, empirical evidence, is consistent with hypothesis 5 in one of the forty-one aspects, "Socioeconomic Compliance", which is more relevant for older students. When conducting Study 2, participants' ages showed statistically significant differences in three concepts: "procurement practices", "forced or compulsory labor", and "local communities". These three aspects are relevant for both groups analyzed, however those older students consider them to be more relevant. These results have corroborated the ideas what suggested the requirement for corporate sustainability does not differ widely if age is considered [36]. Neither Study 1 nor Study 2 has produced evidence that supported hypothesis 5, which may be explained by the fact that there are no major differences in the participating students' ages.

5. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The hotel sector performs a prominent role around the world and exerts a big impact on economic activities. Consequently, equipping future leaders with fundamental values toward sustainability is essential. Significantly, the hospitality industry will require leaders who can address the challenges faced by the industry over the coming decades, showing concern about the environment and society [53]. In the future, students will be changing agents and must be aware that by integrating sustainability into corporate management they will be able to mitigate the negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts in the hotel industry. Sustainability requires intergenerational commitments so that future generations

prosper and integrate their needs with the needs of the current generation [7].

This study was undertaken to examine how undergraduate and graduate students in tourism and hotel management programs, as future managers of the hotel sector, perceived corporate sustainability within two moments of global uncertainty: the COVID crisis and the outbreak of the Ukrainian war. The analysis was conducted by carrying out a survey among 204 students for the first scenario and 201 for the second one. The results have shown that future professionals in the hotel sector express considerable concern for the economic, social, and environmental perspectives of sustainability. The students participating in this study have given top priority to “quality and guest satisfaction” and the “health and safety of guests and workers”. They have stressed significant importance of “non-discrimination”, “the control of the risks involved in the work conducted by children”, or the “evaluation of human rights with the idea of identifying, preventing, and mitigating possible negative impacts on human rights”. Aspects regarding the environmental perspective of sustainability, the importance of efficient energy management, as well as control of the establishment's water consumption and the management of liquid waste are at the bottom of their list of priorities. This study has argued that the level of relevance given to non-discrimination (among other aspects) does not depend on participants' professional experience, origin, or age [13].

When considering professional experience, it has become increasingly apparent that the environmental perspective is critical. However, students in postgraduate programs focus largely on social issues related to customers and employees, which differs from students in lower-level studies. Regarding students' origin, this study has found that students from Europe and Northern America show greater concern for aspects related to the three perspectives of sustainability. It is worth mentioning that students who come from other countries have given top priority to the subject of customer privacy. In the case of Europe and Northern America, this concept is at the bottom of the list, which could be explained by the fact that it is a topic more implemented in societies by existing regulations or rules.

In Study 1, we found no statistically significant differences in most examined aspects. Notably, our analysis of perceptions deviates from earlier research suggesting that women are generally more concerned about sustainability than men [9, 36, 45, 54]. It is important to consider that the age range of our participants might affect these findings, as 93% were under the age of 35, potentially influencing their perceptions of sustainability.

In contrast, Study 2 demonstrated significant gender-based differences in the perception of sustainability, with disparities between male and female participants becoming apparent across a broad spectrum of social and environmental aspects. This suggests that gender may play a more influential role in the perception of sustainability issues than previously understood.

In summary, this study suggests that no major discrepancies exist in the perceptions of corporate sustainability between students who have enrolled on hotel administration and management programs during times of uncertainty, except for gender. The influence of gender on perceptions of corporate sustainability appears to depend on the type of scenario. This finding could be attributed to the diverse roles that men and women play in war environments, while these differences are

not noticeable during pandemics. Overall, the results indicate that the sociodemographic characteristics of future hotel directors or managers do not impact their decision-making process, except for gender.

5.1 Theoretical and practical implications

One of the issues that emerges from this study is that hotel management schools are providing effective training in sustainability to their students. Aspects on sustainability have received positive feedback, which has balanced the three dimensions. This emphasizes the importance of incorporating sustainability content into the educational curriculum so as to better equip future managers to drive the sector toward a more sustainable tourism model.

It is worth noting that there was a slight difference in the responses based on the participants' demographic characteristics. It is possible that this is due to the fact that the sample was drawn from a single higher education institution that provided the same education and training in sustainability, which helped to reach a consensus on integrating sustainability into corporate strategy. These study programs are seeking to ensure that sustainability is key to hotel management. However, it is important to adjust sustainability practices based on the specific circumstances of each tourist destination or hotel establishment, rather than depend on managers' characteristics.

These results provide further support for the hypothesis that the hotel industry is failing to capitalize on the opportunity to enhance its strategic corporate sustainability plans, which results from not considering academic institutions and students as key stakeholders. Most hotel chains overlook the importance of academic institutions and students as stakeholders and, therefore, fail to take to their perspectives into consideration.

5.2 Limitations and future lines of research

The findings in this study are subject to several limitations. The first limitation lies in the fact that the chosen sample has received training from the same academic institution, a top-ranked international hospitality business school [55], which can result in a certain cultural homogeneity of the respondents. On one hand, this may affect the generalizability of the results to other institutions, since the selection criteria of students in this institution may not necessarily be representative of the broader higher education system. However, this institution was chosen for its specialization in the tourism and hospitality sector, as well as its focus on management and organizational administration training which is the focus of this study. On the other hand, since the institution has campuses in different countries with varied contexts and environments, the geographical bias of the empirical analysis is limited. Nevertheless, future studies could expand the sample by considering the expectations of tourism or hospitality students from other schools or universities that offer these programs. Moreover, the information was collected in two periods characterized by uncertainty, which had strong social impacts. This factor has shaped the expectations of future hotel managers, who attached greater importance to social issues. Further work is needed to assess whether consensus between distinct groups exists in other adverse shocks such as financial crises or natural disasters. Additionally, the impact that different negative external shocks have on individuals'

expectations can also be analyzed.

There is a pressing need to conduct further research into the role of future generations in sustainable development. In this framework, actors in educational institutions are key since they train the future decision-makers of the economic ecosystem. Being fully aware of current higher-degree students' expectations in specific sectors can help us to identify what aspects of sustainability will be given more priority and what aspects must be reinforced to achieve a balance between all dimensions of sustainability.

One of the issues that emerges from this study is that hotel management schools are providing effective training in sustainability to their students. Aspects on sustainability have received positive feedback, which has balanced the three dimensions. This emphasizes the importance of incorporating sustainability content into the educational curriculum to better equip future managers to drive the sector toward a more sustainable tourism model.

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These results provide further support for the hypothesis that the hotel industry should consider the sustainable perspectives of students and academic institutions in order to capitalize on the opportunity to improve their strategic corporate sustainability plans.

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