

# The Perspective of Sustainability from an Independent Resort Hotels on Koh Samui in Thailand

Win Piyaoui<sup>1</sup> and Veerades Panvisavas<sup>2</sup>

Mahidol University International College (MUIC), 999 Phutthamonthon 4 Rd, Salaya,  
Phutthamonthon, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand<sup>1</sup>  
E-mail: Winpiyaoui@gmail.com

Mahidol University International College (MUIC), 999 Phutthamonthon 4 Rd, Salaya,  
Phutthamonthon, Nakhon Pathom 73170, Thailand<sup>2</sup>  
E-mail: Veerades.pan@mahidol.ac.th

## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to outline the general perception of sustainability and explore key areas of sustainable practice which independent resort hotels in Koh Samui valued. There are two main objectives in this research include: 1) Identify the perception of independent resort hotel manager or owner toward sustainability. 2) Outline key areas of sustainable practice which independent resort hotels value. The scope of this research focuses on independent resort hotels on Koh Samui. This research used qualitative research methodology by interviewing 12 independent resort hotels managers and owners. Data saturation and thematic analysis were applied in this research. The finding of this research shows that independent resort hotel managers and owner recognise the importance of sustainability, but they are uncertain of the direction of sustainable development within the Island. They tend to perceive sustainability as a way to tackle environmental issues but lack a general understanding of the concept. Most of them heavily rely on internet search to acquire information related to sustainability concepts and practices, while a few hotels take extra initiative to search for more comprehensive information from government institutions and other hotels that successfully integrate sustainability. In terms of key sustainable practices which they value, it appears that independent resort hotel managers and owners tend to focus on the environmental dimension of sustainability. Practices such as waste management, energy management, and waste water management tend to be the most valued sustainable practices among independent resort hotels on Koh Samui. For future development, many independent resort hotels want to focus on improving water and energy management due to their cost benefits and operational efficiency. Nonetheless, several of them seem uncertain about the type of sustainable practice they want to achieve in the future.

**KEYWORDS:** Independent resort hotel managers and owners, Sustainability, Sustainable practices, Koh Samui

## 1 INTRODUCTION

There has been a growing concern among hoteliers regarding the environmental and social impacts of hotel development and operations (Goldstein and Primlani, 2012). Several studies

have shown that hotels can receive various benefits from pursuing sustainability, including improved competitive advantage, customer loyalty, brand recognition, employee retention, risk management, and regulatory compliance (Graci and Dodds, 2008; Walsh and Dodds, 2017). In addition, neglecting sustainable practices can also lead to serious drawbacks that can possibly damage hotel performance, such as reputational damage, lower employee job satisfaction, and a potential lawsuit (Athwal et al., 2019; Yilmaz and Flourish, 2010; Wong and Li, 2015). Thus, sustainability should be taken into consideration at all levels, and manager should view it as a part of the hotel's operational strategy in order to achieve a long-term goal and ensure the survival of the business.

Although it seems that sustainability is a key to long-term success in the hotel industry, the concept itself is far from perfect. Several studies have revealed certain sustainability issues that prevent independent resort hotels from incorporating sustainability into their business practices. These factors include lack of a concrete framework, ambiguity of the sustainability concept, lack of financial resources, manpower, and market information (EsquerPeralta et al., 2008; Pojasek, 2012; Font et al., 2016; Barnett, 2020). Furthermore, various academic publications frequently emphasize the view of sustainability on large-scale or chain hotels, which have greater capability in implementing sustainable practices. The evidence of this can be seen in several academic works, such as (1) Jones et al. (2014) which identify how global hotels such as Marriot, Best Western, Hyatt and Holiday Inn communicate their approach to sustainability, (2) Hsieh (2012) which outline the environmental policies and practices of branded hotels such as IHG, Whitbread and Accor. (3) Ozdemir and Gucer (2018) which focus on the perspective of waste management from international chain hotels in Ankara. As a result, there is little information regard sustainability from an independent resort hotel perspective to formulate or develop a sustainability framework that are applicable for small to medium-sized hotels. As a result, this thesis will address the general perception of sustainability from an independent resort hotel on Koh Samui in Thailand, while highlighting key sustainable practices that they valued.

## **2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The goal of this research is to identify the perspectives of independent resort hotel managers and owners toward sustainability, while exploring the key areas of sustainable practice which they value. There are two main objectives in this research include:

- 1) Identify the perception of an independent resort hotel manager or owner toward sustainability.
- 2) Outline key areas of sustainable practice which independent resort hotels value.

### **2.1 Scope of the research**

According to Wood (2015), the hotel industry is highly fragmented, as it can be classified by size, location, target market, level of service, and ownership structure. Therefore, this research selected a specific type of hotel and location to ensure that the findings came from the same group of target respondents and that the results were valid and consistent. The selected type of hotel and location for this research can be seen in table 1.

**Table 1:** *The scope of the research*

Type of the hotel	Resort hotel
Size	Small to medium size hotel (less than 100 rooms available)
Location	Samui Island (Koh Samui)
Ownership	Independent resort hotel

There are several justifications for the criteria of the selected type of hotel in the table above. First, this research focuses on resort hotels as they offer an all-around service within the premises. Because of the variety of services provided by a resort hotel, this type of hotel may have a higher environmental

impact and multiple stakeholder groups. In addition, the location for the selected type of hotel in this research is Koh Samui due to its special characteristics that rely on the natural environment to attract visitors. Furthermore, the coverage of this research would be small to medium size hotels that have less than 100 rooms available, while the ownership mode would be independent resort hotel or self-owned hotel. The reason behind this is because this research aims to outline the general perception of sustainability among small to medium size independent resort hotels.

## 2.2 Limitation of the study

There are several limitations in this research that must be highlighted. First, this research only covers resort hotels on Koh Samui in Thailand. Therefore, the result may not represent how other managers or owners in other types of accommodations or geographical regions perceive sustainability. Second, this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the result may differ from the normal period as there are other factors involved in the decision-making process of the manager and owner of the hotel. These factors may include changes in local regulations and policies to cope with the spread of COVID-19, a shortage of labour, limited financial capability, and changes in consumer behaviour.

## 3 LITERATURE REVIEWS

### 3.1 Sustainability concept and framework

Although the word "sustainability" has been extensively used, the definition of this term has been interpreted and used differently depending on its designation and recognition rather than on the domain concept. As a result, various terms pertaining to sustainability have emerged, or the existing ones are being extended, and this multitude of definitions creates great confusion for the user as the meaning of some terms is similar to or different from one another (Glavi and Lukman, 2007). However, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe has defined sustainability as "development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UNECE, 2005). This definition seems to be the most widely used term that has gained acceptance from various academics.

According to Kim et al. (2018) the concept of sustainability has 3 fundamental dimensions:

environmental, social, and economic. The model that can be used to explain and simplify the concept of sustainability is "The Three Pillars of Sustainability." This framework represents the balancing of trade-offs between these 3 equally desirable goals while ensuring the well-being of now and future generations (Purvis et al., 2018). Nevertheless, this approach has been criticized by several researchers as the concept itself is rather unclear and contain different set of values that are not directly commensurable relative to each other (Mieg, 2010; Hansmann et al., 2012). In addition to this, KyburzGraberet et al. (2006) also highlights that within a single pillar of sustainability, conflicting interests of many stakeholders often occur. Therefore, balancing stakeholder interests in each pillar may take precedence over balancing social, economic, and environmental factors.

In comparison, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) deployed by the United Nations Development Programme tend to offer a much better sustainability framework, as each of the SDGs has a clear description for achieving sustainability. According to United Nations Statistics Division (2018) SDGs contain 17 broad goals that consist of 169 targets and around 230 indicators. The study from Barbier and Burgess (2017) argues that the 17 goals of the SDGs can be classified into 3 different system goals: social, economic, and environmental. Balancing the trade-off among the different goals of these three systems would achieve the sustainability goals of the SDGs.

However, SDGs tend to emphasize their goal on the macro level, thus failing to act as a sustainability guideline for a specific type of business. The 17 goals of the SDGs and their 169 targets often focus on the national policies (UNDP, 2021), which offer little guidance on how businesses could contribute toward the SDGs. With this flaw, there is a need for a more concrete framework of sustainability for a specific type of business in order to facilitate businesses' contributions to the SDGs.

### **3.2 Koh Samui and Sustainability**

In terms of sustainability on Koh Samui, it appears that the Thai government is making a concerted effort to promote it. Several government departments have issued numerous projects and activities to support Koh Samui's sustainable development. The most notable project would be the "7 Greens Concept" implemented by the Tourism Authority of Thailand in 2012. This project aims to involve all stakeholders in the tourism sector to work collaboratively in order to achieve sustainable tourism (Muangasame and McKercher, 2015). Although this project offers a conceptual framework and guidelines for achieving sustainable tourism, the study from Muangasame and McKercher (2015) highlights that the seven thematic domains of the "7 Greens Concept" are difficult to operationalize.

For sustainable development in the hotel sector, several hotels in Koh Samui had integrated ISO 14001: Environmental Management System, ISO 50001: Energy Management, and ISO 20121: Event Sustainability Management Systems to ensure that their hotel activities were more sustainable. There are several hotels in Koh Samui that are certified in some of these ISO management systems, such as Banyan Tree Samui, Conrad Koh Samui, Ibis Samui Bophut, and Anantara Bophut Resort & Spa. Nevertheless, it can be seen that these hotels operate under chain hotel groups, which have more financial capability to acquire an ISO certificate. This would prove to be more difficult for independent hotels, as the average cost

of ISO certification is around 3000 to 5000 dollars per year.

### **3.3 Previous literature regard hotelier attitude toward sustainability**

To gain a basic understanding of hotel managers' and owners' attitudes toward sustainability, 14 academic literatures published in different geographical locations were reviewed. The attitudes of hotel managers and owners toward sustainability are quite varied. Some hotel managers and owners in certain regions seem to have a general understanding of the concept of sustainability and acknowledge the environmental issues caused by the hotel (Walsh and Dodds, 2017; Bohdanowicz, 2005; Maleviti et al., 2012; Prayag et al., 2010; Musavengane, 2019). The environmental factor seems to be the most emphasized area by the managers, as many of them consider it a means to provide competitive advantages and a way to comply with legislation and regulation (Chan, 2013; Walsh and Dodds, 2017; Sajjad et al., 2018). Nonetheless, several studies have also shown that sustainability is still a new phenomenon in some countries, so several managers and owners may not have a basic understanding of the concept (Ayuso, 2006; Graci, 2009; Sajjad et al., 2018).

As for the motivational factor, several studies have shown that some hotel managers and owners adopt sustainable practices due to their concern about the environmental impact generated by hotel activities (Prudhomme and Raymond, 2016; Oxenswärdh, 2020). They believe that it is part of their social responsibility to reduce the negative environmental effects (Kasim, 2009). Moreover, economic drive is another factor that motivates hotel managers and owners to adopt sustainability into their hotel operations. Several studies have identified economic motives such as competitive advantages, cost savings, and marketing. (Prud'homme and Raymond, 2016; Chan, 2013; Walsh and Dodds, 2017). Despite the fact that many managers and owners acknowledge the importance of sustainability and its benefits, various studies still highlight that a lack of financial resources acts as a main barrier for managers to implement sustainable practices into hotel operations (Erdogan, 2007; Bohdanowicz, 2005; Musavengane, 2019; Novacka et al., 2019). In addition, some managers and owners do not have sufficient knowledge and market information to integrate sustainability into their hotel operation (Oxenswärdh, 2020; Musavengane, 2019).

Nevertheless, the context and research result of these academic literature may not be applicable in Thailand for several reasons. First, some of these studies are considered outdated, so the results and contents might not be perfectly reliable as the attitude of managers toward sustainability could change over time. Second, when taking other factors into consideration, it is obvious that these academic literatures were conducted in other countries, so they might not offer a clear overview of Thai managers' and owners' attitudes toward sustainability. The reason behind this is because these countries differ from Thailand in so many ways, including organizational structure, power distance, consumer behavior, and employee support toward sustainability and institutional condition. In addition, there are very few literatures that focus on how managers in small and independent hotels are dealing with sustainable development. Many existing studies have concentrated on large hotel chains or branded hotels. Therefore, more extensive research is required to understand and identify how hotel managers and owners in Thailand think about the concept of sustainability.

### **3.4 Focused area of sustainability in hotel industry**

To effectively identify the key area of sustainable practice that independent hotels value, it is critical to review previous studies on sustainable practice in the hotel industry. Therefore, the Three Pillars of Sustainability model would be used in this section to point out key areas of focus. When looking at how the hotel industry implements sustainability, several studies have shown that the environmental pillar tends to be the most focused area of sustainability among hoteliers as it can offer competitive advantages and enable hotels to comply with local regulation and legislation (Chan, 2013; Walsh and Dodds, 2017; Sajjad et al., 2018). When the environmental pillar is broken down, the key sustainable practices that have been implemented tend to focus on three domains: energy management, waste management, and wastewater management. In the social pillar, many hotels seem to focus on employee welfare related to diversity in the workforce, equality of opportunity, employees' work/life balance, training and development, and human rights (Jones et al., 2014). In addition, the study from Abaean et al. (2014) also highlights that some hotel may showcase their social sustainability through activities such as charity and donation programs. In economic pillar, many hotels tend to focus on efficiency allocation of resource, financial performance, and long-term business survival with profitable result. Interestingly, the study from Jurigová et al. (2016) shows that many large-scale or chain hotels integrate environmental and social sustainability to achieve the economic sustainability of their hotel. Nevertheless, this information tends to focus on the sustainability of large-scale and chain hotels. This could be because these hotels have a well-established sustainability report that is more accessible and relatively easy to measure the impact of sustainable practices. Hence, the focus area of sustainability for an independent hotel still remains unclear, and more research must be done to identify the key focus areas of sustainability that independent hotels value and believe to be achievable.

## **4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this research, qualitative method will be used to fulfil the research objective. The reason behind this is because the qualitative method will enable subject to express their opinion, feeling and attitude in non-numerical data form. The method which this research used to collect data is an interview. This is because the view on the topic related to sustainability can be varied. Hence, interview method would enable the subject to fully express how they perceive and think about the topic. Moreover, data saturation had been applied in this research. In this case, 12 interviews were conducted as the interview result showed that the data acquired had been saturated. As for the target respondent, this research set the criteria for suitable resort hotels and eligible candidate to participate in this research interview. In short, the eligible candidate for interview must be a hotel manager or owner of an independent resort hotel who responsible for controlling or administering the hotel, while have certain authorities to implement or change hotel policies and practices. The detail of the interviewee profile, hotel information and interview duration can be seen from Table 2-4.

In term of data analysis, thematic analysis had been applied. This method helps identify both implicit and explicit ideas within the data through the use of theme. Thus, enables the researcher to conduct an analysis of the frequency of a theme based on the collected data. This pattern identification among the themes offers crucial insight on how manager or owner

**Table 2: Profile of interviewees**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Position</b>
1	HR-1	Female	Thai	General Manager
2	HR-2	Male	Thai	Owner
3	HR-3	Male	Thai	Owner
4	HR-4	Male	Thai	Owner
5	HR-5	Female	Thai	Owner
6	HR-6	Male	Thai	General Manager
7	HR-7	Male	Malaysian	General Manager
8	HR-8	Female	Thai	General Manager
9	HR-9	Female	Thai	Owner
10	HR-10	Female	Thai	Owner
11	HR-11	Female	Thai	Owner
12	HR-12	Female	Thai	Owner

**Table 3: Profile of interviewee hotels**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Resort Hotel Size</b>	<b>Target customer</b>
1	HR-1	79	European
2	HR-2	72	European
3	HR-3	76	European
4	HR-4	12	European
5	HR-5	56	French and British
6	HR-6	92	European
7	HR-7	70	Chinese and Israeli
8	HR-8	28	European
9	HR-9	43	European
10	HR-10	21	Russian and Ukrainian
11	HR-11	23	French and German
12	HR-12	19	Scandinavian





**Table 5:** Perception of sustainability from an independent resort hotel manager or owner

Categories	Themes
How independent resort hotel owners and managers perceive sustainable development in Koh Samui	Improvement in sustainable development Uncertainty in direction of sustainable development
Independent resort hotel owners and managers perception of sustainability concept	Sustainability as a tool to minimize environmental impact Sustainability as a strategy for business survival Uncertainty in the concept and practice
How independent resort hotel owners and managers acquire information regard sustainability	Internet search Government institutions Example from another hotel

as paper straw or even bio-degradable packaging (Respondent 10, HR-10). In term of support from government, some interviewees had outlined several efforts made by government to improve sustainable development in Koh Samui. Some managers and owners of independent resort hotel feel that government had issue legislation that facilitate the development of sustainability in Koh Samui. The government seem to support sustainable development in term of legislation which hotelier need to comply (Respondent 1, HR-1). Moreover, several managers and owners of independent resort hotel also mention a few government programs that provide helpful insight regard sustainable practices that can be applied to hotels. 'There was a government project which provides knowledge on how to turn food waste into EM fertilizer' (Respondent 8, HR-8).

Uncertainty in the direction of sustainable development

Although independent resort hotel managers and owners recognize the development of sustainability on Koh Samui, several of them remain uncertain about the direction of sustainable development. Although they acknowledge the importance of sustainability, some of them are still unsure whether their contribution is enough to facilitate the development of sustainability in Koh Samui. "I know that sustainability is important because hotel sectors rely on natural environments to attract tourists, but many of the environmental issues that I have seen actually come from other sectors as well, so I am not sure if what we do in our hotel is enough to minimize the environmental impact (Respondent 11, HR-11). In addition, the effort from the government to promote sustainability has been perceived negatively by some independent resort hotel managers and owners. "I know that the government is very keen to promote sustainability in Koh Samui, but from what I have seen, there is a lack of continuity in their attempt to make Koh Samui a green island (Respondent 7, HR-7). Besides, certain independent resort hotel managers and owners have expressed that some regulations and

policies issued by the government are rather ineffective or not enforceable. I think that the development of sustainability in Koh Samui went quite poorly because of the lack of restrictions in terms of building regulation. 'Right now, you can see that a lot of new accommodations are being built on the mountain area, which causes environmental impacts in this destination, so I am not sure if we can achieve sustainability in the long run' (Respondent 4, HR-4).

### **5.1.2 Independent resort hotel owners and managers perception of sustainability concept**

#### Sustainability to as a tool to minimize environmental impact

Most of the independent resort hotels managers and owners perceived sustainability as a tool to minimize the environmental impact caused by hotel activities. I feel that by implementing sustainability, it can help reduce the environmental impact caused by hotel activities. In this case, I had implemented many practices that will facilitate the development of sustainability in my hotel, but I am not sure if they are good enough because we are still new to this concept and still look for new practices to apply to our hotel (Respondent 3, HR-3). 'Sustainability is about how to reduce the environmental impact caused by the hotel.' It could be about how to reduce the amount of waste or even the pollution caused by energy usage (Respondent 4; HR-4).

#### Sustainability as a strategy for business survival

Unlike the previous theme, some of the independent resort hotel managers and owners think of sustainability as a strategy to maintain their business performance in the long run. 'I think sustainability is how you make sure that your business can operate in the long run. So, it is about how to continuously attract the customer to use your service, how to reduce the cost, and how to maintain the environment around you (Respondent 9, HR-9). If the business can reduce the negative impact on the environment but fails to make any profit, then you cannot call it sustainability. For me, the first step to achieve sustainability is to ensure that the business is financially sustainable in the long run (Respondent 5, HR-5).

Uncertainty in the concept and practice Although independent resort hotel managers and owners had different perspectives on sustainability, 5 out of 12 interviewees expressed uncertainty about their understanding of the concept. Sometimes we implemented several sustainable practices before we realized they were considered sustainable practices. This is because we are still unsure of what constitutes sustainability (Respondent 4, HR-4). Some of them even asked the principal investigator of the research to briefly explain the concept of sustainability since they were unsure about their knowledge of the notion. I am not sure what you mean by sustainability, is it sustainability of the business or sustainability of the natural environment in Koh Samui? Could you give me an example of what sustainability looks like in a hotel?' (Respondent 12, HR-12).

### **5.1.3 How independent resort hotel owners and managers acquire information regard sustainability**

#### Internet search

All of the independent resort hotel managers and owners mentioned that internet searches are their primary source of information. It seems that the internet was the most common method used to gather information about sustainability. 'Usually, I just google around to see what kinds of sustainable practices can be done in the hotel and how I can incorporate

them into my hotel operation' (Respondent 2, HR-2). Moreover, internet seem to enable independent resort hotel managers and owners to explore the concept and idea of sustainability that can be applied to their hotel. Some websites contain information that we never knew before, especially international websites that have more up-to-date information about new technologies that we can apply to our hotels (Respondent 3, HR-3).

#### Government institutions

Aside from internet searches, several independent resort hotel managers and owners obtained sustainability information from government institutions. The channel through which they acquire information related to sustainability comes from seminars organized by government institutions or government programs. When there was a seminar about waste management hosted by the government, we always sent some of our staff to participate in the event (Respondent 6, HR-6).

#### Example from another hotel

In addition, some independent resort hotel managers and owners receive an idea of how to integrate sustainability into hotel practice via their visits to other hotels. I had a chance to visit the Tongsai Bay Resort, and they specialize in integrating sustainability into hotel practice. After the visit, I now have a better understanding of how to incorporate sustainability into hotel operations (Respondent 10, HR-10).

## **5.2 Sustainable practices or green initiative that independent resort hotels valued**

The findings in this section are divided into 3 categories with a total of 15 themes, as illustrated in Table 6.

### **5.2.1 Current sustainable practices which independent resort hotel implementing**

There are 8 types of sustainable practice that interviewed independent resort hotel managers and owners currently performing. Overall, all hotels implement sustainable practices as part of their hotel operations. The list of sustainable practices that had been implemented in each hotel can be seen in Table 7.

### **5.2.2 Sustainable practices on which independent resort hotels focus**

#### Waste management

Many independent resort hotels managers and owners have stated that one of the most concerning sustainability issues in Koh Samui is the waste issue. Some of them highlighted the fact that Koh Samui does not have the capability to deal with the high volume of waste generated by tourists. 'More people are moving to Koh Samui, both from abroad and from within the country. This is concerning because we may not be able to handle the increasing amount of waste. Our island lacks a waste disposal facility, so waste is transported to Surat Thani province by boat' (Respondent 10, HR-10). This awareness proved to be vital as it encouraged many independent resort hotel managers and owners to make waste management a priority. Several measures have been implemented to tackle this issue, such as waste segregation and waste recycling.

#### Wastewater management

Several independent resort hotel managers and owners highlighted that they focus solely

**Table 6:** Sustainable practices or green initiative that independent resort hotel valued

Categories	Themes
Current sustainable practices which independent resort hotel implementing	Waste management Wastewater management Energy management Water management Supply chain management Employee welfare Tree management plan Green products
Sustainable practice which independent resort hotel focus	Waste management Wastewater management Energy management
Sustainable practice that independent resort hotel wants to achieve in the future	Waste management Energy management Water Management Uncertainty

**Table 7:** List of sustainable practices which independent resort hotel currently performing.

	HR-1	HR-2	HR-3	HR-4	HR-5	HR-6	HR-7	HR-8	HR-9	HR-10	HR-11	HR-12
Waste management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wastewater management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Energy management	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Water management	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Supply Chain management	✓	✓			✓			✓				
Employee welfare		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓	
Green products	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Tree Management Plan					✓			✓	✓			

on their wastewater treatment process in order to comply with legislation issued by the government. 'I tend to focus on the wastewater treatment process in my hotel because I want to comply with the legislation' (Respondent 9, HR-9). Moreover, some of the independent resort hotel managers and owners focus on wastewater management because they do not want any contaminated water to be released into the sea. 'Mostly, I focus on wastewater treatment because, after the water is treated, it will flow directly into the sea. If some of the waters were still contaminated, our beach water would be polluted' (Respondent 11, HR-11).

**Energy management** Several independent resort hotel managers and owners prioritise energy management among other sustainable practices. This is due to their desire to reduce their energy consumption and thus lower their utility bills. I prefer to focus on energy management or clean energy because it helps me save money. For example, I saved money on my utility bill by installing LED lighting, and I didn't have to spend a lot of money on light bulb replacements because LED lighting is more durable (Respondent 5, HR-5).

### 5.2.3 Sustainable practices that an independent resort hotel wants to achieve in the future

#### Energy management

In terms of energy management, there are several green initiatives that independent resort hotel managers and owners want to achieve in the future. First, many of the independent resort hotel managers and owners expressed their wish to install or expand the use of solar power in their hotel. 'We would put solar panels on top of our hotel building if we had enough money in the future because it would lower our energy use and be beneficial for the environment' (Respondent 12, HR-12). Second, several independent resort hotel managers and owners wish to transform their food waste into biogas for usage in their facilities. 'Biogas production from food waste is an intriguing concept that we would like to explore' (Respondent 3, HR-3).

#### Water management

Several independent resort hotel managers and owners are looking for new technology and systems to improve their water management. 'Water management is another area I hope to focus on in the future, as Koh Samui is currently experiencing frequent water shortages. Right now, hotels in Koh Samui experience water shortages for 23-week periods each year, which is more frequent than in the past. So, I am still looking for new technology to tackle this issue (Respondent 2, HR-2).

#### Uncertainty

Several independent resort hotel managers and owners appear to be undecided about which type of sustainable practice they want to adopt in the future. Some of them simply want to strengthen their current sustainable practice before moving on to the next one. 'As I previously stated, we faced some minor setbacks when implementing sustainable practices. So, before proceeding on to another practice, we want to improve our ability to manage the current one' (Respondent 11, HR-11).

On the contrary, several of them are unsure whether they will have enough financial capability or human resources to apply additional sustainable practices in the future. 'I honestly don't know because our financial condition is dire right now, and we need to prioritize securing our hotel's survival. I believe that after the tourist arrival rate has fully recovered to normal, we might begin to consider further sustainable initiatives that our hotel could implement' (Respondent 7, HR-7).

## **6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 General perception or attitude of sustainability**

In general, it appears that independent resort hotel owners and managers in Koh Samui have two different perspectives regarding sustainable development. Some independent resort hotel owners and managers believe that there is an improvement in sustainable development. They seem to be aware of the changes in sustainability developments that are taking place around them. Nonetheless, several independent resort hotel owners and managers have expressed their uncertainty regarding the direction of sustainable development in Koh Samui. This uncertain feeling came from 2 factors, including a lack of trust in the government's administration process and uncertainty regarding their contribution (see Section 5.1.1). To tackle these issues, it is crucial that the local government strengthen its legal enforcement capability and ensure the consistency of the sustainability project. Moreover, they should develop their own sustainable development goals based on existing sustainability frameworks (see sections 3.1 and 3.2). There is a need to adjust these sustainability frameworks to be more applicable and relevant to Koh Samui in order to ensure that every organization can understand and know how to make a contribution.

In terms of perception toward sustainability, several independent resort hotel managers and owners perceive sustainability as a tool to tackle environmental issues, while some of them tend to think of it as a strategy to achieve the long-term survival of their hotel (see section 5.1.2). The way in which they perceive sustainability tends to focus on the environmental aspects of sustainability. It seems that they do not have a general understanding of the sustainability concept, which is about the balancing of trade-offs between 3 fundamental dimensions, including environmental, social, and economic (see Section 3.1). In addition, nearly

half of the interviewees expressed uncertainty regarding their understanding of the concept of sustainability (see section 5.1.2). This shows a direct link to other studies that highlight that sustainability is still a new concept for many hotel managers and owners and that they may not have a general understanding of the concept (see section 3.3). In this case, it can be seen that education is an essential factor in building up independent resort hotels managers and owners understanding of sustainability. Organizing a seminar with experts from reputable institutions to impart knowledge could help them understand sustainability better. Once they have a basic understanding of the sustainability concept, they should have a general sense of how to incorporate sustainability into their hotel business.

When looking at how independent resort hotel managers and owners acquire information related to sustainability, it is clear that all of them heavily rely on internet search (see section 5.1.3). Although this method enables them to explore new ideas and practices about sustainability that can be implemented in their hotel, it appears that the information available online is quite limited and thus fails to provide a clear overview of sustainability concept. Other sources of information that independent resort hotel managers and owners get are from government institutions and examples of other hotels (see Section 5.1.3). These sources of information tend to provide more comprehensive insight, which enables them to get an overview of how to integrate sustainability into hotel operations. Nonetheless, it is not as easily accessible as internet research.

## **6.2 Sustainable practices or green initiative that independent resort hotel valued**

Despite the fact that some independent resort hotel managers and owners are unfamiliar with sustainability concepts, it appears that they all implement certain sustainable practices in their hotels. These sustainable practices include waste management, wastewater management, energy management, water management, supply chain management, employee welfare, tree management plans, and green products (see Section 5.2.1). Waste management and wastewater management appear to be common practices followed by all hotels. This is due to the fact that waste management is relatively simple to implement, whereas wastewater management is a mandatory practice in Thailand due to wastewater discharge regulations. Moreover, they also want to comply with local policies and regulations, which implies that government policy and regulation have a considerable influence on the implementation of sustainable practices. As for other practices, it seems that independent resort hotel managers and owners only implement them on a voluntary basis. For example, energy management has been implemented by many independent resort hotel managers and owners as they want to reduce their utility costs (see Section 5.2.2). The findings of this section seem to match with previous studies in the literature review (see section 3.3). It can be seen that cost reduction plays a crucial role in motivating independent resort hotel managers and owners to adopt sustainable practices. Overall, the finding shows that the focused area of sustainable practices lies within 3 areas, including waste, wastewater, and energy management. This demonstrates a direct link to Section 3.4 of the literature review and thus confirms that independent resort hotel managers and owners tend to prioritize the environmental aspect of sustainability.

In terms of sustainable practices that they want to achieve in the future, the opinion is split into 2 sides. Several independent resort hotel managers and owners appear to have a clear

idea of the kind of sustainable practices they wish to implement in the future. These practices include energy management and water management. It appears that they want to adopt the technological advancements that are available into their sustainable practices in order to make their hotel operation more efficient and environmentally friendly. On the contrary, some independent resort hotel managers and owners seem uncertain about the type of sustainable practice they want to achieve in the future. While some of them want to improve their current sustainable practices before moving on to the next, others are unsure if they will have the financial or human resources in the future to implement additional sustainable practices.

### 6.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, independent resort hotel managers and owners in Koh Samui acknowledge the importance of sustainability. While some of them have their own understanding of sustainable development and the concept of sustainability, many still lack a basic understanding of the notion, which is about the balancing of trade-offs between 3 fundamental dimensions. They tend to think of sustainability as a way to minimize the environmental impact of their hotel activities or as a strategy for long-term survival. Most of their effort was put into environmental management activities. Thus, it is clear that many of them are still focused on the environmental factor and neglect other dimensions of sustainability, such as the social and economic dimensions. Hence, it is obvious that education and support from the government to provide the tools and knowledge required to adapt sustainability are needed in order to ensure that independent resort hotel managers and owners have a comprehensive understanding of the sustainability concept, whilst able to incorporate this concept into hotel operations. Independent resort hotel managers and owners of Koh Samui had shown their willingness and commitment to integrate sustainability into their hotel operation. Nonetheless, there is a need for direction and guidelines regarding sustainability as a whole for Koh Samui, so that every organization knows how to make a contribution. A new direction and clear guidelines for sustainable development on Koh Samui should be established, and representatives of all business sectors should be perceived as stakeholders and participate in setting these sustainable development goals. Key issues and suggestions from all private and public businesses should be highlighted and taken into consideration when creating a new sustainable development goal for Koh Samui to ensure that the project is applicable to all sectors while still being able to continuously progress toward expected direction. This should bring Koh Samui closer to the desired level of sustainability.

### REFERENCES

- Abaeian, V., Yeoh, K. & Khong, K. (2014). An Exploration of CSR Initiatives Undertaken by Malaysian Hotels: Underlying Motivations from a Managerial Perspective. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 144, 423-432.
- Athwal, N., Wells, V., Carrigan, M. & Henninger, C. (2019). Sustainable Luxury Marketing: A Synthesis and Research Agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 21(4), 405-426.
- Ayuso, S. (2006). Adoption of voluntary environmental tools for sustainable tourism:



- analysing the experience of Spanish hotels. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 13(4), 207-220.
- Barbier, E. & Burgess, J. (2017). The Sustainable Development Goals and the systems approach to sustainability. *Economics*, 11(1), 1-22.
- Barnett, B. (2020). Soft Brand Hotels Southeast Asian Market Review 2020. C9 Hotelworks. <https://www.c9hotelworks.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-11-soft-brand-hotel-market-review.pdf>
- Bohdanowicz, P. (2005). European Hoteliers' Environmental Attitudes. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 46(2), 188-204.
- Chan, E. (2013). Managing green marketing: Hong Kong hotel managers' perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 34, 442-461.
- Erdogan, N. (2007). Environmental Management of Small-sized Tourism Accommodations in Turkey. *Journal of Applied Sciences*, 7(8), 1124-1130.
- EsquerPeralta, J., Velazquez, L. & Munguia, N. (2008). Perceptions of core elements for sustainability management systems (SMS). *Management Decision*, 46(7), 1027-1038.
- Font, X., Garay, L. & Jones, S. (2016). Sustainability motivations and practices in small tourism enterprises in European protected areas. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 137, 1439-1448
- Glavi, P. & Lukman, R. (2007). Review of sustainability terms and their definitions. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 15(18), 1875-1885.
- Goldstein, K. & Primlani, R. (2012). *Current Trends and Opportunities in Hotel Sustainability*. New York: HVS. <https://www.hospitalitynet.org/file/152004802.pdf>
- Graci, S. & Dodds, R. (2008). Why Go Green? The Business Case for Environmental Commitment in the Canadian Hotel Industry. *Anatolia*, 19(2), 251-270.
- Graci, S. (2009). Examining the Factors That Impede Sustainability in China's Tourism Accommodation Industry: A Case Study of Sanya, Hainan, China. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 19(1), 38-55.
- Hansmann, R., Mieg, H. & Frischknecht, P. (2012). Principal sustainability components: empirical analysis of synergies between the three pillars of sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 19(5), 451-459.
- Hsieh, Y. (2012). Hotel companies' environmental policies and practices: a content analysis of their web pages. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 24(1), 97-121.
- Jones, P., Hillier, D. & Comfort, D. (2014). Sustainability in the global hotel industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 26(1), 5-17.
- Jurigová, Z., Tuková, Z. Kuncová, M. (2016). ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY AS A FUTURE PHENOMENON. *Journal of Security and Sustainability Issues*, 6(1), 103-112.
- Kasim, A. (2009). Managerial attitudes towards environmental management among small and medium hotels in Kuala Lumpur. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 17(6), 709-725.
- Kim, Y., Barber, N. & Kim, D. (2018). Sustainability research in the hotel industry: Past, present, and future. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 28(5), 576-620.
- KyburzGraber, R., Hofer, K. & Wolfensberger, B. (2006). Studies on a socioecological approach to environmental education: a contribution to a critical position in the education for sustainable development discourse. *Environmental Education Research*, 12(1), 101-114.
- Maleviti, E., Mulugetta, Y. & Wehrmeyer, W. (2012). Energy consumption and attitudes for

- the promotion of sustainability in buildings. *International Journal of Energy Sector Management*, 6(2), 213-227. Mieg, H. (2010). Sustainability and innovation in urban development: concept and case. *Sustainable Development*, 20(4), 251-263.
- Muangasame, K. and McKercher, B. (2015). The challenge of implementing sustainable tourism policy: a 360-degree assessment of Thailand's "7 Greens sustainable tourism policy". *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(4), 497-516. Musavengane, R. (2019). Small hotels and responsible tourism practice: Hoteliers' perspectives. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 220, 786-799.
- Novacka, L., Pícha, K., Navratil, J., Topaloglu, C. & vec, R. (2019). Adopting environmentally friendly mechanisms in the hotel industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 31(6), 2488-2508.
- Oxenswärdh, A. (2020). Sustainability Practice at Hotels on the Island of Gotland in Sweden an exploratory study. *European Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation*, 10(3), 203-212.
- Ozdemir, G. & Gucer, E. (2018). Food Waste Management within Sustainability Perspective: A Study on Five Star Chain Hotels. *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies*, 6(1), 280-299.
- Pojasek, R. (2012). Implementing a sustainability management system. *Environmental Quality Management*, 22(1), 83-90.
- Prayag, G., Dookhony-Ramphul, K. & Maryeven, M. (2010). Hotel development and tourism impacts in Mauritius: Hoteliers' perspectives on sustainable tourism. *Development Southern Africa*, 27(5), 697-712.
- Prudhomme, B. & Raymond, L. (2016). Implementation of sustainable development practices in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(3), 609- 639.
- Purvis, B., Mao, Y. & Robinson, D. (2018). Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins. *Sustainability Science*, 14(3), 681-695.
- Sajjad, A., Jillani, A. & Raziq, M. (2018). Sustainability in the Pakistani hotel industry: an empirical study. *Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society*, 18(4), 714-727.
- UNDP. (2021). Sustainable Development Goals | UNDP. <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>
- UNECE. (2005). UNECE Annual Report 2004-2005 - Sustainable Development. [https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/oes/nutshell/2004-2005/focus\\_sustainable\\_development.htm](https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/oes/nutshell/2004-2005/focus_sustainable_development.htm)
- United Nations Statistics Division. (2018). Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. [https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/Global%20Indicator%20Framework%20after%20refinement\\_Eng.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/Global%20Indicator%20Framework%20after%20refinement_Eng.pdf)
- Walsh, P. & Dodds, R. (2017). Measuring the Choice of Environmental Sustainability Strategies in Creating a Competitive Advantage. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 26(5), 672-687.
- Wong, S. & Li, J. (2015). Will hotel employees' perception of unethical managerial behavior affect their job satisfaction?. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*



*Proceeding of the 7<sup>th</sup> TICC International Conference 2023  
Toward Sustainable Development Goals: Transformation and Beyond  
February 4-5<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Chiang Mai, Thailand*

ment, 27(5), 853- 877.

Wood, R. (2015). *Hospitality Management*. London: SAGE Publications. Yilmaz, A. & Flouris, T. (2010). Managing corporate sustainability: Risk management process based perspective. *African Journal of Business Management*, 4(2), 162-171.