Article

Sustainability Practices in Hospitality: Case Study of a Luxury Hotel in Arrábida Natural Park

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Abstract: The agenda of researchers and practitioners in the tourism industry has focused on the demand for sustainable practices. Luxury hotels have also followed this trend, although studies are still limited. The aim of this study is to understand what environmental and social sustainability practices luxury hotels are adopting and how their management perceive the benefits and results from their adoption. This empirical research is based on a case study that triangulates data from semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observation. The results show that luxury hotels have implemented environmental practices that address energy efficiency measures that reduce water consumption, waste, and carbon emissions and that control, protect, and maintain fauna and flora to promote of unique natural landscapes. They have focused on social practices that address the relations with charitable institutions, provide consumers high-quality services, and create a safe and healthy work environment. Luxury hotels have successfully implemented these practices to reduce operational costs. The study's findings provide practical guidance for hotel managers who seek to implement sustainability practices.

Keywords: sustainability practices; environmental sustainability; social sustainability; corporate social responsibility; luxury hospitality

1. Introduction

Societies are increasingly affected by problems of poverty and inequality, climate change, and an annual net human population growth rate of approximately 70 million. It is imperative to take action to conserve resources and to lessen the growing environmental burden [1]. Human progress and development has always depended on industrial activities that have undesirable impacts on the environment. Therefore, there is a need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations.

Due to increasingly serious environmental problems, such as global warming, governments in different countries have sought a less polluted and healthier environment and, thus, have introduced stricter environmental regulations and encouraged companies to protect the planet [2]. The success of the hotel business depends on providing a safe and attractive environment and, therefore, environmental protection is important for the industry [2]. The intersection between business and the environment is transforming existing markets, creating new ones, and increasingly promoting the principles of sustainability in business strategies [3]. For the service sector in general and the hotel industry in particular, the design and implementation of sustainability practices present key competitive and ethical challenges [4]. These practices help the organization to concretize the triple bottom line goal in which "long term success of a corporation and its environment requires emphasis on all three dimensions of sustainability—economic, environmental

(natural environment), and social (social environment)" ([5], p. 13). Environment sustainability practices in the hotel industry include, among other things, furnishing rooms with environmental-friendly materials, using water-saving toilets in bathrooms, recycle cooking oil, and implementing energy saving programs [6]. However, social sustainability practices include, among other things, investing in training and employee development, listening to employees' suggestions, encouraging hotel employees to take part in various kinds of social events, donating to the community, providing guests with high-quality services and a safe environment, and paying hotel's suppliers for their services and supplies on time [6]. Economic sustainability practices are related to cost control (e.g., low operational costs, low labor costs), income growth (e.g., high occupation rate growth, high-profit growth), and expansion of market share (e.g., rate of new product introduction to market, advertising and marketing intensity) [6].

This work aims to understand how luxury hotels adapt to this new reality in particular, to understand what practices are adopted both environmentally and socially, and how managers perceive the benefits and results of these practices. The luxury travel market is the fastest growing segment of the travel industry worldwide [7], and luxury hospitality has the third largest market share in the global luxury goods industry [8–10]. While a high level of comfort and service and exclusivity are still key elements for luxury travelers, experiential travel and sustainability are playing an increasingly important role [7].

The literature recognizes that these topics need further research and clarification. For example, Benckendorff and Moscardo [11] state that luxury tourism has not received much attention in the academic literature on tourism; Chu et al. [12] argue that very limited academic work has focused on specific and diverse aspects of luxury hotels. However, as suggested by Jones et al. [13] "the hotel industry is in the midst of an awakening" (p. 6).

Most studies on sustainability practices in the tourism industry are limited to larger business organizations [14]. Research on sustainability practices in small tourism organizations is scarce, so the existing literature shows a gap in attention and inadequate data on sustainability in small tourism businesses [14]. From this perspective, the case study presented in this research aims to fill these gaps that contribute to a better understanding of the environmental and social practices that are adopted by the luxury hotel industry. This research, therefore, aims to answer the following questions: (i) what environmental and social practices has the Hotel Casa de Palmela adopted? and (ii) what results were obtained from their adoption, in terms of cost reduction and image. In order to answer these questions, this research uses the case study methodology. Specifically, the study aims to evaluate and present the environmental and social practices that the Hotel Casa de Palmela applied and how the management perceived their benefits and result of their application. The Hotel Casa de Palmela has in its genesis the activity of nature tourism, and it considers the environmental component as extremely important to its strategy. It is a five star hotel located in the Arrábida Natural Park and its unique concept has been decisive in obtaining the results obtained so far.

The research proceeds as follows: The next section presents the theoretical framework. The following two sections present the research methods and the findings. The last section presents the implications for theory and practice and limitations and opportunities for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Sustainability in the Hotel Sector

Tourism as an industry is a phenomenon that has a growing presence in the dynamics of the international economy as it contributes approximately 10.5% to global GDP [15]. Therefore, its development can be a way to improve the economic and social welfare of a country [16].

For many nations and regions, it is a major source of income, employment, and development [17]. However, part of this industry is still reluctant to commit to sustainability initiatives. Research on the environmental challenges of the tourism industry has

received far less attention than manufacturing activities [18], but the growing number of environmental laws and growing market pressures has increased its environmental awareness [2].

In the tourism sector, the hotel industry provides the most jobs and has the greatest effect on the development of the regions where it operates [19]. This sector is also characterized by its high consumption of resources and waste generation [20,21]. It can then be said that there is an inevitable link between the development of the hotel industry, environmental impacts, and the need for greater resource efficiency [22]. Hospitality, being the largest subsector of the tourism industry, undeniably has the broadest impacts on the environment [23]. Thus, sustainability becomes an important and necessary factor, not only for improving the natural environment, but also for maintaining the competitive performance of this sector. As such, there is growing concern about sustainability issues within the tourism industry worldwide [24,25]. Environmental orientation has now become a prerequisite for achieving sustainable tourism development [26,27]. For companies and organizations in the tourism sector, social responsibility is of particular importance because of the dynamic development of this sector in national economies and its social orientation to meet people's needs and improve their quality of life [28].

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a complex and multidimensional concept that encompasses terms such as corporate citizenship, corporate sustainability, corporate responsibility, or any other terms to describe the positive impact of business on society and the environment [29]. As defined by the European Commission [30], CSR is also a concept whereby companies integrate social, environmental, ethical, and human rights concerns into their business operations and core strategies in close collaboration with their stakeholders: customers, employees, and society as a whole. Sustainability should be seen as a responsibility that involves the triple bottom line in which the corporate expectation is that business results should be based not only on economic prosperity but also on the criteria of environmental integrity and social equity as well as their interrelationships [31].

Many hospitality organizations were the first to design and implement ambitious CSR initiatives [32]. Cherapanukorn and Focken [33] state that the hospitality industry is embracing the concept of CSR. Several studies have concluded that CSR initiatives bring financial benefits to hotel companies by finding a positive and meaningful relationship between CSR and financial profit [34]. CSR is a form of corporate self-regulation that is integrated into a business model [35]; and within the framework of economic globalization, understanding quality and its implementation has become an integral part of business success and competitive advantage [36]. According to Yuen et al. [37], the importance and expectations of CSR differ among geographical factors, including national culture. The merits of CSR have been endorsed by many tourism companies, intermediaries, trade associations, pressure groups, and non-governmental organizations [38].

2.2. Environmental and Social Sustainability Practices

Boley and Uysal [39] summarize the hospitality industry's move towards "going green" as a growing emphasis on minimizing its impact on the environment by applying environmentally preferred practices to reduce waste and by using sustainable resources and supplies. Due to increasingly serious environmental problems, such as global warming, governments in different countries have introduced stricter environmental regulations and have encouraged companies to adopt measures to protect the planet [2]. Mensah [40] believes that mandatory environmental regulations, along with monitoring and explicit penalties for non-compliance, have proven to be effective mechanisms to encourage companies to improve their environmental performance.

Many hotels recognize that adopting green practices is not only ethical but also beneficial in reducing costs, enhancing image, creating market differentiation, and increasing CSR [41]. Kularatne et al. [41] identify that eco-management of a hotel not only helps in terms of profitability and customer retention but also demonstrates better social responsibility and builds a good reputation.

Sustainability involves adding even more complexity to the definition of an operations strategy, as developing a sustainability strategy is a rather complicated task in of itself [42], and there is little research that examines the strategies to implement CSR [37]. The developments of environmental and social sustainability practices are a means of refining innovative business strategies to rethink the business model [43] by exploring alternatives and creating new practices [42].

Environmental practices used in the hotel industry include, among others, the purchase of environmentally friendly products, the use of environmentally friendly cleaning products, energy and water-saving practices, and the selective collection of solid waste [6,25,44]. According to Kasim et al. [29], the water consumption of the hotel is determined by several factors: the infrastructure and its age, efficiency, and configuration as well as the multiplicity of water use devices and the practices and behaviors of guests and employees. The number of overnight stays sold, the number of meals served, and the amount of laundry washed internally are factors that also contribute to the water and energy consumption of the hotel [45]. There are several reasons for increased water consumption in hotel developments: garden maintenance (irrigation), daily cleaning of rooms, daily laundry, pool maintenance, intensive kitchen activities, and a "pleasure approach" to showers and baths [46]. The most common measures to save water are the implementation of low consumption taps and showers throughout the installation and the control of existing water leaks [47].

Hotels operate 24 h a day. This makes them one of the most energy-intensive types of organizations [48]. Cooling systems, lighting, and water heating are identified in the literature as the three main factors of energy consumption in hotels [48]. As energy use is strongly linked to greenhouse gas emissions, the implementation of efficient energy-saving strategies during the hotel's operation phase will result in reduced costs for hotel units and a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions [48].

Some hotels are introducing new energy sources, such as solar energy and wind energy, as a way to become more efficient [49]. The use of smart cards, automatic air conditioning systems, and solar thermal systems also play a key role in energy management [49]. The installation of energy-saving light bulbs better known as LED (Light-Emitting Diode), the implementation of motion sensors that turn lights and other electrical devices on and off, as well as the use of natural light are also identified in the literature as practices used by hotels to reduce energy consumption [47]. Finally, to reduce waste generation, the most common measures used in hotels are the recycling of plastics and glass, the creation of internal policies to save office supplies, and the separation of generated waste [47]. The adoption of these practices is positively influenced by the level of training of employees in environmental matters [50] and the demographic characteristics of hotel managers, such as age, level of education, and moral behavior [50]. The size of the hotel, the star rating, the organization, and the level of modernization, and the age of the hotel also affect the adoption of these practices [50]. Other factors such as the existence of a competitive market environment, the level of innovation of the hotel, social capital and organizational learning also positively influence the green orientation of tourism business organizations and the implementation of sustainability practices [51]. In addition, the literature indicates that sustainability is a beneficial path to follow, regardless of the size, category, and budget of business organizations in the tourism industry [52]. Although most hotels around the world have already adopted environmental sustainability practices, most hotels adopt basic practices, although the scope and extent of these vary with the location of the hotel [53].

There are several barriers to the adoption of environmental sustainability practices. One can be classified as internal and comprises organizational culture, management attitudes, lack of resources, implementation, understanding, and perception. The second is external, such as economic issues, certifiers, and institutional support [25]. Chan et al. [2] present the classification of these barriers in eight dimensions: (1) resources, (2) understanding and perception, (3) implementation, (4) company attitudes and culture, (5) auditors, (6) economic capacity of the hotel, (7) institutional weaknesses, and (8) support and guid-

ance. These authors have adopted this classification to investigate barriers to sustainability practices in the hotel sector when focusing on small and medium-sized hotels. They find that a lack of knowledge, skills, professional guidance, lack of resources and auditors, uncertainty about the results, and implementation and maintenance costs are the main barriers.

Companies are continually committed to behaving ethically and contributing to economic development that improves the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society in general [33]. The idea is to generate a "positive impact on society and the environment" through interactions with key stakeholders such as employees, customers, investors, and suppliers [54]. Kramer and Porter [55] state that the focus of successful companies is on the concept of "shared values". Shared values refer to the policies and practices that improve a company's competitiveness while promoting social, environmental, and economic conditions in the communities where the company operates. Social sustainability practices also include local initiatives related to alleviating education and poverty [6,49], charitable donations [6,56], voluntary actions [6,57], creating long-term partnerships with suppliers, treating all consumers fairly, providing high-quality services and products and a safe environment for consumers, and organizing activities with local community [6].

2.3. Motivations for Sustainability Practices

Organizations adopt environmental and social sustainability practices in response to external pressures from stakeholders [58]. Many hotels and other hospitality companies implement environmental programs to save energy and water, reduce waste, and improve their environmental performance in response to growing pressure from environmentally conscious customers, local governments, business partners, and shareholders [2,25]. Other motivations for hotels to adopt these practices are entering new markets, wanting to keep up with competitors, the influence of suppliers, and social pressures in the countries where the company operates [59]. Cost reduction and efficiency, and internal forces (e.g., management convictions, organizational culture) can also be motivators that underlie the adoption of sustainability practices [25].

It is important to stress that the successful adoption of environmental practices in the service industry depends on the involvement of employees, as they are responsible for putting them into practice [59]. As Boley and Uysal [39] argue, with increasing competition in a globalized world, tourist destinations and hospitality companies that do not adopt this philosophy do not have the potential to compete with their main competitors. Social sustainability aspects are influenced more by employees and NGOs, while the adoption of environmental sustainability practices are influenced more by other stakeholders, government, competitors, and clients [60].

2.4. Benefits of Implementing Sustainability Practices

Sustainable tourism refers to a level of tourism activities that can be maintained in the long term because it results in a net benefit to the social, economic, natural, and cultural environments of the area where it occurs [61]. Empirical studies analyzing the relationship between environmental performance and the economic performance of tourism enterprises show consistent evidence that it is worth being environmentally conscious [62]. The adoption of sustainability practices has positive effects on the performance of organizations at various levels, such as employee satisfaction [33], company reputation [31], improving the image, and loyalty of key stakeholders, that in turn provides long-term competitive advantages [42]. The benefits of sustainability for companies can be tangible benefits in the form of reduced costs and risks of doing business as well as through intangible benefits in the form of increased brand reputation, increased attractiveness of talent, and increased competitiveness [22]. There is also evidence of a positive relationship between sustainability and organizational performance, and the importance of employee empowerment and teamwork in achieving environmental improvement [23].

Managers also invest in the environmental development of their hotels to improve public relations and to promote better relations with local communities [63]. Robin et al. [17] show that adopting environmental practices is beneficial to the hotel and tourism industry. A proactive environmental strategy positively affects organizational competitiveness and overall financial performance [17]. Kleindorfer et al. [64] demonstrate that environmental practices in the hospitality sector increase profitability by improving customer satisfaction and loyalty. Increased profitability is associated with increased demand for green products and services in the global market [65].

The adoption of environmental and social programs is complex, and the implementation of sustainability programs is more than just a technical process that requires redesigning organizations according to organizational capabilities [66]. As Golini et al. [66] state, social and environmental programs are expensive, and companies find it difficult to commit to these practices because the benefits must outweigh the costs. Chan and Hawkins [67] say that the biggest challenge in promoting environmental programs in hotels is to get people to invest emotionally in these ideas and change their behavior.

2.5. Sustainability from a Customer Perspective

In recent decades, there has been increasing pressure on companies to pay more attention to the environmental and resource consequences of the products and services they offer and the processes they implement [66]. Hotel customers are increasingly recognizing the importance of environmental awareness and expect hospitality companies to follow environmentally friendly practices [68]. There is growing concern about the impact of their choices on the environment [57], as the customer plays an increasingly important role in environmental sustainability initiatives [69].

The credibility of a place that is and promotes itself as sustainable has been highlighted by several authors as one of the motivations of customers to choose their holiday location [47]. Chan et al. [2] say that hotel customers, especially those who are environmentally friendly, are increasingly demanding environmentally designed sustainable hotels, while some customers are willing to pay a higher price for sustainable hotel facilities. Guests are constantly increasing their awareness of energy efficiency and often choose the option of using the same towels and sheets during their stay rather than incurring the environmental cost of washing them every day [22].

Robin et al. [17] say that it is impossible for tourists to experience the desired holiday before visiting, which highlights the importance of the destination's image because it influences consumers during decision-making. The same authors state that the consumer does not consider it necessary to find out about the ecological quality of a hotel before visiting it, nor about the presence of measures certifying that it has implemented sustainable practices.

Many consumers feel that staying in "green" hotels can have an adverse effect on the comfort and luxury aspects that hospitality has to offer as an experience [9,10]. The introduction of new practices and technology means that consumers can continue to experience without having to compromise their expectations of comfort and service [11]. However, studies carried out by the International Hotels Environment Initiative (IHEI) show that 90% of hotel guests prefer to stay in an environmentally friendly hotel [70]. Moreover, in their study, Amatulli et al. [8] show that a sustainability-focused communication (versus a customer service-focused) in the context of luxury hospitality leads to a higher willingness to book a room because it enhances consumers' perception about the luxury hotel's integrity.

2.6. Sustainability Practices and Performance

The adoption of a proactive stance towards the environment and the adoption of appropriate environmental management tools are vital to the value creation process [22]. The initial moves to use environmental practices in international hotel management have focused on cost reduction initiatives and government regulations [70]. It is during the introduction phase of environmental practices that investment is greatest in order to make operations environmentally friendly, thus, having an impact on cost efficiency [70].

However, reducing operating costs increases profits and improves competitiveness in the tourism market [22].

Adopting CSR practices can be an effective lever to facilitate compliance with legal or regulatory constraints [71]. Further, it can improve both short-term and long-term financial performance of companies [33] that contributes to higher guest satisfaction, higher job satisfaction among employees, and a lower environmental and social footprint associated with being sustainable [39]. It can also help achieve better safety standards and healthier working conditions [59].

The application of more efficient methods of water and energy consumption, waste recycling, and the consequent reduction in a company's operating cost, has direct effects on its operating performance [14,59]. These practices provide better operational performance by the company, such as lower cost and better quality and speed of delivery, which increases customer satisfaction and improves the reputation of the company. Both operational performance and reputation improvement increase the competitive position of the company and indeed its financial performance [59]. Golini et al. [66] stress that the implementation of sustainability programs is more than just a technical process and requires, instead, the redesign of organizations according to their capacities. Greening hotel services means building additional value that offers alternative opportunities for differentiation [72]. Alonso-Almeida et al. [14] find a positive and significant effect of environmental practices on financial performance. Regardless of the type of environmental practices implemented, even in small companies, these results due to cost reductions and increase in sales are unanimous in the literature [9].

A sustainable services strategy will result in success if the characteristics highlighted by the company are authentic, credible, and environmentally relevant [72]. The advantage of differentiation usually arises from the perception that the product or service is more valuable, or unique, in the eyes of customers [73] because personality, experiences, and unique relationships of a company are difficult to imitate [74]. According to Alonso-Almeida et al. [14], the capacity to adapt, survive, and provide adequate organizational resources to deal with threats and seize opportunities is of vital importance in the scenario faced by hotels. These resources reflect changes in customer needs, higher expectations of value and quality, and an increasingly competitive environment.

Companies involved in CSR-related activities can create resources or capacities, which allow them to continue their economic activities for a long period [34]. This ability leads to increased competitive advantage for hotel companies [49] that promote a stronger reputation among clients [73]. This reputation leads to attracting and retaining clients, thereby enriching the hotel's service offerings [72] and is beneficial to financial performance [17]. An analysis of the relationship between financial performance and investment in sustainable initiatives shows that tourism enterprises are more committed to the environment than enterprises in other sectors and that the tourism enterprises with the highest financial performance have higher environmental performance [73]. Yoon et al. [68] demonstrate that CSR can promote the affection, motivation, and trust of employees. A team-based organization allows collaborative activities that create joint motivation to achieve sustainability goals [74].

Alonso-Almeida et al. [14] found that the adoption of social sustainability practices has a positive significant effect on market success factors and financial performance. The implementation of social practices related to employees such as learning and career development opportunities, diversity training, work-life balance options, among others, increase the morale and commitment of employees, which in turns increases profitability and market share.

3. Methodology

The empirical research is based on qualitative research design; more specifically, a case study is used as the method because it has the advantage of applicability to human situations that are contemporary contexts of real life [75]. In management and strategy

research, interest in case studies as a method for generating and testing theory has increased recently [76]. The purpose of a case study is to gather detailed and systematic information about a fact and is a methodological procedure that highlights contextual understandings without forgetting representativeness [77]. The case study approach is not a method per se, but a research strategy [77]. The case study should be considered in a situation where the researcher has little control over events and when the aim is contemporary phenomena inserted into some real life contexts [77].

We used different methods to collect data for this study: a semi-structured interview, visits to the hotel where we could make direct non-participatory observations of the various practices implemented by the hotel, and photographs were taken to prove their existence. In order to triangulate the information, one researcher of this work also examined documents and consulted the hotel's website as well as other websites with online reviews (e.g., Booking.com) with the aim of understanding whether the clients in their reviews mentioned any dissatisfaction with the implementation of environmental management practices. In order to complement the information from the interview, several emails were also exchanged to collect additional information. Appendix A presents the contribution of each method of data collection.

Semi-structured interviews have aroused a great deal of interest and have been of frequent use. This interest is associated with the expectation that interviewees are more likely to express their views in a relatively openly designed interview situation than in a standardized interview or a questionnaire [75]. Although it was more interesting from a methodological point of view to have more semi-structured interviews, only one interview was made with the hotel manager since he was considered the only key informant in view of the information regarding the adoption of environmental and social practices. The semi-structured interview was carried out at the company's offices on 19 July 2019, at the end of the morning, and lasted about 90 min.

To facilitate data collection, an interview script was developed (see Appendix B), based on the literature used for this study. This script highlighted the sustainability practices that the tourist industry had adopted and put into practice, particularly in the luxury hospitality sector. The interview was organized with a focus on the particularities of the hotel, the environmental and social sustainability practices adopted, and the results obtained from their adoption.

This study analyzes the case of the Hotel Casa de Palmela that the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests (ICNF) recognizes as a nature tourism hotel. The Hotel Casa de Palmela started in 2016 as nature tourism after the requalification of the facilities at Quinta do Esteval. This house has a history dating back to the seventeenth century and is located in the natural park of Arrábida. This park is considered a biogenetic reserve in the peninsula of Setúbal. It was also in the year 2016 that the Paris Agreement entered into force and a record 175 countries ratified the agreement that aimed at slowing down global warming.

Nature Tourism is a product composed of establishments, environmental activities, and accommodation services. It integrates a variety of practices that range from accommodation in traditional houses to interpretation, contemplation, and enjoyment of nature in its different aspects (e.g., walking, cycling, horseback riding, bird watching, canoeing, climbing, orientation, etc.). These activities aim to promote the occupation of the free time of tourists and visitors through the knowledge and enjoyment of the natural and cultural values proper to the protected areas.

The creation of the Casa de Palmela demonstrates experience, vision, and character with a commitment to perfection and quality in services, where the concept of sustainability is present. The hotel's purpose is the experience in comfort surrounded by stunning nature, and a combination of privacy and nature that, thus, contributes to the sustainability of the environment in which it is integrated through principles of economic, environmental, and social commitment.

A five star hotel seeks to provide an experience for families who are looking for freedom and rest. In this setting, they can enjoy the mountain landscape of Arrábida and the vineyards of the house in an atmosphere of calm and perfect symbiosis with nature. Guests can get a well-deserved rest in contact with nature, walk through the Quinta do Esteval, or take a dip in the turquoise waters of the region. They can also enjoy free parking and access to free Wi-Fi, a spa and wellness center, outdoor swimming pool, and lessons about local culture. Further, guests can visit a local cheese factory where the famous Queijo de Azeitão DOP is produced. They can get to know the history, tools, and techniques of artisan production of this local delicacy, and the well-known handicraft work, crockery, and tiles developed in the region.

The hotel contains the Zimbral restaurant that specializes in Portuguese cuisine with a selection of seasonal and fresh local products whenever possible. The hotel is located on a 70-hectare farm that consists of three buildings, which provide different types of accommodation. It has 23 rooms, of which 3 are suites, 5 are junior suites, and 15 are doubles. It currently employs 33 direct employees. The hotel has a concept of luxury, which seeks to promote a cooperative relationship between guests and nature.

4. Findings

This section presents the main findings of the empirical study. The presentation of the results is divided by topics with the aim of determining the final conclusions, either as a consequence of environmental sustainability practices or as a consequence of social sustainability practices.

4.1. Environmental Sustainability Practices

The Casa de Palmela obtained its permit from the ICNF that annually monitors its maintenance to verify whether the environmental rules to which the hotel has committed itself are being complied with. As it is not possible to build in the natural park, the hotel was renovated using unusual construction and landscape architecture project. It was required to do an environmental impact study and whenever it was necessary to change a watercourse, the Portuguese environmental agency had to give a positive opinion. Sewers, paths, gardens, and vineyards, everything, had to be done in accordance with environmental standards. This project was required to conserve a community of bats that is located in the park. Their impact study had to show what they had to protect in terms of the fauna and flora that served as food for this community. Some areas were fenced off to promote this activity. The hotel felt that the ICNF did not provide support to promote the project's evolution. The first phase would be to protect the area, the second would verify the evolution of the project (positively or negatively), and the third phase would present the project to the clients. The hotel committed to an alternative for verification of the second phase by offering to partner with BirdWatching associations, because the farm and the park offer excellent conditions for this type of activity.

With regard to the adoption of environmental sustainability practices, the hotel adopted measures to reduce energy and water consumption, waste separation, food leftovers, consumption of ecological products, prevention of CO_2 emissions, and laundry. However, the hotel does not have any environmental management certification such as ISO 14001 and the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS). Regarding that, the hotel manager says, "The hotel does not have environmental certification, namely ISO 14001. It is recognized by the ICNF as nature tourism, and we believe that environmental certification is not necessary, as we employ equivalent practices for correct environmental performance" (Interviewee).

The genesis of the hotel has always been environmental values; as such its objective has been to preserve to the maximum what nature can offer in the space where it is located by cleaning and conserving the surrounding areas, protecting natural spaces in order to promote diversity and abundance (ecosystems, fauna, flora, etc.), and promoting the unique and attractive natural landscapes.

4.1.1. Practices for Reducing Water Consumption

The hotel obtains all the hot water it needs by exclusively using thermodynamic solar panels. This technology generates hot water up to 55° without sun exposure and even during the night. Low flow taps and showers are used throughout the hotel along with flushing cisterns with selection of flush quantity. In the kitchen, the use of low-flow taps and built-in sanders were introduced with an 80-L tank in 2017. Better water management during the restaurant's periods of operation has led to significant improvements in reducing water consumption. Currently, consumption is between 200 and 250 L per meal. Before this implementation, water consumption during each meal was around 1000 L.

Other systems adopted are the purification of water served to guests and the use of reusable bottles (see Appendix C, Figure A1) as the administrator says, "the water served to guests is purified by a filtering system on the farm, and served in reusable bottles. Before the purchase of 0.5 L bottles, the average consumption was about 500 bottles per month, plus all the container service and breaks. With this system we managed to reduce consumption by ten times, because the bottles are always the same. Currently, we use 70 bottles that are washed daily and filled by the filtering system, and we supply water with and without gas". In the opinion of the manager, "Guests are aware of this solution" (Interviewee). The water that feeds the garden irrigation circuit comes from wells that already existed on the farm, and are not subject to any treatment. Watering the green spaces is always done during the night to reduce evaporation and, thus, there is greater use by the plants that also ensures that some water returns to the groundwater. All the water used outside the hotel comes from these sources, except the swimming pool water, which by law has to be from the public supply network. Further, the whole system is regularly checked for leaks, which is the most common measure to save water [47]. To reduce evaporation in the pool, a cover is used whenever possible.

As mentioned earlier in the literature review, hotels operate 24 h a day, which makes them one of the top consumption organizations. Thus, despite the various measures taken by the hotel to reduce water consumption, consumption has increased due to an increase of about 20% in the number of guests from 2017 to 2018. As mentioned in the literature, the number of overnight stays sold, meals served, and the amount of laundry washed internally are factors that contribute to water and energy consumption in the hotel [45].

4.1.2. Energy Reduction Practices

All the lighting in the hotel is done by means of LED lamps, which significantly reduces electrical energy consumption, as referred to in the literature [47,48]. Outside, twilight switches are used, which are only activated in the absence of natural light. These switches are associated with clocks that switch off the lighting at times set by an employee of the hotel. As mentioned in the literature by [47], movement sensors that switch the lights on and off and other electrical devices are practices used by hotels to reduce energy consumption. In rooms, the hotel uses a card-key system in which the lighting only comes on when the card is inserted in a base of its own and switches off automatically when the card is removed from that base. This practice is mentioned in the literature as one of the most common in hotels to reduce energy consumption [49].

The investment in alternative energies was also mentioned by the hotel manager: "we are considering investing in solar panels for electric energy production, in order to be totally independent, and it is also planned to install an electric charging station in partnership with TESLA by the end of 2019" (Interviewee). All common areas have motion sensors that turn on and off when necessary. As the hotel is a seventeenth century house, some walls are 1.10 m thick, all the windows are PVC and have triple glass, which helps to conserve heating and cooling. The walls are all white, which improves the natural luminosity, which is a practice also mentioned in the literature that helps to reduce the need for artificial lighting [47]. A heat pump system with air conditioning reduces electrical consumption by about 70% compared to conventional systems.

Regarding the refrigeration of products, the hotel manager states that "the refrigeration of food products currently represents the hotel's largest expenditure on electricity, although they are efficient appliances, they are in high demand in the high season, so in the low season some are turned off, in order to reduce this cost they have been contracted with the most regular suppliers of food products, which have a validity of 5 days" (Interviewee). The refrigeration is also identified as one of the main sources of energy consumption in the hotel [48]. With sustainability practices in place, management estimates the reduction in annual energy costs due to the implementation of the above-mentioned practices to be between 100,000 and 150,000 euros per year.

As can be seen, energy expenses follow the trend of other consumptions due to the number of guests growing higher from year to year with the same forecasted for 2019. According to information from the hotel management, energy consumption in 2019 would be EUR 2000 per month on average. As of the date of the interview, consumption was practically balanced with consumption in 2018. As the occupancy rate from 2018 to 2019 would increase by 40%, the implementation of environmental practices contributed to reducing energy consumption.

4.1.3. Waste Separation

The separation (sorting) of waste is done inside the hotel, and currently the waste is not weighed. Own containers are used for waste separation throughout the hotel area. In this type of tourist activity, some types of materials, such as disposables, paper, and plastic, cannot be used to obtain approval. The hotel manager states that, "as some guests like to make picnics there is a great temptation to use this kind of articles, and if in some event it is shown that these kinds of materials have been used and discarded in nature the hotel is the main victim, so all the articles used in this activity are reusable, such as cutlery, cloth napkins, glass water bottles, etc." (Interviewee). At the hotel's request, a collection point has been set up for the competent authorities. All rubbish is properly packed and separated, thus, preventing access by wild animals. The used food-oils and fats from the restaurant, as well as batteries, are collected by a specialized company. With this management, the hotel only needs a single pickup of rubbish per day, which helps to reduce operational costs, reduce the time the rubbish is on the premises, and, thus, prevents the appearance of pests.

4.1.4. Food Leftovers

As far as restaurant leftovers are concerned, legal practices are very demanding, and leftovers are not offered to anyone. There has been an attempt to make agreements with unused food collection companies, but they require the food to be vacuum-packed, which is difficult for the hotel. Therefore, it could not make any donations. Today, the leftovers go to the farm animals.

Another solution was food recovery. As the hotel manager says, "for example, the summer period has a catering facility where the food is cold based, i.e., everything left over from breakfast is used again during lunch. Some leftovers are used to make starters for dinner, thus, reducing waste. The food is also used in the canteen to feed the employees" (Interviewee).

4.1.5. Ecological Products

With regard to ecological purchases, the hotel manager states that "cleaning products are bought in a house specializing in hotel products, at the time of purchase care is taken to purchase more ecological products, as waste water goes into skeptical pits, and as the water will be absorbed again by the earth care is taken to pollute it as little as possible". The use of chemicals is also avoided whenever possible as mentioned by the hotel manager: "swimming pools are treated with salt (salt electrolysis) and do not require any chemicals" (Interviewee). The purchase of ecological products and the use of cleaning products that are not harmful to the environment are two practices adopted by small service companies to protect the environment [59].

4.1.6. Prevention of CO_2 Emissions

Regarding initiatives related to the reduction of CO_2 emissions, the administrator said, "the hotel has partnerships with companies that promote bike tours, in which the tourist chooses the route to take in Portugal by bicycle, and stays in the hotels that have joined this modality" (Interviewee). Inside the property, the hotel promotes walks or bicycle and horseback riding.

4.1.7. Laundry

One of the practices mentioned in the literature to reduce water, energy, and detergent consumption is the reduction in towel changes [22]. This is also stated by the hotel manager: "towels in guest rooms are only changed on request and not daily" (Interviewee). Towels are first dried, because for the same load of the machine it is possible to wash more clothes with the same amount of detergent, the same amount of water, and the same amount of electricity. As this part is outsourced with this simple gesture, it was possible to reduce the number of trips for the collection and delivery of clothes, also contributing to a reduction in CO_2 emissions, with the adoption of this practice the laundry costs were reduced by 50%.

The reduction in the consumption of materials is also highlighted by the hotel manager who states: "The hotel laundry has a guarantee, after reaching a number of washes it no longer offers the same quality, so with the reduction in the number of washes the laundry stays within the hotel's quality standards for longer and the need to buy new clothes is lower" (Interviewee).

4.2. Raising Customers' Awareness of Environmental Issues

The hotel tries to raise awareness of environmental issues. This issue was mentioned by the hotel manager: "for guest information, a booklet on environmental practices is used, which explains that the hotel is a nature tourism hotel. A briefing on environmental practices, the nature park, etc., is made at check in" (Interviewee).

The hotel has a staff member who is dedicated to Guest Relations to explain to guests individually what the activities and points of the hotel are, and also to provide information on environmental practices. In all rooms, there is information to make guests aware of how to reduce water (see Appendix C, Figure A2) and electricity consumption.

The manager's opinion raising awareness among guests is possible: "the hotel considers that if it is well explained to the guests, everyone accepts it, because the space is very careful, green, undamaged, and has been maintained for many years; as such, no barriers to the adoption of environmental practices are recognized" (Interviewee). All personal care products in the rooms are supplied in reusable glass jars, and the hotel has so far had no complaints from customers.

4.3. Social Sustainability Practices

The Casa de Palmela is associated with its culture and practical strategy of social responsibility. This association can be proven by the several social sustainability practices adopted by the hotel.

Regarding the use of the park, although private, the administrator says that: "in the park is not allowed any kind of fence or room, anyone can circulate inside the park even being almost 100% private. It is considered positive because most people have the conscience to take care and watch. Signs have been placed with welcome messages, for nature conservation, and requests for information to be delivered at the reception of the hotel in case they encounter something strange or damaged. An action with very positive effects, as the users were soon thanked through the social networks" (Interviewee).

The manger considers that the quality of the services, the experiences they provide the guests, the cooperative relationship between guests and nature, and above all the friendliness and closeness of people are factors that differentiate the hotel. These factors demonstrate that the hotel is consumer-oriented and that it provides consumers with

high-quality services, two of the practices included in the consumer's dimension of social practices presented by Modica et al. [6].

With the start of the activity in 2016, the involvement with local communities and projects of a social nature became a concern. The hotel has an agreement with the Portuguese Association of Parents and Friends of the Mentally Disabled Citizen (AP-PACDM), which collaborates with people with some type of disability and promotes the integration of these people into working life. The hotel welcomes these people to accompany the hotel staff in their daily tasks such as gardening, cleaning, helping in the kitchen, or serving in the restaurant. The manager says that, "it allows giving a different view of the situations that society has, and allows these people later to find work solutions. This practice is done every year since the hotel is in operation, and it starts in spring until the end of summer, as it is the established period of these associations" (Interviewee).

The hotel management is committed to a new project that also covers these people: "there is currently a new project, which will start at the end of the summer of 2019 and consists of the planting of vegetables. It is planned to build social vegetable gardens, not to give them up for their own cultivation, but to serve as integration for these people and also to help sell the products. The land, water, and some materials will be the responsibility of the hotel, the rest as sponsors for seeds, marketing, packaging, etc., will be the responsibility of the association. It is a social project within the hotel in order to communicate to the guests, as some of the food they will consume may have been produced by that community. Some of these foods may even be sold to customers" (Interviewee).

The hotel is very involved and committed to the development of local communities. All the cheeses come from the region, and the wines are primarily from the region. The hotel uses smaller, more artisan cellars, and it goes to the Setúbal market, where it also gets supplies. Whenever possible, it only buys fruit from the region. In catering, they promote Portuguese cuisine, the chefs try to innovate by presenting the same Portuguese dish in a different way. There is also the concern to use organic products as the manager states: "organic products such as honey, wine and tea are produced on the farm and presented to guests for their consumption. The presentation of these products in the restaurant is still a challenge, as the law still doesn't allow it" (Interviewee). These practices can be integrated into the community dimension of social practices presented by Modica et al. [6]. Twice a year, practical team building and coaching are provided to raise employees' awareness of safety, the environment, and quality, to ensure that they carry out their activities correctly. As stated in the literature, training helps to achieve better safety standards and healthier working conditions [2]. The hotel has a program for improvement and suggestions, not only in the team building and coaching program, but also by recommending that employees write improvement recommendations anonymously or not.

Once again, points that differentiate the Casa de Palmela from the competition are the experience of the place that they try to communicate to the guests. Both environmental and operational performances depend on motivated employees that are involved as a team, are confident, and with a committed management. The management considers that a good environment is necessary, and this is gained with time, as people get to know each other and integrate: "it is necessary to have discipline and demand, but there must always be compromises in some points, to achieve consensus and maintain balance, and this then emerges in the people and the way they perform their functions. The sympathy of the collaborators cannot be forced; it is a quality that can be achieved with a good working environment. The salary itself is not enough, in the team building no one was missing, even the employees who were off duty, were there because they like it" (Interviewee).

Whenever it is necessary to make any communication that is related to the strategy or changes in operations, employees are informed through a meeting. The management, thus, tries to get people to make the decision, as it considers that their opinion is important. As Bohdanowicz et al. [54] state, this seeks to strengthen the atmosphere of partnership and fair treatment, increasing employee satisfaction at work.

The director was also asked about gender policy: "in relation to gender policy we consider that the important thing is the curriculum, the function for which you are hiring and the skills you have, people should perform the functions by merit and not by obligation. We currently have a 50% percentage of employees of both sexes" (Interviewee).

All these practices are included in the employee's dimensions of social practices presented by Modica et al. [6].

The image of the hotel is evaluated by its customers on websites such asBooking.com and Google. At the time of the interview, the hotel was rated with a score of 9.3 out of 10 on Booking.com and 5 out of 5 on TripAdvisor Portugal, which the management considers very positive. The literature states that the adoption of environmental practices improves image and creates market differentiation [41].

The main strength of small hotels compared to their larger counterparts and hotel chains is the personal touch, that is, the ability to provide an individualized service [78]. Tourists seek luxury experiences as a temporary escape from their daily realities [11]; often looking for accommodation with a homely atmosphere and services tailored to their needs [78]. [77] Luxury in tourism has shifted from conspicuous consumption to the search for authenticity and unique experiences [6].

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

In recent years there has been a general increase in the number of travelers who want unique experiences and personalized service rather than traditional luxury hotels. Promoting the tailored nature of luxury travel is already an important part of marketing [7]. Climate change related to environmental issues and constraints makes governments and industry stakeholders more aware of the need for change [33]. As a result, the hotel industry is becoming increasingly responsible for the environment, paying more attention to energy efficiency, committing to incorporating environmental policies, managing human resources, and providing environmental education to its employees [22]. Ecological orientation has become a prerequisite for achieving sustainable tourism development [26,27].

The main objective of this work was to investigate what social and environmental sustainability practices were adopted by the Casa de Palmela and what results were obtained from their adoption, according to the management's perception. The type of tourist activity offered by the Casa de Palmela highlights the environmental dimension as one of the main factors for its development. Since the requalification, and beginning of activities as nature tourism, the practices of environmental sustainability have contributed to a superior operational and financial performance. The initial investment already included technology to reduce water and energy consumption and has had proven benefits. This is considered an advantage over other hotel units; even if the reintroduction of more advanced and efficient technologies was necessary. The results of the study make it clear that the Casa de Palmela has implemented environmental sustainability practices that are mainly basic environmental practices that are aimed at reducing energy and water consumption and waste, the purchase of ecological products, the reduction of environmentally harmful products, and waste selection. According to the literature, these environmental practices are the most adopted by the hotels [9,25]. These practices have a direct impact on cost reduction [59]. The hotel has also implemented advanced environmental practices such as solar water heating, a long-term environmental approach, the use of environmentally efficient appliances, biosphere protection activities, the installation of a charging station for electric cars, the creation of green products, the use of well water, and the environmentally friendly drying of clothes.

In terms of social sustainability practices, the agreement with the Portuguese Association of Parents and Friends of the Mentally Handicapped Citizen (APPACDM) should be highlighted. This agreement aims to receive people with some kind of disability or incapacity and promoting the integration of these people into working life. The concern is to reinforce the atmosphere of partnership and fair treatment that increases the satisfaction

in the work of the employees. It is important to stress that the successful adoption of environmental practices in service industries depends on the involvement of employees, as they are responsible for putting them into practice [59].

The quality of service is essentially "an exchange of human actions and behaviour" ([79], p. 374) in which the aptitude and attitude of employees, and the way they behave, have a significant impact on the client's evaluation of the service and, finally, on their satisfaction [80]. The Casa de Palmela is very committed to the performance of its employees and provides training and includes them in decision-making. They also have an improvement program and suggestions to ensure that the fulfillment of their duties is done efficiently, giving continuity to the benefits obtained so far, because good management practices positively affect the rating of the company's CSR [49].

The hotel is currently engaged in the creation of an association with some entities in order to develop tourism in the region where it is located. It wants to create a brand and a destination, which involves the name Arrábida as a clear sign of commitment to the long-term environmental approach. Everything indicates that the strategy of commitment to the activity of nature tourism was the right one.

5.2. Managerial Implications

This study is important for hotel managers because it shows what practices can be adopted at the environmental level to reduce energy and water consumption as well as to obtain better economic results with their adoption as a set of practices that can be used as benchmarking. Considering all the sustainability practices adopted and described throughout this work, the hotel management estimates that it achieves savings of 40% in the total sum of consumption in relation to the budget forecast for 2019. This study also shows managers that the adoption of environmental practices can be considered an investment rather than a one-off cost that, thus, might reduce their resistance to adopting them. One of the reasons identified in the literature for not implementing the practices is related to the costs of implementing them [81]. This study goes some way in helping managers reconsider this issue. It also contradicts the idea that sustainability practices in luxury hotels dilute the perceived comfort in the eyes of clients [9–11,41], and the image and prestige of the hotel [9,10] by showing that, despite the implementation of these practices, the level of client satisfaction remains high, the image of the hotel is good, and the occupancy rate continues to increase. Thus, our study highlights compatibility between luxury and environmental sustainability practices in the hospitality context. This "positive" view is more in line with recent studies that explain the positive reaction of consumers when learning that a luxury hotel is committed to sustainability [8], and studies that show that consumers favor luxury hotels that communicate their focus on environmental sustainability [8]. This study also shows that the environmental strategy as referred to in the literature is a key factor for the hotel's long-term competitiveness.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

The fact that this is a case study of a single hotel unit limits it, as it does not allow the results to be generalized. It would be interesting to see whether the practices adopted by the Casa de Palmela are also adopted by other luxury hotels and compare the results obtained with them. As such, a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire to collect data may be used to provide additional confirmation and generalization. In addition, data collection from different regions or countries would be useful in comparing the results of this study. A longitudinal study would help to better understand how the degree of implementation of sustainability practices (basic and advanced) affects the performance levels achieved. The coronavirus (COVID 19) pandemic has had tremendous effects on the hospitality sector [82]. However, as stated by Zenker and Kock ([83], p. 1), "not all effects are worth of researching or novel". Future research on sustainability practices in the luxury tourism industry should focus on long-term and indirect effects to grasp the full impact of the coronavirus pandemic [83].

VP GMS AD

Appendix A

Table A1. Contribution of each data collection technique.

Data collection technique	Contribuition
Semi-structured interview and emails	Understanding the environmental and social practices adopted by the hotel, the management's perception of the benefits and results from their adoption, how the hotel contributes to customers' awareness of environmental issues, what specific environmental sustainability practices have had to be adopted by the hotel due to the fact that it is located in a natural park.
Direct observation (visit the hotel)	Observation of the various practices implemented by the hotel and taking photographs to prove their existence.
Document analysis (Hotel's website, websites with online reviews, reports with energy and water consumption, permit granted by the Instituto de Conservação da Natureza e Floresta (ICNF), booklets)	Understanding whether the clients in their reviews mentioned any dissatisfaction with the implementation of environmental management practices. Confirm the results obtained in terms of cost reduction. Understanding what specific environmental sustainability practices have had to be adopted by the hotel due to the fact that it is located in a natural park. Understanding how the Hotel's website promotes environmental campaigns. Understanding how the hotel communicates its environmental policy to customers and raises customers' awareness of environmental issues.

Appendix B

Interview Script
Introduction
(Adopted from [33,40,41])

(1) I would like to know if your hotel Casa de Palmela has any corporate social responsibility policies? Or any environmental policies?
(2) To what extent do you consider that improving social responsibility and reducing environmental impacts is associated with the hotel's culture?
(3) Is improving social responsibility and reducing environmental impacts part of the hotel's strategic planning?

(4) Was an environmental impact study carried out before the restructuring? What is the reason for this study having been carried out?

(5) Have employees had any training on environmental and social sustainability practices?

(6) In your opinion, do you think that clients value the implementation of environmental sustainability practices? Or social sustainability practices? Or on the contrary, are they resistant to the changes implemented?

(7) In your opinion, how does the Casa de Palmela differentiate itself from its competitors?

Environmental Sustainability Practices
(Adopted from [2,29,40,48,49])

(1) Does the hotel have any environmental system certification? If yes, when did you obtain it? What is the main reason for seeking environmental certification of the hotel establishment?

(2) What specific environmental sustainability practices have had to be adopted due to the fact that the hotel is located in a natural park?

(3) What environmental sustainability practices have been adopted since the hotel began operating?

Which of the following practices have been adopted by your hotel?

- Practices to reduce water consumption. If yes, how?
- Practices to reduce energy consumption. If yes, how?
- Practices to purchase more environmentally friendly cleaning products. If yes, how?
- Practices for managing food waste. If yes, how?
- Practices to avoid or reduce the waste of fresh products. If yes, how?
- Waste separation practices. If yes, how?
- Practices to promote environmental information (education) to guests. If yes, how?
- Does your hotel establishment have an environmental management policy that promotes the adoption of environmental practices with suppliers? If yes, what actions have been taken (reduction of plastic packaging, smaller quantities, fewer deliveries, etc.)? If yes, how?

Social Sustainability Practices
(Adopted from [33,37,41])

(1) What practices has the hotel implemented to promote conscious consumption?

(2) How does the hotel manage seasonal fluctuations in employee needs? (Are they transferred to other units, assigned other duties, hire temporary workers for peak season, etc.?)

(3) Do you try to hire employees from the community where the hotel is located?

(4) What is the hotel's hiring policy in terms of gender?

(5) What is the hotel's involvement with local communities (contribution to the local economy, purchase of products for hotel consumption, handicraft, etc.)?

(6) Are employees involved/informed in changes made at strategy level? How are they involved (e.g., meetings, email)?

(7) Does the hotel encourage its employees to make more conscious choices in relation to consumption, health, community, and planet? How?

(8) Does the hotel have an improvement suggestion program for employees? If yes, in your opinion, do you think that this program has led to an improvement in employee satisfaction? Did any of the proposals made by the employees refer to improvements in environmental management? Or at the level of social responsibility? Were these improvement proposals implemented?

(9) In the hotel's marketing campaigns are environmental campaigns promoted?

Performance
(Adopted from [17,22,42,62])

(1) What are the environmental performance indicators that your hotel evaluates annually?

(2) Does your hotel set targets (annual, quarterly, etc.) to improve these indicators?

(3) In your opinion, do you think that the adoption of environmental management practices contributes to improving the image of the hotel? And social practices?
(4) Have the environmental management practices adopted by your hotel allowed the hotel to reduce operating costs?
(5) Which practices, in your opinion, have contributed the most to cost reduction?
(6) Do you consider that the implementation of sustainability practices has contributed to increase/decrease customer satisfaction towards the hotel? If yes, why?
(7) Do you consider that quality and efficiency have changed with the adoption of environmental practices? In what way?
(8) Do you consider that the implementation of sustainability practices has contributed to an increased level of employee satisfaction?

Appendix C

Figure A1. Reusable bottle for purified water.

Figure A2. Information to guests about the use and change of towels.

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