



23 JANUARI 2023

# THE IMPACT OF THE GREEN KEY CERTIFICATE

THE PERSPECTIVES OF DUTCH HOTELS ON THE EXPECTED AND ACTUAL  
EFFECT OF THE GREEN KEY CERTIFICATE

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## Executive summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the expected gains and the actual gains from implementing Green Key within a Dutch hotel compare. This was done by investigating different possible gains, the extent of the effect of Green Key, and the difference between large and small hotels. Qualitative research was used to come up with a framework existing out of the main gains of implementing sustainable certification: environmental gains, economic gains, social gains, and external gains. This framework was used as the basis of the questionnaire. With this data qualitative analyses, such as paired samples t-test and independent samples t-test were done. From this can be concluded that almost all hotels expect and experience environmental, economic, social, and external gains with the implementation of Green Key. The least expected and experienced are the economic gains. This research has added to the literature as it found that the expectations for the social gains and the economic gains are too high. Furthermore, it was found that large hotels expect Green Key to affect the social gains more than small hotels. In reality, small and large hotels experience the same effect of Green Key on all the gains.

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## Abbreviation list

GTBS – Green Tourism Business Scheme

SMEs – Small- and Medium-sized enterprises

SMHs – Small- and Medium-sized hotels

GHG – Green House Gas

EMS – Environmental Management System

## 1. Introduction

It has become increasingly popular to implement environmentally sustainable approaches within the tourism industry (Bučar et al., 2019). This is because tourism and climate change have a multimodal relationship, where they influence each other (Calabro & Vieri, 2014; Gössling et al., 2012). On the one hand, tourism contributes to climate change in terms of emitting Greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions (Pang et al., 2013), and consumes large amounts of resources (Bohdanowicz, 2009, as cited in Hsiao et al., 2018; Buunk & van der Werf, 2019). On the other hand, tourism is highly dependent on the attractiveness of the environment, and should therefore try to minimise its' impact (Calabro & Vieri, 2014; Rahman et al., 2012). By using environmentally sustainable approaches, such as ecolabels, sustainable certifications, or environmental management systems (EMS), in the tourism industry, this impact can be minimised. To get the certification companies will need to measure up to a set of environmental criteria that are assessed by a third party (Buckley, 2002). Ecolabeling and sustainable certifications can stimulate businesses to implement more sustainable practices within the company and its' management (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2012; Bohdanowicz & Martinac, 2003 as cited in Rattan, 2015).

The subsector within the tourism industry that implements the most sustainable certifications or ecolabels is the accommodation sector. Of all certifications awarded within the tourism industry, 68 percent goes out to accommodation, as this sector has standards that are the easiest to measure (Font & Bendell, 2002, as cited in Rattan, 2015). The use of sustainable certification within accommodations can help mitigate climate change as the industry has a significant impact. In total, the overnight tourism industry contributes around 4.4% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Peeters & Dubois, 2010). The accommodation sector has one of the largest CO<sub>2</sub> footprints within tourism, with 21%, after transport which contributes 72% of tourism's CO<sub>2</sub> footprint (Gössling & Peeters, 2015). Tourism accommodations do not only influence CO<sub>2</sub> emissions but are also a large consumer of drinking water, with around 350 L per guest night (Gössling & Peeters, 2015; Hadjidakou et al., 2013). Moreover, the hotel industry consumes major amounts of other natural resources and it discharges a significant amount of waste, which affects the sustainability of the environment (Bohdanowicz, 2009; Mungai & Irungu, 2013).

One of the benefits of a hotel having a sustainable certification is that it helps to decrease the aforementioned impacts on the environment. Yet this is not the sole benefit that is expected when a sustainable certification is implemented. The certification can also help increase the competitiveness of a business (Buckley, 2002; El Dief & Font, 2010; Segarra-Oña et al., 2012). Even more so, it will stimulate other hotels to also implement sustainable practices or certifications, for the sake of

staying competitive. Not only that but also other stakeholders of the hotel and society will be influenced to be more sustainable. Hotels, namely, operate at different spatial scales, local, regional, national, and global, and because they are buyers, suppliers, and employers they can have a positive influence on its stakeholders and society (Melissen et al., 2016). Next to this, implementing such certificates and environmental management practices can help bring down costs, and thus increase profit (Buunk & van der Werf, 2019; Gila et al., 2001). The costs will be reduced by implementing sustainable technologies that are more resource-efficient (Bagur-Femenias et al., 2016; Barberán et al., 2013; Hellmeister & Richins, 2019). However, investments are most of the time a necessity (Buunk & van der Werf, 2019).

Due to these investments mostly bigger (Hellmeister & Richins, 2019), and older firms adopt sustainable certification (Buunk & van der Werf, 2019). Notwithstanding, small hotels are still implementing sustainable certifications. Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are mostly motivated by protecting the environment, personal or lifestyle choices, improving society, and cost-saving (Font et al., 2016). While for larger companies the motivation lies foremost in cost-cutting and reputation management (Hellmeister & Richins, 2019).

The most popular certification scheme that is implemented within The Netherlands amongst the hotels is Green Key (Mzembe et al., 2020; Ngawenja Mzembe et al., 2021). For this certification, the motivation to implement can be seen to be based on personal values to help the environment and to increase the market share of the hotel (Mzembe et al., 2020).

There are expectations about what gains the implementation of sustainable certification in a hotel can bring. These expected gains can be seen as the reason to implement sustainable certification. Next to this, certifications in reality do have an impact and help obtain certain expected gains (Barberán et al., 2013; Buunk & van der Werf, 2019; Font et al., 2016; Gilmore et al., 2014; Parpairi, 2017; Segarra-Oña et al., 2012). On the contrary Mzembe et al. (2020) found that the expectation of influencing stakeholders by participating in the Green Key scheme did not match the reality amongst hotels, instigating hotels to leave the scheme.

### 1.1 Relevance

This research has scientific relevance as it will investigate what gains are expected to be obtained by hotels when implementing a sustainable certification and what gains are actually obtained when the certification is implemented. As stated by Mzembe et al. (2020), “it may be useful to conduct longitudinal studies that quantitatively investigate the sustainability and financial performance outcomes associated with adopting green certification schemes” (p. 1347). Even though this study will not look at it longitudinally, this study will partially fill in the gap by investigating the

environmental, social, and external outcomes associated with adopting green certification schemes. Secondly, it will investigate how the expected and actual benefits compare to one another. As Dunk et al. (2016) state, further research on the expectations of sustainable tourism should be done to get a consensus on the effect of a scheme and therefore increase scheme retention. Thirdly, a comparison between small- and medium-sized hotels (SMH) and large hotels will be made, as the two have different expected gains reasoning their implementation of sustainable certification. The main expectations of large hotels are mostly economic gains (Hellmeister & Richins, 2019), and for SMH the main expectations are protecting the environment and personal values (Font et al., 2016). Next to this, it is relevant to investigate the difference between large and small hotels that have an environmental certification to determine if there are significant differences in the impact of environmental certification (Bagur-Femenias et al., 2016).

Additionally, this research has management relevance. By investigating if the expected gains match reality the expectations can be managed. By managing the expectations of the clients a certification scheme can increase their retention (Dunk et al., 2016), as well as the ability to recruit members (Mzembe et al., 2020). It will show what relatively will be benefitted due to the implementation of sustainable certification. Based on the results of this research, hotels can make a more informed decision on whether or not to implement a sustainable certification.

## 1.2 Research questions

*How do the beforehand expected gains and the actual gains from implementing a sustainable certification within a hotel compare?*

- What are the expected gains and the actual gains from the implementation of a sustainable certification within a hotel?
- How are the actual gains perceived compared to the expected gains?
- How do the expected gains and actual gains differ between large and small hotels?

This thesis will first give a literature review on the subject (Chapter 3). Chapter 4. Methods will go into depth on the methods, it states how the research was done. After this, the results of the analysis will be stated in chapter 5. Chapter 6 will discuss the results making a comparison with the literature review. Finally, the results will be concluded in chapter 7.

### 3. Literature review

Different expected and actual gains from the implementation of a sustainable certification within the tourism industry can be identified within the literature (Buunk & van der Werf, 2019; Dunk et al., 2016; Hellmeister & Richins, 2019; Mzembe et al., 2020). Based on this literature 4 main categories can be classified: environmental, economic, social, and external. These categories can be divided into different dimensions which will be discussed below.

#### 3.1 Environmental gains

With a sustainable certification, certain environmental gains are expected to be obtained. The expectation of protecting the environment is the foremost reason for hotels to implement a sustainable certification (Al, 2003; Font et al., 2016; Hsiao et al., 2018). But also to improve the hotel manager's personal values (Dunk et al., 2016; Hellmeister & Richins, 2019) and the hotel's business practices (Dunk et al., 2016). The following sections will investigate the possible expectations and actual gains known in the literature.

##### 3.1.1 *Protecting the environment*

Buunk and van der Werf (2019), state that one of the main reasons to join a sustainable certification is to protect the environment. Especially amongst SMEs, environmental gains seem to be the most important. The reason for joining a certification scheme for SMEs is for 87% to protect the environment (Font et al., 2016). Reasoning that SMEs see that they are dependent on the preservation of the environment and culture for their employment and income, and therefore, are more motivated to invest in their environment, contrary to larger hotels (Prud'homme & Raymond, 2016). The larger hotels mostly invest in sustainable certification because of the possible economic gains, while mostly small hotels invest in a scheme for the environment. A reason is that larger companies have more corporate values, vision statements, and goals, while SMEs run more on the managers' values and ethics (Al, 2003).

##### 3.1.2 *Fulfilment of personal norms and values*

Looking at the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) 63% of the hotels joined because of a green philosophy and practice (Dunk et al., 2016). It was stated that 45% joined because their personal values aligned with helping the environment. When looking at tour operators, 64% reasons their personal values or their lifestyle for joining or implementing sustainable practices (Hellmeister & Richins, 2019). Font et al. (2016) state that 49,2% of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) adopt sustainable practices due to their personal values or their lifestyle.

##### 3.1.3 *Fulfilment of business norms and values*

The expectation of the fulfilment of a sustainable business practice is also a reason to implement a sustainable certification. It was identified that 25% of GTBS participants implemented the



certification because of business practices (Dunk et al., 2016). Companies, such as hotels, started to implement sustainable schemes to improve their environmental practice as a business (Al, 2003).

### 3.2 Economic gains

Implementing a sustainable certification is expected to offer certain economic gains for the company. Looking at GTBS, 58% of the participants stated they joined the certification due to business benefits they expected to gain (Dunk et al., 2016). However, 30% of the respondents left the GTBS certification. The reason for leaving was for 75% issues with costs and no/or limited increase in business (Dunk et al., 2016). This shows that there was, for some of the hotels, a mismatch between the expected gains and the actual benefits, prompting them to quit the certification scheme. This shows relevance to investigating if a mismatch is also happening for certified hotels.

When talking about the abovementioned business benefits literature mostly divides them into: competitive advantage, increasing marketing, cost saving, and profit increase. These benefits are expected and experienced by hotels with the implementation of sustainable certification. Below their expected and actual gains will be discussed in more depth.

#### 3.2.1 Profit increase

A profit increase can be caused by a decrease in costs (Buunk & van der Werf, 2019). Therefore, hotels might expect an increase in profits when they expect a decrease in costs. Geerts (2014) even discusses a cost decrease when discussing the increase in profitability due to hotels using sustainable certification. However, the increase in profit cannot be seen as a major motivator. While investigating the motivations for joining Green Key the increase in profit was only mentioned once (Buunk & van der Werf, 2019). Though 26% of the participants of this research experienced an actual increase in profit in the end. In this case, the actual increase was bigger than what the hotels expected to gain. This shows a mismatch between expectations and reality.

#### 3.2.2 Cost saving

Sustainable certification is expected to reduce costs within a hotel. The implementation of the certification saves costs by reducing resources and optimizing operationalisation (Ayuso, 2006, 2007). Within the hotel industry implementation of sustainable practices seems to lead to cost savings with little investment (Buunk & van der Werf, 2019). Yet when a hotel already has sustainable practices implemented beforehand, the cost-saving might not be as great as expected (Geerts, 2014).

Be that as it may, the expectation of cost saving can be identified as an actual benefit. It is achieved due to the sustainable practices that need to be implemented to obtain sustainable certification (Geerts, 2014). Technologies that are implemented with a sustainable certification are for example faucet aerators, more sustainable lighting, and climate control units that use less water and

electricity (Gilmore et al., 2014). The instalment of water-saving technologies can have a profitability rate of the investment between 932% and 7022%, depending on labour costs and the extent of the investment, whole new taps, or just installation of the water-saving devices (Barberán et al., 2013).

### *3.2.3 Competitive advantage*

One of the economic gains possibly motivating hotels is the expected benefit of higher competitive advantage (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2012; Ayuso, 2006, 2007; Buckley, 2002; El Dief & Font, 2010; Segarra-Oña et al., 2012). Competitive advantage is a big motivator to implement sustainable practices within the tourism industry (Ayuso, 2006). However, Font and Buckley (2001) found that an ecolabel still causes a limited impact on the competitive advantage. On top of this, hotels that are in the possession of an ISO certification are not necessarily more competitive than non-certified hotels, considering non-certified hotels are also able to invest in sustainable practices without being certified (Segarra-Oña et al., 2012).

The same can be seen for the Green Key certification. Where one of the main reasons to implement the Green Key certification within a Dutch hotel is the expected competitive advantage by increasing the market share (Mzembe et al., 2020). Green Key is one of the largest sustainability certification schemes in The Netherlands among hotels (Mzembe et al., 2020). In case a business has such a certificate it will have implemented certain sustainable measures in its business (Greenkey.nl, n.d.-a). However, the hotels question the impact of the Green Key brand and whether or not the competitiveness is increased compared to non-certified hotels (Mzembe et al., 2020). As stated by the authors, this mismatch between expectations and reality causes hotels to rethink their certification. This shows the importance of investigating whether the expected benefit, of increased competitiveness, from being sustainably certified is actually experienced by hotels and seeing if what they expected is justified.

### *3.2.4 Increase marketing opportunities*

It is suggested that having a certification can help boost the image of a business and can be used as a marketing tool to stand out from the crowd (El Dief & Font, 2010). By using the certification as a marketing tool it can attract customers who are susceptible to businesses who are environmentally aware (Bagur-Femenias et al., 2016). However, there is some hesitancy to use the sustainable certification as a marketing tool. Due to the limited publicity, the certification partly fails as a marketing tool. Geerts (2014) mentions that the limited publicity is because hotels felt that the certification was not important for customers when choosing a hotel. Moreover, hotels decided to not publish their certificate in the eye of competition with higher tier participants. It was seen that in a tier system certification, lower tier participants published their certificate less than higher tier participants (Geerts, 2014). Still, Jarvis et al. (2010) state that the potential marketing gain is

expected and is a major motivator for joining GTBS. Nonetheless, as time passed the members found that the extent of the marketing did not go as far as they expected (Jarvis et al., 2010).

### 3.3 Social gains

It is expected that with the implementation of a sustainable certification certain social gains are obtained. Improving society is expected by hotels when they have implemented the certification (Font et al., 2016; Hellmeister & Richins, 2019). Moreover, hotels and other tourism enterprises expect to raise awareness with their certification put in place (Font et al., 2017; Gössling & Buckley, 2016; Hellmeister & Richins, 2019). Below the gains improving society and raising awareness will be discussed more thoroughly.

#### 3.3.1 Improving society

Improving society was stated by 46,9% of SMEs to be the reason for getting involved in sustainable business practices (Font et al., 2016). According to Hellmeister and Richins (2019), after improving the environment improving society was found most important by managers implementing sustainable certification.

#### 3.3.2 Raising environmental awareness

Bringing awareness to customers is seen as important when implementing a sustainable certification (Hellmeister & Richins, 2019). Dunk et al. (2016) mention that for a quarter of the participants, the expectation of raising awareness is a driver to commit to a sustainable certification.

Nonetheless, at the same time, companies have started to under-mention their sustainability practices, because products that are being labelled environmentally friendly are more perceived as unlikeable (Gössling & Buckley, 2016). Only 30% of the sustainable actions businesses implement are being communicated, therefore companies participate in “Greenhusing” (Font et al., 2017). This can result in a lack of awareness among consumers (Hellmeister & Richins, 2019). Even though businesses expect to increase awareness, they do not know the extent of it. On top of this, customers might make environmentally friendly decisions regarding accommodation, but they do not find it relevant to spread word-of-mouth and raise awareness among people (Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2018).

### 3.4 External gains

Certain external gains can be expected from implementing a sustainable certification. Organizations implement environmental strategies as a reply to the expectations of and the pressures from external institutions (Ayuso, 2006). This response to external institutions can be investigated from the stakeholder theory perspective: organisations take into account the preferences of stakeholders (Ayuso, 2006). These stakeholders can be identified as the parties who are influenced by and have an

influence on the specific entity, for example, competitors and customers. According to Ayuso (2006), the stakeholder theory explains the incentives for companies to implement sustainable practices. Keeping customers and other stakeholders satisfied can create loyalty and impact the hotel's earnings in the long run (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2012). The next sections will look more into the compliance with laws and regulations, and the response to stakeholders.

#### *3.4.1 Comply with laws and regulations*

In order for hotels to gain certain benefits from either banks or the government they have to comply with laws and regulations. As stated by Mzembe et al. (2020) banks in the Netherlands have lending guidelines in place to pressure clients into having more environmentally friendly business practices. Although the article states that this is limited in the Dutch hospitality industry, a lot of banks still ask potential clients to obtain the Green Key certification. Next to this, having a sustainable certification can increase opportunities for grants and subsidies, as well as possible tax advantages in countries stimulating environmental enterprises (Bagur-Femenias et al., 2016).

#### *3.4.2 Respond to stakeholders*

As a response to competitors, a sustainable certification can be implemented. A business wants to stay competitive with other hotels therefore if one hotel implements a certification other hotels will follow. By copying a competitor's implementation of a sustainable certification the market share and competitiveness can be increased (Hsiao et al., 2018). Next to this, stakeholders also have certain expectations and, therefore, pressure companies to become more sustainable (Ayuso, 2006, 2007). As the article suggests businesses need to include their stakeholders in their business strategy. One of the most influential stakeholders pushing for sustainability within the Spanish hotel industry is tour operators (Ayuso, 2006, 2007).

Moreover, the need to comply with external expectations from customers is also perceived as an important gain driving to implement sustainable certification (Williams & Schaefer, 2013). Customers want green hotels, and in case hotels fail to adapt to this demand or even communicate their sustainability they may lose these customers (Rahman et al., 2012). Hellmeister and Richins (2019) found that 39% of the respondents' reason to join a certification was due to customer demand. According to Mungai and Irungu (2013), hotels are becoming more and more aware of customers' concerns about the environment and their corporate social responsibility and are therefore more motivated to implement sustainable certification.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Literature suggests that tourism enterprises that implement sustainable certification expect and obtain a lot of different gains such as: protecting the environment, fulfilment in personal norms and values, fulfilment in business norms and values, profit increase, cost saving, competitive advantage,

increase in marketing opportunities, improving society, raising awareness, complying with laws and regulations, and respond to stakeholders. In the table below (See Table 1) an overview can be seen of the expected and actual gains of implementing a sustainable certification for hotels. As can be seen in the table below not all expected gains have a known actual gain. Meaning that for certain gains no literature specifically for the hotel industry was available on this matter.

Table 1 - Overview of the expected and actual gains of hotels with the implementation of sustainable certification

<b>Gain</b>	<b>Expected</b>	<b>Actual</b>
<b>Environmental</b>		
<b>Protecting the environment</b>	Hotels implement a sustainable certification to protect the environment. (Al, 2003; Buunk & van der Werf, 2019; Font et al., 2016; Prud'homme & Raymond, 2016)	Hotels protect the environment with a sustainable certification. (Scandic hotels, 2005 as cited in Bader, 2005; Bohdanowicz, 2009; Mungai & Irungu, 2013)
<b>Fulfilment of personal norms and values</b>	Hotels expect that personal values will be gained (Dunk et al., 2016)	
<b>Fulfilment of business norms and values</b>	Hotels expect that a sustainable business practice will be gained (Al, 2003; Dunk et al., 2016)	
<b>Economic</b>		
<b>Profit increase</b>	A profit increase is expected but not for all sustainable certifications. (Buunk & van der Werf, 2019)	Hotels experience a profit increase due to sustainable certification. (Bader, 2005; Buunk & van der Werf, 2019)
<b>Cost saving</b>	Cost saving is expected with a sustainable certification. (Ayuso, 2006, 2007; Buunk & van der Werf, 2019; Geerts, 2014)	Hotels save costs due to sustainable certification. (Barberán et al., 2013; Geerts, 2014; Gila et al., 2001; Gilmore et al., 2014)
<b>Competitive advantage</b>	A competitive advantage is expected by hotels. (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2012; Buckley, 2002; El Dief & Font, 2010; Mzembe et al., 2020; Segarra-Oña et al., 2012)	Hotels experience a limited impact in terms of competitive advantage. (Font & Buckley, 2001; Mzembe et al., 2020; Segarra-Oña et al., 2012)
<b>Increase marketing opportunities</b>	Sustainable certification is expected to help increase marketing. (Bagur-Femenias et al., 2016; El Dief & Font, 2010; Jarvis et al., 2010)	The increase in marketing is experienced as minimal. (Geerts, 2014; Jarvis et al., 2010)
<b>Social</b>		
<b>Improving society</b>	Hotels implemented sustainable business practices as they expect to improve society. (Font et al., 2016)	
<b>Raising awareness</b>	Hotels joined a sustainable certification because they expected to raise awareness.	Awareness is not raised as word-to-mouth is not done amongst customers. (Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2018)

	(Dunk et al., 2016)	
<b>External</b>		
<b>Comply with laws &amp; regulations</b>	Hotels expect to comply with laws & regulations by implementing a sustainable certification. (Bagur-Femenias et al., 2016; Mzembe et al., 2020)	
<b>Respond to stakeholders</b>	Hotels implement a sustainable certification to respond to demands from customers and other stakeholders. (Ayuso, 2006; Hsiao et al., 2018; Mungai & Irungu, 2013; Rahman et al., 2012)	

From the table can be concluded that a lot of different expected and actual gains can be identified with the implementation of sustainable certification in the hotel industry. After all, mismatches can be found between certain expected and actual gains. Moreover, research is missing if gains are actually obtained. The mismatch between the expectations and reality causes doubt amongst Green Key participants. Still, numerous hotels are part of the certification scheme. By investigating Green Key certified hotels, this research will try to give a clearer overview of what gains hotels expect to obtain and the extent of it. As well as to what extent that gain is actually obtained. Furthermore, it will compare expectations with experience to investigate possible conflicts and relations. Moreover, it will investigate if there are differences in the comparison between large and small hotels. Below the conceptual model shows what this research will investigate and the relations (See Figure 1 - conceptual model).

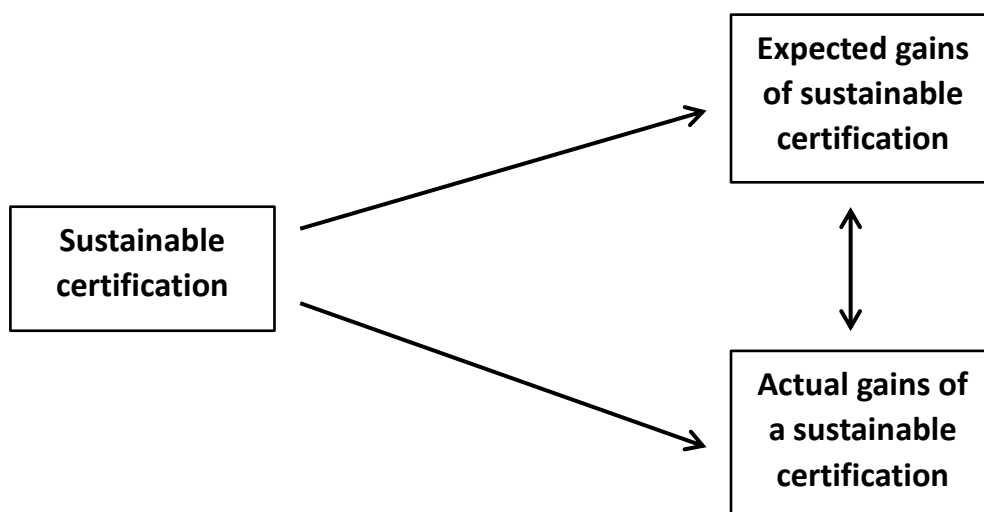


Figure 1 - conceptual model

## 4. Methods

This chapter will first go into depth about the research design. Secondly, it will discuss the operationalisation of the key concept. Finally, the methods of data collection and data analysis will be explained.

### 4.1 Research design

This research can be considered descriptive. The paper is descriptive by describing how things have changed over time (Stier Adler & Clark, 2015). Based on the literature, hypotheses were formulated and these were validated by analysing data from the survey. This showed if the relative motivations and actual gains found in the literature have changed over time. Moreover, this research is deductive. From the information, a hypothesis was formed, by analysing data this hypothesis was either confirmed or rejected (de Vaus, 2013). This research first looked at the literature regarding sustainable certification in the tourism industry, and from this propositions were deducted which were tested.

For descriptive research most often quantitative research is done, as usually large numbers are investigated (Stier Adler & Clark, 2015). The population sample used in this research is 322 hotels that are Green Key certified (Greenkey.nl, n.d.-b). As Swanson and Holton (2005) suggest, to be able to investigate a large population and to generalise the findings, quantitative research is the best option. Therefore, this research was also quantitative. Most of the quantitative data were derived from a questionnaire and are therefore primary. Nonetheless, also secondary data was gathered and used as a basis for formulating the survey questions and gathering background information. This is data that has been gathered by other researchers and used in their work with similar subjects to this research.

On account of the timeframe of this research, at only one point in time, data was gathered from one sample. Accordingly, the research design is cross-sectional (Stier Adler & Clark, 2015). Furthermore, this study can also be identified as a cross-sectional study due to the large population size that is being investigated (Stier Adler & Clark, 2015).

### 4.2 Operationalisation of key concept

The gains that were used as the basis of the questions were derived from existing literature. From the literature review, it can be concluded that most research categorises the expectation to be part of environmental, economic, social, or external factors. As can be seen in Table 2 the expected gains and actual gains are categorised. These categories all have different dimensions. These were used as the basis of the survey questions (see Appendix I - Survey).

Table 2 - Overview of the categories and dimensions of sustainable certification implementation, and the related survey questions

Categories	Dimensions	Survey Question
Environmental	Protecting the environment	2, 13
	Fulfilment of personal norms and values	3, 14
	Fulfilment of business norms and values	4, 15
Economic	Profit increase	5, 16
	Cost saving	6, 17
	Competitive advantage	7, 18
	Increase marketing opportunities	8, 19
Social	Improve society	9, 20
	Raising awareness	10, 21
External	Comply with laws and regulations	11, 22
	Respond to stakeholders	12, 23

*Based on (Al, 2003; Ayuso, 2006; Buunk & van der Werf, 2019; Dunk et al., 2016; Font et al., 2017; Geerts, 2014; Hellmeister & Richins, 2019; Jarvis et al., 2010; Mzembe et al., 2020)*

In order to investigate what gains hotels expect and experience with the implementation of the sustainable certification a 5-point Likert scale was used. By using these 5 levels also the perceived extent of the impact was identified. The levels of the Likert scale are no effect, small effect, medium effect, comparatively large effect, and large effect. By using this Likert scale it can also be investigated if there is a difference between what hotels expect Green Key to influence and how they perceive Green Key has actually influenced.

#### 4.3 Data collection

This research used both primary and secondary data. The secondary data was used as a basis for the data collection and to provide a background for the subject discussed. The secondary data that was used is data from previously done research on similar subjects. In order to answer the research questions *“What are the expected gains and the actual gains from implementation of a sustainable certification within a hotel?”*, *“How are the actual gains perceived compared to the expected gains obtained?”*, and *“How do the expected gains and actual gains differ between large and small hotels?”*, it was chosen to gather primary data via a survey. A survey was chosen as this was found to be the most convenient. Using a questionnaire makes it possible to gather as much data and reach as many participants as possible within a limited timeframe (Roberts, 1999). Furthermore, a survey was chosen as the method of data collection as it can attract a large enough sample to reduce the sampling error as well as being a cost-effective way to gather data. To administer the survey



Qualtrics was used. This program gathers all the data which was then exported to an SPSS file. It was chosen to administer the survey in Dutch as it was distributed among Dutch hotels.

Only hotels with a certain type of certification were included in this study. It was chosen to only include hotels with the sustainable certification scheme Green Key in this study. This was done, instead of hotels with another certification, for example, Green Globe, as it has the most participants in The Netherlands (Mzembe et al., 2020). In total 322 hotels have the Green Key certification in The Netherlands (Greenkey.nl, n.d.-b). On the website of Green Key, a list of all certified hotels can be found. This list was used to come up with the population for this research.

This list of 322 hotels also stated the tier of certification, place of establishment, and web addresses of the hotels. The links to the hotel's website were used, and on the website, a search for the email address was done. In case a link was not available, a google search of the name and place of establishment of the hotel was done to end up at the hotel's website. Not only independent hotels are part of the Green Key certification also hotels that are part of a chain or franchise are certified. Therefore, the websites of all hotels were checked to find an independent email address to contact them. When this was not the case, this hotel was excluded from the list, as the research is specifically about the individual hotel's view on the matter.

An Excel file was computed with all the independent email addresses of the hotels. This showed that of the total 322 Green Key certified hotels 276 hotels remained. For 43 hotels either no email addresses or independent email addresses could be found. Next to this, it was found that 2 hotels were no longer in business.

The email requesting hotels to fill in the questionnaire was therefore sent to 276 hotels. In order to prevent the email from ending up in the spam folder of the hotel due to mass sending, it was decided that one email was sent per approximately 20 possible respondents. The first email was sent Thursday afternoon (13/10/2022). After about a week the responses started to stagnate. This first email got 36 respondents. To possibly reach other respondents it was decided to send the email on a different day and time. Therefore, on Monday morning (24/10/2022) a reminder email was sent to the hotels, to request everyone who had yet to fill in the questionnaire to do so. This second email added 21 respondents to the sample. In the end, 57 responses were collected. Therefore, there was a response rate of around 21%.

It was determined that 57 responses were a large enough sample to get representative data. As all hotels were contacted in the same way, they had the same opportunity to participate in this study. Moreover, as samples get larger than 30, the sample distribution is normally distributed, with a mean

equal to the population mean (Field, 2013). Making the sample of 57 respondents representative of the population.

#### 4.3.1 Data collection secondary data

In search for articles that are relevant to this research, the Scopus and Mendeley library were used. Scopus was used to search articles. Mendeley was used as a reference manager. In the table below the used search terms and their hits can be seen for Scopus (See Table 3). The search criteria were: written in English or Dutch and from the year 2000 or later. The criteria written in English or Dutch were chosen as the researcher understands these languages. Furthermore, the list was sorted on cited by (highest), to first get articles that are also used by fellow researchers.

The first search term, (“Sustainable certification”) AND (“tourism”), did come up with relevant articles, however, to broaden the information scope EMS and ecolabel were added as these are very similar to the term sustainable certification. To find more literature specific to hotels the term tourism was replaced by hotel\*. As this research is specifically about the Green Key certification this was used together with hotel\* and certificat\* this led to more specific literature about hotels having the Green Key certification.

To get more specific articles related to the gains, expected and actual, benefit\*, gain\*, and advantage\* were included in the search terms. This resulted in quite some literature on which motivation and gains could be identified that sustainable certification could bring to hotels. Furthermore, the snowball effect was used to obtain data. Within promising articles, other references were checked to see if these were useful for this research as well. Next to this, articles were used to search for other terms that could be used. For example, the article by Buunk and van der Werf (2019) used the term ecolabel and EMS when talking about sustainable certification and Green Key. So this was then decided to be added to the search terms. The table below (Table 3 - Overview of search terms used and the number of hits) shows an overview of the used search terms and the corresponding hits.

Table 3 - Overview of search terms used and the number of hits

Search terms	Number of hits
(“Sustainable certification”) AND (“tourism”)	4
( "Sustainable certification" OR "EMS" OR "Ecolabel" ) AND ( "tourism" )	88
( "Sustainable certification" OR "EMS" OR "Ecolabel" ) AND ( "tourism" ) AND ( hotel* )	23
( "Sustainable certification" OR "EMS" OR "Ecolabel" ) AND (hotel* )	58
( "Sustainable certification" OR "EMS" OR "label" ) AND ( small AND hotel* )	3

("Sustainable certification") AND ("tourism") AND ("benefits")	2
("tourism") AND ("sustainable certification" OR "EMS") AND (cost)	5
("Sustainable certification" OR "ecolabel" OR "EMS") AND (hotel*) AND (benefit* OR gain* OR advantage*)	53
("Sustainable certification" OR "ecolabel" OR "EMS") AND (hotel*) AND ("small" AND "medium" AND hotel*)	1
("Sustainable certification" OR "label" OR "EMS") AND ("Small-and medium hotels") OR ("Large hotels")	
("Green Key") AND (hotel*)	6
("Green Key" AND certificat*) AND (hotel*)	3
("Sustainable certification" OR "ecolabel" OR "EMS") AND (hotel*) AND (benefit* OR gain* OR advantage*) AND ("economic")	7
("Sustainable certification" OR "ecolabel" OR "EMS") AND (hotel*) AND (benefit* OR gain* OR advantage*) AND ("economic") AND ("social") AND ("environmental")	2
("Sustainable certification" OR "label" OR "EMS") AND ("tourism") AND (benefit* OR gain* OR advantage*) AND ("economic" AND "social" AND "environmental")	4

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

The data was analysed using SPSS to perform the statistical analyses. As the questions were asked per different gain and this research is about the categories new variables were computed. New variables per expected and actual categories were made by computing the mean values of the corresponding dimensions. Meaning that for the variable expected environmental gains the gains environmental protection, fulfilment of business norms and values, and fulfilment of personal norms and values were added together and the mean was taken from this. The analysis of the SPSS data used a significance level of  $\leq 0.1$ . By using a significance level of 0.1 the probability that an effect that genuinely exists is rejected is decreased (Field, 2013).

In order to answer the research question, *“What are the expected gains and the actual gains from the implementation of a sustainable certification within a hotel?”*, a frequency analysis was done in SPSS per expected and actual gain. This showed the frequency of hotels that expected a certain effect and what effect actually was seen. It was chosen to report the frequency instead of the percentage as the research has a small sample. As the mean variables that were computed were used also average scores came out of the analyses. To be able to compare the data it was chosen to group the values that it again corresponded with the 5-point Likert scale. The values below 1.5 were categorised as no effect. The values 1.5 - <2.5 small effect, 2.5 - < 3.5 medium effect, 3.5 - < 4.5 comparatively large effect, and  $\geq 4.5$  was categorised as a large effect.

To be able to investigate what effect on average was expected and what actually was gained a descriptive analysis was done. To give an overview of the data from the frequency and descriptive analyses Excel was used to make graphs.

To answer the second research question, *“How are the actual gains perceived compared to the expected gains?”*, a paired samples t-test was done in SPSS. By using a paired samples t-test it was analysed whether *“two means from the same sample differ significantly”* (Field, 2013, p. 880). The test compared the means of the corresponding expected and actual gains for differences. It showed if hotels experienced a different effect of Green Key on a certain gain than what they expected

An independent t-test was used to answer the third research question *“How do the expected and actual gains differ between large and small hotels?”*. An independent samples t-test compares if two means from independent samples differ significantly (Field, 2013). This analysis showed if there is a difference between what small and large hotels expected or experience due to Green Key.

#### 4.5 Reliability and validity

In order to have a reliable instrument, the questions in the survey were formulated in such a way that it became clear what was asked of the participant. Using a sentence that the participants needed to fill in and giving an example of this made it for the participants easier to understand what was asked of them. This was done to decrease the room for interpretation of the questions as much as possible, making sure that the instrument is reliable and gives time and time again the same data (Stier Adler & Clark, 2015). Moreover, the questions regarding the expected effect were asked before the questions on the actual effect to minimise the influence of the answers as little as possible.

To filter out faults within questions a comment section was added to the questionnaire. Here participants could describe if questions were difficult to understand and if there were mistakes present within the survey. However, to minimize this the survey was checked by a peer before distribution. One of the participants stated in the comment section a spelling error and this was immediately changed. Furthermore, the comment section was used by participants to state some things about the certification.

The method of data collection might not be stable over time and deliver different data when used at different times. It might be that the expected effect differs as this is asked of hotels after implementation. The further the implementation is in the past the more the expectations might be forgotten or influenced by what is actually experienced. Secondly, the regulations of the certification might change over time. Influencing for example, how much environmental protection is done.

On top of that, the measurement instrument also has internal reliability. Cronbach's alpha for 8 items is 0.913, which indicates a high level of internal consistency for the scale used. The items of measurement are sufficiently related. All items are below 0.913 therefore all items are positively contributing to the overall reliability.

As the Likert scales are not defined it can influence the inter-observer reliability of the data collection. This means that interpretation of the scales is possible, where one participant might observe a large effect, and another participant with the same effect size might perceive it as a small effect. Regardless, this research is focussing more on the perceptions of the hotels on the effect size.

Face validity investigates if the measurement strategy will answer the research questions (Stier Adler & Clark, 2015). By asking the questions with the following Likert scale: no effect, small effect, medium effect, comparatively large effect, and large effect, the research question could be answered. The whole survey can be seen in Appendix I - Survey. The answer no effect showed if certain gains were not expected and/or experienced. Moreover, the data could be used to analyse the differences between the expected and actual gains. On top of this, by asking the participants about the size of their hotel, based on Rahman et al. (2012) stating that small hotels have 100 or fewer rooms and large have more than 100 rooms, it was possible to measure the difference between small and large hotels.

Content validity is "a test for validity that involves the judgement of the experts in the field" ( Stier Adler & Clark, 2015, p. 140). This research used Rahman et al. (2012) to define the size of hotels. Moreover, the categories used in the research instrument are based on the literature that is written by experts in the field on sustainable certification, ecolabels, EMS, the motivation and expectations of implementation, as well as benefits received from implementation.

## 5. Results

This chapter will go through the results from the data analysis of the survey to answer the research questions. First, the descriptive statistics will be shown in Table 4, and Table 5 will show the correlation matrix to give an overview of the data. Secondly, the results regarding the first secondary research question: “*What are the expected gains and the actual gains from the implementation of a sustainable certification within a hotel?*”, will be discussed (see section 5.1 The expected and actual gains of sustainable certification. Thirdly, the secondary research question: “*How are the actual gains perceived compared to the expected gains obtained?*” will be investigated (see section 5.2 Comparison of the actual and expected gains. Finally, the last secondary research question “*How do the expected gains and the actual gains differ between large and small hotels?*” will be analysed (see section 5.3 The difference between small and large hotels).

In total 34 hotels had 100 rooms or less and 23 had 100 rooms or more.

Table 4 - Overview of descriptive statistics of the expected and actual gains variables

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<i>Expected environmental gains</i>	57	2	5	3.480	0.716
<i>Expected economic gains</i>	57	1	5	2.829	0.823
<i>Expected social gains</i>	57	2	5	3.737	0.802
<i>Expected external gains</i>	57	1	5	3.447	0.900
<i>Actual environmental gains</i>	57	1.667	5	3.509	0.831
<i>Actual economic gains</i>	57	1	5	2.715	0.925
<i>Actual Social gains</i>	57	1.500	5	3.500	0.829
<i>Actual External gains</i>	57	1	5	3.377	0.997

Table 5 – Correlation matrix of the variables

		<i>Expected environmental gains</i>	<i>Expected economic gains</i>	<i>Expected social gains</i>	<i>Expected external gains</i>	<i>Actual environmental gains</i>	<i>Actual economic gains</i>	<i>Actual social gains</i>	<i>Actual external gains</i>
<i>Expected environmental gains</i>	Pearson Correlation	1	.612**	.711**	.368**	.793**	.565**	.667**	.443**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001
	N	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57
<i>Expected economic gains</i>	Pearson Correlation	.612**	1	.512**	.591**	.532**	.879**	.504**	.600**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57
<i>Expected social gains</i>	Pearson Correlation	.711**	.512**	1	.463**	.695**	.465**	.745**	.472**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57
<i>Expected external gains</i>	Pearson Correlation	.368**	.591**	.463**	1	.351**	.496**	.401**	.779**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.005	0.000	0.000		0.007	0.000	0.002	0.000
	N	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57
<i>Actual environmental gains</i>	Pearson Correlation	.793**	.532**	.695**	.351**	1	.544**	.747**	.497**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.007		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57
<i>Actual economic gains</i>	Pearson Correlation	.565**	.879**	.465**	.496**	.544**	1	.579**	.588**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000
	N	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57
<i>Actual social gains</i>	Pearson Correlation	.667**	.504**	.745**	.401**	.747**	.579**	1	.556**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57
<i>Actual external gains</i>	Pearson Correlation	.443**	.600**	.472**	.779**	.497**	.588**	.556**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	57	57	57	57	57	57	57	57

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### 5.1 The expected and actual gains of sustainable certification

For the expected environmental gains 29 hotels expect the certification to have a comparatively large effect. For the environmental gains, only 3 hotels expect a large effect because of Green Key. Of all the hotels 19 expect the certification to have a medium effect on the environmental gains. All hotels expect Green Key to have some effect on the environmental gains (See Figure 2 - Frequency of expected effect size per gain).

For the economic gains, most hotels expect a medium-sized effect (25). After this, a small effect is mostly expected by hotels on the economic gains (17). Only 1 hotel expects Green Key to have no effect at all on the economic gains and only 1 expects a large effect.

The expected effect of Green Key on the social gains is for 29 of the hotels comparatively large. A large effect of Green Key is expected the most on the social gains (13). While a medium effect is seen the least for the social gains (12) compared to the other gains. All hotels expect Green Key to have some extent of an effect on the social gains. Only 3 hotels expect a small effect of Green Key on the social gains.

For the external gains, a large effect is expected for 6 hotels. The expected effect of the certification on the external gains that are expected by most hotels is comparatively large (30). Next to this, 15 hotels expected Green Key to have a medium effect on the external gains. Only 1 hotel expected Green Key to not affect the external gains.

Figure 3 shows the average expected effect of Green Key on the gains. On average the expected effect of Green Key on the gains is larger than medium but smaller than comparatively large. Only the economic gains are expected to be affected by Green Key between small and medium.



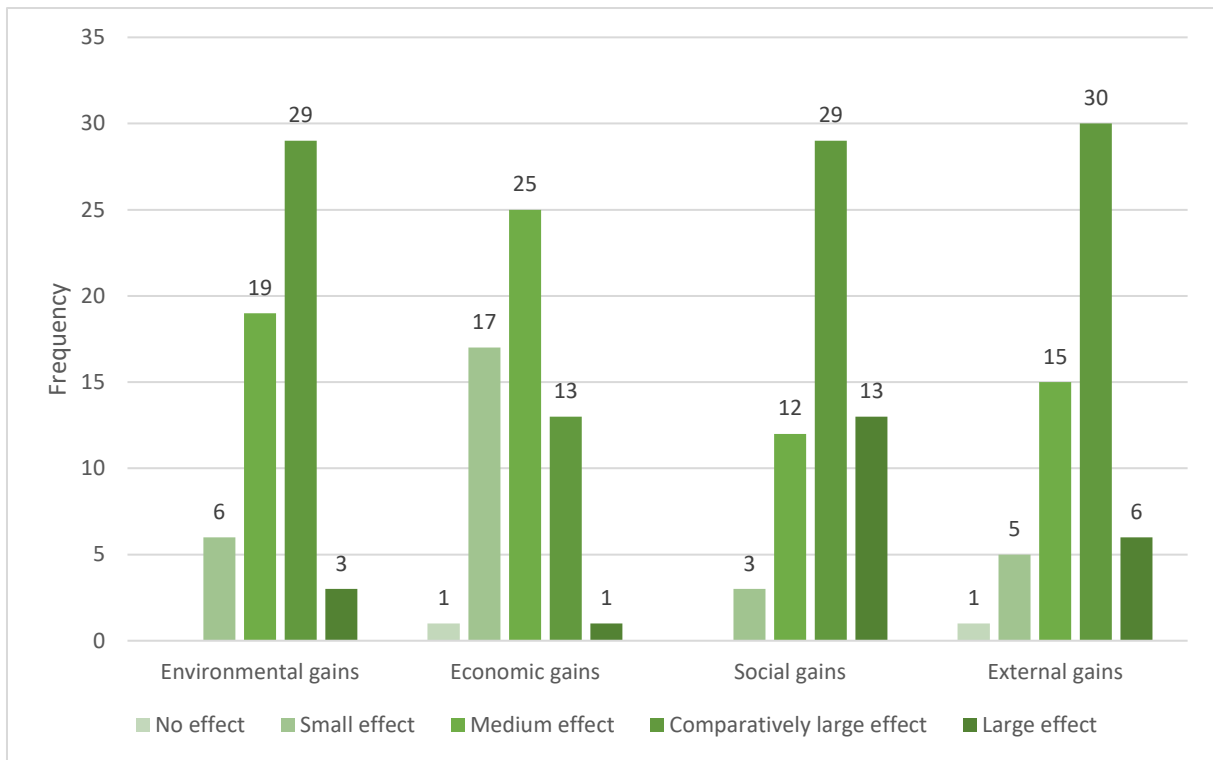


Figure 2 - Frequency of expected effect size per gain

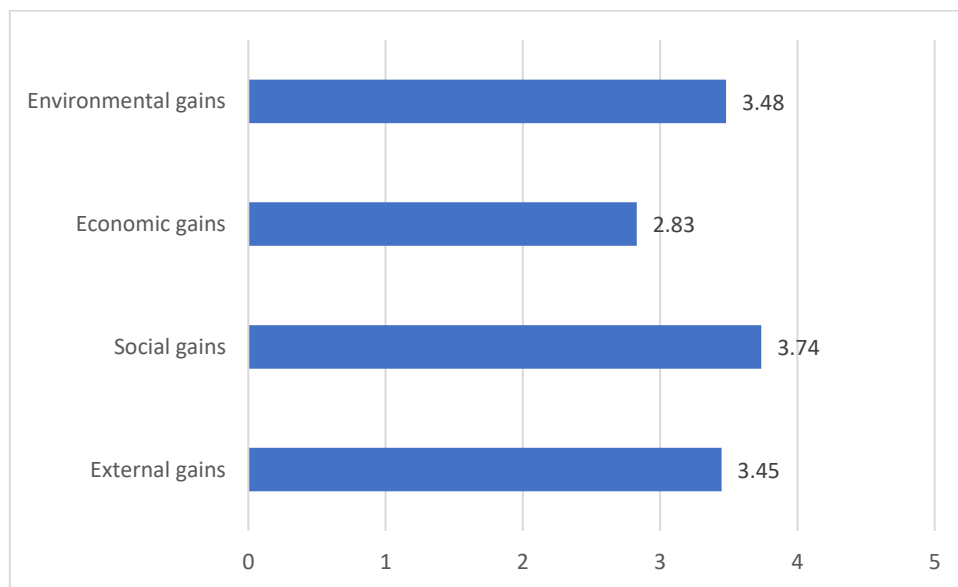


Figure 3 - Mean values of the expected gains  
(1: no effect, 2: small effect, 3: medium effect, 4: comparatively large effect, 5: large effect)

As can be seen in Figure 4, a comparatively large effect was mostly experienced by hotels on the environmental gains (26). Of all the hotels 16 experienced a medium effect of Green Key on the environmental gains. A large effect was only experienced by 6 hotels. All hotels experienced some effect of Green key on the environmental gains.

No influence of Green Key was experienced by 3 hotels on the economic gains. A large effect of Green Key on the economic gains was only experienced by 1 hotel. The most experienced effect of Green Key on the economic gains by hotels is a small effect (21). A medium effect was experienced by 18 hotels and 14 hotels experienced a comparatively large effect of Green Key on the economic gains.

All hotels experience some effect of the certification on the social gains. A small effect is experienced by only 5 hotels. A medium effect on the social gains due to Green Key is experienced by 17 hotels. Only 8 hotels experience a large effect of Green Key on the social gains. Most hotels experience a comparatively large effect of Green Key on the social gains (27).

No effect of the certification on the external gains was experienced by 2 hotels. A small effect of Green Key on the external gains was experienced by 6 hotels. Additionally, 17 hotels experienced a medium effect on the external gains. Only 7 hotels experienced Green Key to have a large effect on the external gains. A comparatively large effect of the certification on the external gains was experienced the most, by 25 hotels.

Figure 5 shows the average effect of Green Key on the different gains. On average the effect of Green Key on Environmental, social, and external gains is between a medium and a comparatively large effect. The economic gains fall on average between a small and a medium effect.

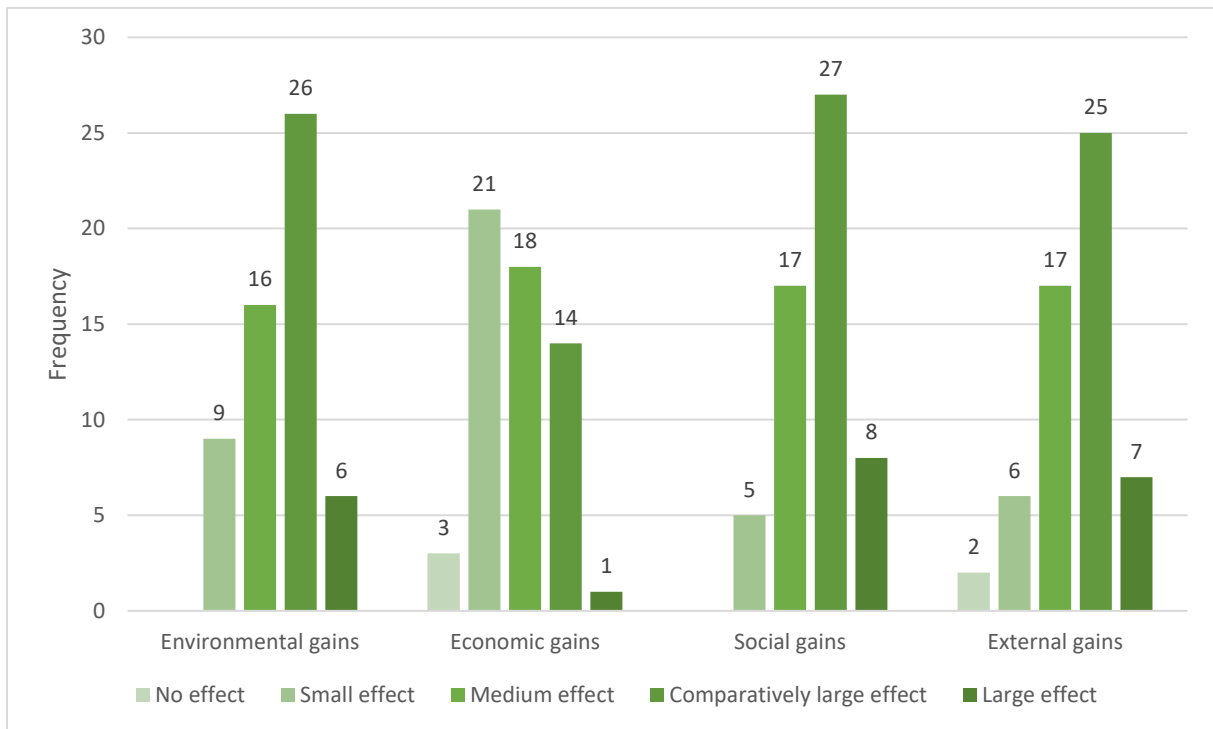


Figure 4 - Frequency of actual effect size per gain

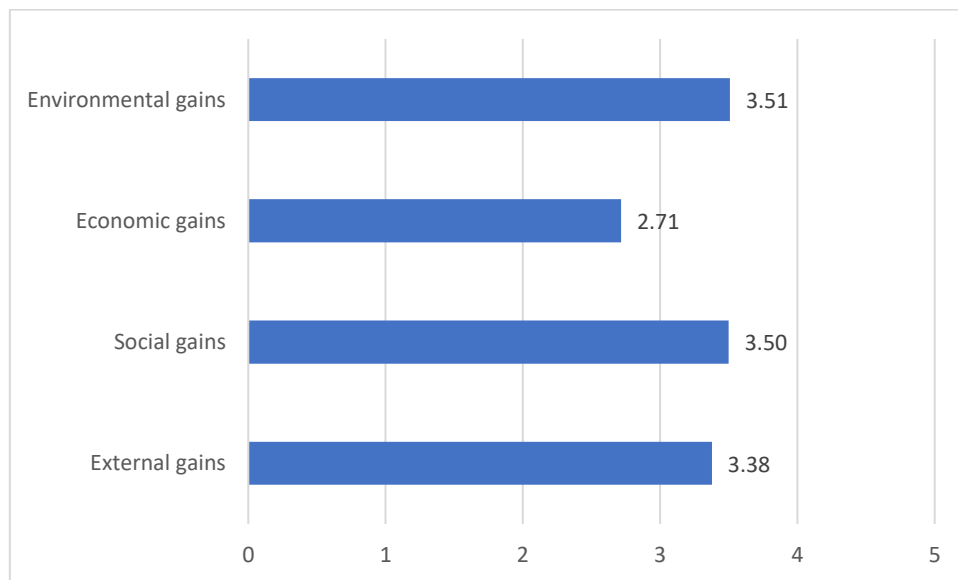


Figure 5 - Mean values of the actual gains  
(1: no effect, 2: small effect, 3: medium effect, 4: comparatively large effect, 5: large effect)

## 5.2 Comparison of the actual and expected gains

This section will first discuss the relative impact of the gains. This will be done by looking at the categories: environmental, economic, social, and external, and investigating if a certain category has a larger effect than another. This will be done by comparing the expected and the actual effect of Green Key on the different gains will be done. This will show which gains' actual average effect differs significantly from the expected average effect.

Table 6 below shows how the expected and actual effect of Green Key compares per gain. The table shows a significant average difference between the expected and actual effect of Green Key on the economic gains and the social gains. The economic gains differ significantly ( $t=1.953$ ,  $p=0.056$ ). On average the expected effect of Green Key on the economic gains is 0.114 higher than the average actual effect. The social gains also differ significantly ( $t=3.066$ ,  $p=0.003$ ). On average the expected effect of Green Key on the social gains is 0.237 higher than the actual effect.

For the external gains, no significant difference was found. The average actual effect of Green Key on the environmental gains is 0.029 higher than the average expectation. However, this difference is found to be insignificant.

Table 6 – Comparison of the expected gains and the actual gains

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean actual</b>	<b>Mean expected</b>	<b>Mean difference</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>sig (2-tailed)*</b>
<i>Environmental</i>	57	3.509	3.480	-0.029	-0.434	0.666
<i>Economic</i>	57	2.715	2.829	0.114	1.953	0.056
<i>Social</i>	57	3.500	3.737	0.237	3.066	0.003
<i>External</i>	57	3.377	3.447	0.07	0.832	0.409

\*  $\alpha \leq 0.1$

### 5.3 The difference between small and large hotels

In Table 7 the difference between large and small hotels in terms of the effect of Green Key on the expected and actual gains can be seen. For the most part, no significant difference between large and small hotels can be identified.

However, Table 7 shows that there is a significant difference between small and large hotels with the expected effect of Green Key on the social gains ( $t=-2.048$ ,  $p=0.045$ ). The average expectation for small hotels was 0.405 points lower than for large hotels.

Table 7 - Comparison of the effect of Green Key between large and small hotels per expected and actual gain

	<b>Equal variances</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>N large hotels</b>	<b>N small hotels</b>	<b>Mean large hotels</b>	<b>Mean small hotels</b>	<b>Mean difference</b>	<b>Sig. (2- tailed)*</b>
<i>Expected environmental gains</i>	assumed	-1.384	23	34	3.638	3.373	-0.265	0.172
<i>Expected economic gains</i>	assumed	-0.879	23	34	2.946	2.750	-0.196	0.383
<i>Expected social gains</i>	not assumed	-2.048	23	34	3.978	3.574	-0.405	<b>0.045</b>
<i>Expected external gains</i>	assumed	-1.426	23	34	3.652	3.309	-0.343	0.159
<i>Actual environmental gains</i>	not assumed	-1.339	23	34	3.681	3.392	-0.289	0.186
<i>Actual economic gains</i>	assumed	-0.597	23	34	2.804	2.654	-0.150	0.553
<i>Actual Social gains</i>	assumed	-0.976	23	34	3.630	3.412	-0.219	0.333
<i>Actual External gains</i>	assumed	-0.899	23	34	3.522	3.279	-0.242	0.373

\*  $\alpha \leq 0.1$

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Environmental gains

Hotels expect the implementation of sustainable certification to effect environmental gains by fulfilling personal norms and values (Dunk et al., 2016), fulfilling business norms and values (Al, 2003; Dunk et al., 2016), and protecting the environment (Al, 2003; Buunk & van der Werf, 2019; Font et al., 2016; Prud'homme & Raymond, 2016). This research found that hotels indeed expect Green Key to influence environmental gains. Mostly a comparatively large effect or a medium effect is expected. In reality, more hotels experience a large effect, however, fewer hotels experience a medium or comparatively large effect. Still on average hotels experience a larger effect than they expect. Nonetheless, this difference between the expected and actual is not statistically significant.

Contrary to literature stating that SMEs implement a sustainable certification as they expect environmental gains from this (Al, 2003; Prud'homme & Raymond, 2016), this research did not find a significant difference between what small and large hotels expect and experienced due to Green Key. This also means that Green Key affects the environmental gains the same for large and small hotels.

### 6.2 Economic gains

Hotels expect to have a higher competitive advantage (Alonso-Almeida & Rodríguez-antón, 2011; Buckley, 2002; El Dief & Font, 2010; Mzembe et al., 2020; Segarra-Oña et al., 2012), increase in marketing opportunities (Bagur-Femenias et al., 2016; El Dief & Font, 2010; Jarvis et al., 2010), cost saving (Ayuso, 2006, 2007; Buunk & van der Werf, 2019; Geerts, 2014), and profit increase (Buunk & van der Werf, 2019). This research found that the economic gains are expected by almost all hotels, however, they expected mostly a small or medium effect of Green Key.

Literature found that because of the implementation of sustainable certification hotels do experience cost saving (Barberán et al., 2013; Geerts, 2014; Gila et al., 2001; Gilmore et al., 2014), and profit increase (Bader, 2005; Buunk & van der Werf, 2019). In reality, the economic gains are not experienced by most hotels compared to the other gains. Most hotels experience a small or medium effect of Green Key on the economic gains, while for the other gains mostly a comparatively large or medium effect is experienced. This might be because the economic gains (competitive advantage and increase in marketing opportunities) are less affected by sustainable certification (Font & Buckley, 2001; Geerts, 2014; Jarvis et al., 2010; Mzembe et al., 2020; Segarra-Oña et al., 2012).

Literature shows that the expected effect of Green Key is higher than what is actually experienced regarding the competitive advantage (Font & Buckley, 2001; Mzembe et al., 2020; Segarra-Oña et al., 2012), and the marketing opportunities (Geerts, 2014; Jarvis et al., 2010). This is in line with what this research found. On average hotels expect more economic gains from sustainable certification than

what they realize. There is a statistical significance, where the expectation of hotels is higher than what the hotels actually experience.

Large hotels implement sustainable certification for the most part to get economic gains (Al, 2003). Yet, this research did not find a statistically significant difference between large and small hotels and how they expected and experienced Green Key to influence the economic gains.

### 6.3 Social gains

Hotels expect sustainable certification to affect the social gains (Dunk et al., 2016; Font et al., 2016). Most hotels expected a comparatively large effect of Green Key on the social gains. Compared to the other gains, the social gains have the most hotels expecting a large effect of Green Key. In reality, however, fewer hotels experience a comparatively large or large effect. More hotels experience a medium effect or a small effect. The expectations do not meet reality. This mismatch might be because raising awareness is seen to be not affected by the implementation of sustainable certification due to “Greenhusing” (Font et al., 2017; Gössling & Buckley, 2016; Martínez García de Leaniz et al., 2018). Still, the social gains are affected by the implementation of the certification, just less than what hotels expect. This difference between the expectation and the experience is statistically significant. This difference of the social gains is statistically larger than the difference for the economic gains. Meaning that there is a larger mismatch between the expected and actual social gains than the expected and actual economic gains.

While SMEs are more focused on improving society (Font et al., 2016), large hotels are more economically driven to implement sustainable certification (Al, 2003; Prud’homme & Raymond, 2016). Be that as it may, this research found that small hotels expect less effect of Green Key on the social gains than large hotels. At the same time, large hotels do not experience a larger effect of Green Key on the social gains than small hotels.

### 6.4 External gains

Hotels expect the implementation of sustainable certification to positively affect their response to stakeholders (Ayuso, 2006; Hsiao et al., 2018; Mungai & Irungu, 2013; Rahman et al., 2012), and to comply with laws and regulations (Bagur-Femenias et al., 2016; Mzembe et al., 2020). This research found that almost all hotels do indeed expect to gain external benefits because of the implementation of Green Key. For the most, a medium or comparatively large effect of Green Key on the external gains is expected.

As a response to stakeholder demand, tourism enterprises and hotels implement sustainable business practices in order to keep customers (Rahman et al., 2012). This adheres to the fact that this research did not find a statistically significant difference between the expected and experienced

effect of Green Key on the external gains. Hotels implement based on consumer demands when complying with the demands of those customers you will not lose these customers. Moreover, one of the external gains is to comply with laws and regulations, which are set rules. When complying with the guidelines you obtain this.

No difference between large and small hotels can be observed. This means that large and small hotels do not expect or experience a different effect of Green Key on the external gains.

Hotels copy the implementation of sustainable certification of a competitor, a stakeholder, to increase the market share and the competitive advantage (Hsiao et al., 2018). The external gain respond to stakeholders is linked with the economic gain competitive advantage. Still, the economic gains are expected and experienced less on average than the external gains.

### 6.5 Limitations

As the expectation of Green Key is asked after implementation the answers might be influenced by what the hotels currently experience. Next to this, the expectation of Green Key might not really be known as hotels might be in possession of the certification for a long time. Even more so, it might be that the person who is currently responsible for upholding the certification is not the person who initially started the process. This person might not even have had any expectations.

Furthermore, hotels might not have explicitly thought about the expectation of Green Key, because of a top-down decision. Even though this research tried to contact only individual hotels some participants still might have belonged to a chain. Because of the top-down structure, the individual hotels might not have explicitly thought about what it would mean for them to be sustainably certified. However, they would have at least thought about how this would affect the hotel and the day-to-day business. Next to this, the hotels will definitely notice a profit increase or a cost decrease.

On top of this, the Green Key certification is based on an assessment by a third party. After the assessment, hotels might not maintain the standards until the hotel has to qualify again. Even though the certification standards might stay at the same level the whole time, still certain technologies and processes cannot be deinstalled, such as the water saving tabs.

The questions in the questionnaire were not randomized. This was also done to minimize the influence of the actual effect on the expected values. However, the different gains were also not randomized. This might have influenced the answers of the participants.

On top of this, the hotels might have had a different interpretation of the Likert scale points. What might be a large effect for one hotel might be a medium effect for another. As the levels were not quantified hotels could perceive the levels differently. However, still the results state the extent of



effect hotels perceive. Moreover, this research wanted to investigate if there was a difference between large and small hotels. The amount of cost saving of large hotels compared to small hotels is most likely much larger with the same technology, but both might still experience it to be a medium effect.

This research found a minimal difference between small and large hotels while the literature stated more differences between SMEs and large enterprises. If this research would have made the separation between small, medium, and large hotels, instead of small and large, possibly other results would have been found.

Another limitation is that this study used the formulated categories to investigate giving a more general overview of what effect hotels expected and experienced due to Green Key. By doing so more detailed findings were not explored.

Moreover, this research did not allow hotels to state that they expected or experienced the certification to have any negative effects. It was only examined if there was either no effect or some extent of a positive effect of Green Key on the different gains.

## 7. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to investigate how the expected gains and the actual gains from implementing a sustainable certification compare. This research looked specifically at Dutch hotels that had the Green Key certification. First, it looked at what gains the hotels expected and to what extent. As well as how hotels perceived what gains they actually obtained and to what extent. After this, the expected gains and the actual gains were compared to one another and the differences between large and small hotels were sought out.

This research contributes to the gap in the literature as it gives an overview of which gains are expected and actually obtained in a hotel due to the implementation of Green Key. Almost all hotels expect and experience the implementation of Green Key to have environmental, economic, social, and external gains.

Next to this, this research indicates what effect can be expected of such a scheme. Overall, hotels can expect Green Key to affect the economic gains the least. While hotels can expect more effect on the environmental and social gains. This can be used to help manage the expectations of new participants that join the scheme, and help retention.

However, the expectations of Green Key on the economic and social gains should not be too high. As a mismatch is present between the expected and actual effect of Green Key on the economic and

social gains. Hotels expect a higher impact on these gains than Green Key actually causes, especially for the social gains.

The expected social gains also differ between large and small hotels. Large hotels expect higher social gains than small hotels. This fills in the gap on significant differences in the impact of environmental practices between large and small hotels.

In terms of managerial relevance, this research shows what gains hotel managers can expect and to what extent. They can use this to manage their expectations and to see if the implementation is worth it. On top of this, this research showed that both small and large hotels can experience the same extent of effect on the gains. Moreover, policymakers of Green Key can see what gains are actually obtained and can use this to change the policy so that certain gains are obtained more or less. Next to this, Green Key can use this to manage the expectations and retention of their clients.

Research has focused on the economic implications of sustainable certification, future research should focus more on the social, external, and environmental. Even though some research is available on the environmental impact of sustainable certification it is still limited.

Moreover, this research focused on the gains that were most present in the existing literature. It would be interesting to investigate other less prominent gains of sustainable certification. This would help to give a more clear overview of all opportunities sustainable certification can bring.

Next to this, this research focused only on Green Key having no effect or a positive effect. As hotels stated not to use the certification for marketing, reasoning they thought it would have a negative effect, it should also be investigated if the certification has negative impacts.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I - Survey

# Effect van de Green Key certificering

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#### Start of Block: Inleiding

Welkom! Beste hotellier,

Allereerst wil ik u hartelijk danken voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. Ik ben een student Urban Environmental Management aan de Wageningen University and Research. Voor mijn afstuderen doe ik onderzoek naar de verwachte en werkelijke effecten van Green Key in de hotel sector.

Het doel van mijn onderzoek is om inzicht te krijgen in wat hotels verwachtten te behalen met het implementeren van de Green Key certificering en wat in werkelijkheid behaald is. Dit om te onderzoeken of er verschillen zijn tussen de verwachting en de werkelijkheid.

Het onderzoek zal ongeveer 5 minuten van uw tijd in beslag nemen.

Er zal betrouwbaar met uw gegevens worden omgegaan en de resultaten worden geheel anoniem verwerkt. De gegevens die verzamelt worden met deze enquête worden enkel voor mijn onderzoek gebruikt. U kunt op elk moment stoppen met het invullen van de enquête. Met de pijlen onderaan de pagina kunt u door de vragen navigeren. Mocht u nog vragen of opmerkingen hebben over het onderzoek, neem dan contact met mij op via [rozemarijn.pool@wur.nl](mailto:rozemarijn.pool@wur.nl) of door een opmerking achter te laten bij de laatste vraag.

Nogmaals hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Rozemarijn Pool

#### End of Block: Inleiding

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#### Start of Block: Vragen

Q1 Hoeveel kamers heeft het hotel?

- 100 kamers of minder (1)
- Meer dan 100 kamers (2)

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Page Break



Q2 - Verwachting In de volgende sectie worden worden mogelijke voordelen van het implementeren van de Green Key certificering benoemd. Probeer terug te denken aan het moment **voor de implementatie** van de certificering. Wat werd er besproken in het bedrijf over het mogelijk implementeren van de Green Key certificering? Hoeveel effect verwachtte het hotel dat de certificering had in de onderstaande voordelen? Geef per voordeel aan hoeveel effect het hotel verwachtte te hebben.

Vul de volgende zin in:

Het hotel **verwachtte** met de invoering van de Green Key certificering (een) ... effect op [voordeel].

*Voorbeeld:*

*Het hotel verwachtte met de invoering van de Green Key certificering een klein effect op de bescherming van het milieu.*

	Geen effect (1)	Klein effect (2)	Medium effect (3)	Behoorlijk effect (4)	Groot effect (5)
de bescherming van het milieu (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de vervulling van persoonlijke waarden en normen (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de vervulling van bedrijfs waarden en normen (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de winst vergroting (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de kosten vermindering (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
het concurrentievoordeel (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de vergroting van marketing kansen (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de verbetering van de maatschappij (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
het creëren van bewustzijn rondom milieu (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
het voldoen aan regels en wetgeving (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
het voldoen aan eisen van belanghebbenden (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q3 - Werkelijkheid In de volgende sectie worden worden mogelijke voordelen van het implementeren van de Green Key certificering benoemd. Probeer te denken aan wat er allemaal is verandert **na de implementatie** van de Green Key certificering. Hoeveel effect merkt het hotel dat de certificering heeft in de onderstaande voordelen?

Geef per voordeel aan hoeveel effect het hotel merkt te hebben dankzij de certificering.

Vul de volgende zin in:

Het hotel merkt door de invoering van de Green Key certificering (een) ... effect op [voordeel].

*Voorbeeld:*

*Het hotel merkt door de invoering van de Green Key certificering een klein effect op de bescherming van het milieu.*

	Geen effect (1)	Klein effect (2)	Medium effect (3)	Behoorlijk effect (4)	Groot effect (5)
de bescherming van het milieu (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de vervulling van persoonlijke waarden en normen (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de vervulling van bedrijfs waarden en normen (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de winst vergroting (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de kosten vermindering (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
het concurrentievoordeel (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de vergroting van marketing kansen (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
de verbetering van de maatschappij (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
het creëren van bewustzijn rondom milieu (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
het voldoen aan regels en wetgeving (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
het voldoen aan eisen van stakeholders (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

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Q4 - Einde Heeft u nog opmerkingen over de enquête?

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End of Block: Vragen

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