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The Rooms Division

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Learning goals

After studying this chapter, readers will have the ability to:

- 1 Define Rooms Division (RD) and describe its impact on profit, people and planet;
- 2 Describe the main sustainability challenges faced by the RD department regarding the impact of water, energy, waste and wellbeing on both guests and employees;
- 3 Provide examples of ways to address some of these challenges;
- 4 Identify good practices in sustainable RD.

Introduction

Depending on the organisational structure of the hotel, the Rooms Division department may or may not include reception, the laundry room, or even the guest service desk, as well as the housekeeping staff. For the sake of this chapter, we will focus on the hotel room itself, the choices that management can take to add value to the triple bottom line, and the behaviour of guests and employees in the physical hotel room.

According to Baloglu and Jones (2015: 237), “the industry’s great challenge in energy conservation is the balance between maintaining gracious service and controlling costs”. This statement can actually be applied to any kind of conservation efforts, be it in energy, water, waste or anything else. A balance needs to be struck between providing guests with the comfort they seek in a hotel, and reducing the negative impact on the environment due to the hotel’s operations. The Rooms Division department has some typical sustainability challenges, which will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

We can broadly split the factors that drive the amount of resources consumed in a hotel into two categories, namely operations-centred factors and customer behaviour-centred factors (Zhang *et al.*, 2012). Both offer opportunities and challenges for any hotel. It could be argued that the first category may be easier to

control by hotel management than the second, even though the attitude of guests is an important factor affecting the use of resources. Guests in general feel less morally obliged to behave in an environmentally sound manner when on holiday than when they are at home. At home they are more likely to engage in certain green practices (Baker *et al.*, 2013). This conclusion is challenged by other studies where it was found that most hotel guests state that they are aware of a hotel's conservation efforts, that they view these actions positively and that they are willing to participate in them (Millar and Baloglu, 2012; Cavagnaro and Melissen, 2018). A possible explanation for these mixed findings on the behaviour of guests may be that guests wish to stay in a 'green hotel', but that the conservation efforts should fall in the operations-centred category, and should not be too much effort for the guest. In sum, when looking at conservation challenges and opportunities in RD, it is essential to look at both operations and behaviour.

In this chapter, the impact of actions by hotel management, employees or guests aimed at reducing the environmental impact or adding value to it will be discussed. These actions have been grouped by elements related to water, energy, waste and wellbeing. As in the other chapters, challenges will be discussed first, followed by some best practices and, finally, solutions will be given for each area.

Main sustainability challenges

This section will focus on the guest's room. We present a description of sustainability challenges in four areas: water, energy, waste and wellbeing. These areas have been chosen because arguably they represent the main challenges that have to be addressed to manage RD sustainably. Facts and figures will be given about the magnitude of the problem, and the main points from current discussion in both academic journals and the hospitality industry itself will be covered.

Water

According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), managing water is recognised as "one of the key societal, environmental and economic challenges of the 21st century" (2015: 15). The growing concerns for the quantity and quality of global water even caused the World Economic Forum to move water from a top three ranking as the most important risk to global growth to the number 1 position (World Economic Forum, 2015). Millions of people are already living under water stress, and this number will only grow. According to Gössling *et al.* (2012), reported consumption of water in hotels varies in range from 84 to 2,000 litres per tourist per day, compared to an average household consumption of 468 litres per day per household in the Netherlands, and 1,219 litres per day per household in Australia (Grafton *et al.*, 2011). Though hotels may express the value of water only in financial terms, the above-mentioned statements show that hotels have an important role to play in the responsible management of water use in their properties, if not for their own well-being, then for the world at large.

Hotels are typically water-intensive businesses, as they need this resource to be able to deliver their services. Different sources, like the WWF and Gössling *et al.* (2012), show that the consumption of water in luxury hotels is much higher than that of average households. Within Europe the amount is double, and in other parts of the world much more than double the amount is used in households (Gössling *et al.*, 2012). This variation in consumption among hotels can be explained by looking at some of the factors that are taken into account when calculating these numbers. Some examples of these factors are the hotel's size in m², rating, regionality, seasonality, in-house or outsourced laundry facilities, and the age of the building. The size of the hotel in particular seems to be a determining factor for its total water consumption (Bohdanowicz and Martinac, 2007). The difference in water consumption between the different levels of luxury can be clearly seen when looking at the environmental footprint report of Accor (2011). It shows that the water usage at Accor's Formule 1 (a 1-star low-budget accommodation) is on average 189 litres per rented room, and at Sofitel (a 5-star luxury hotel) 1,556 litres per rented room. This makes sense, as the higher the level of luxury, the more services (like swimming pools, sauna, and restaurants) are offered to the guest. The difference in use of water due to geographical location is exemplified by comparing the litres of water per tourist per day used in Switzerland and in Egypt: 100 litres vs 400 litres respectively (Gössling *et al.*, 2012). Rankin and Rousseau (2006) report that water consumption in South African hotels is 30-40% higher in summer than in the cold season, while – within this percentage – the proportion of hot water consumed is lower. The effect of laundry can be seen when looking at the data found by Deng and Burnett (2002). They found that the average Water Use Index (WUI) for hotels with an in-house laundry is higher than that of hotels without one. The WUI is a figure that expresses the number of cubic metres (m³) of water used per square meter (m²) of gross floor area per year. The average WUI for a hotel with an in-house laundry is 5.10, and 3.64 for hotels without laundry facilities. In hotels with an in-house laundry, 47% of their total water usage is spent on this, and 30% of water usage on the guest rooms. If a hotel does not have a laundry, the water usage in the guest rooms amounts to 44% of the total water consumption. This way we see that the guest room percentage of the total water usage goes up significantly. This shows that when hotels outsource their laundry, in effect, they outsource (part of) their water consumption. If we look specifically at the division of how the water usage in guest rooms, we see that 45% of water is used in the sink, 33% by the shower and 22% by the toilet (Cobacho *et al.*, 2005). Besides the direct water consumption, there are also other factors indirectly affecting the amount of water needed in hotel rooms, such as cotton. A typical hotel room contains several cotton items, like towels, pillowcases, bed sheets, and curtains. According to the WWF (1999), it can take more than 20,000 litres of water to produce 1 kilogram of cotton. One bale of cotton (about 217 kilogram) can produce 249 bed sheets, or 1,256 pillowcases (National Cotton Council of America, n.d.). When you do the math, it quickly becomes clear how this impacts the amount of water needed per hotel room. Of course these are