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The Food & Beverage Department:

At the heart of a sustainable hotel

Elena Cavagnaro

Learning goals

This chapter helps readers to understand and critically evaluate different measures to address sustainability issues in one of the core activities of a hotel: the offer of food and beverages. After studying this chapter, readers will have the ability to:

- 1 Define F&B and describe its impact on profit, people and planet;
- 2 Describe the main sustainability challenges the F&B department faces considering the space in which and the vessel on which food and beverages are served, food and beverages items purchased, and the relationship between host and guest;
- 3 Provide examples of ways to address some of these challenges;
- 4 Identify good practices in sustainable F&B.

Introduction

Alongside Rooms Division and Front Office, Food and Beverage (F&B) is one of the core operational departments within a hotel. Its purpose is to professionally manage food and drinks. From a hotel perspective, this department is responsible for satisfying the food and beverage needs of both hotel guests and casual guests. The F&B department is usually the largest department in a hotel, and deals with the purchasing of materials and products, their storage, retrieval, processing and serving. Serving can occur as part of room service, in bars and restaurants on the hotel premises, and in banquet and conference rooms.

F&B is a complex department where many activities take place, as can be deduced from the description provided above. Just to give an example, processing involves retrieving items from the storage rooms, cleaning and washing them, cutting and carving them, (pre-)cooking them, assembling them on a plate while

ensuring that each order is promptly attended to. Each activity in the F&B department presents several specific sustainability challenges. One can easily imagine how much information needs to be conveyed in a chapter dedicated to sustainability and F&B. To structure the discussion, and following a suggestion by food designer Francesca Zampollo (personal communication, Belfast, 5 May 2016), this chapter groups F&B activities in four main categories: space, vessel, food and beverages, and person. 'Vessel' is the device used to serve food and drinks whilst 'space' refers to the physical environment, such as a bar or a restaurant, in which food and beverages are served. By 'person' we mean both the person enabling (host) and the person enjoying (guest) the food and drinks service.

For hotels with restaurants, the F&B department is generally the second-largest operating department on the premises and the second contributor to total revenues, after Rooms Division. Proper management of this department is undoubtedly crucial for a hotel's healthy financial balance and usually features during hotel management courses. As we will see in more detail in the next two sections, proper management is also needed to accommodate the impact of F&B on people and planet.

Main sustainability challenges

Like any other department in a hotel, the F&B department consumes materials, energy and water. Direct energy and water consumption is a challenge that the F&B department shares with other hotel departments, such as Room Division. Therefore, we will not enter into it here in any detail. A more distinctive challenge pertains to the choice of vessel on which food and drinks are served, and the arrangement of the space in which they are served. The most distinctive sustainability issues, though, occur during the purchasing and handling of the (raw) materials that will eventually constitute the food and beverages offer to guests. Therefore, the remainder of this section will first look at the physical environment or space in which the food is served, then at the food and beverages offer itself, and lastly at the vessels. A final note concerns the challenges with regard to hosts and guests.

Space

The space in which food and beverages are served consists of an outer shell (the building) and an inner shell (the restaurant, rooms or conference room). The sustainability challenges in connection with the construction of the outer shell have already been touched upon in Chapter 8 and will not be considered again here.

In designing the inner shell, the major sustainability challenges are connected with the choice of furniture, fixture and fittings (Legrand *et al.*, 2010). Similar to fitting out a hotel room, these challenges concern both the product used and the labour conditions under which the product was produced. Labour conditions vary greatly from country to country, and are under particular scrutiny in

countries that produce at low cost for the Western mass market. As an example, let us consider the production of natural stone, a material used for pavements and walls. A recent report examined the environmental and social impacts of natural stone production in the Chinese provinces of Fujian and Shandong (Bjurling *et al.*, 2008). The main people-related issues that emerged during the inspection were related to a lack of attention for the health and safety of workers in quarries and factories, wages under the legally required minimum and the absence of written employment contracts. Main environmental issues observed were a high water usage, the release of wastewater, the dumping of tailings and waste from broken stones, as well as a lack of restoration of exhausted quarries. Though the study concluded that at the time these environmental issues do not seem to have had any negative impact on the surrounding community, it also encouraged all parties involved, including the buyers and their clients on the European market, to join forces to improve the environmental and foremost the social impacts of the Chinese natural stone industry.

As can be seen from the example of natural stone, sustainability challenges occur all along the supply chain of products needed to fit out the space where food and beverages are served. In other words, to assess the environmental and social impacts of a product or service one needs to consider not only how an item is produced, but also how and how long it is used and the way it is discarded. In other words, a Life Cycle Assessment has to be done. It would be require too much detail here to provide a full Life Cycle Assessment of all materials that could possibly be used to furnish the F&B space, however, we will be able to give some general indications about the main impacts during usage, considering that the general concept of waste has already been discussed in the Introduction to this book. 'Usage' of products needed to fit out a restaurant space refers generally to the energy and water consumption of the equipment, to safety in handling the equipment, and to cleaning of the space. From a sustainability perspective, the main issue connected to cleaning is the use of chemical substances and the impact they may have on the natural environment on the one hand and human health on the other. For example, it has been found that exposure to spray cleaners, chlorine bleach and other disinfectants could cause asthma in cleaning workers (Zock *et al.*, 2010). Energy and water are used in the space where food is stored and prepared, namely the storage rooms and kitchen. Compared to food procurement, though, the amount of energy and water used in storage and cooking is minimal, namely 1.9% versus 95% (Baldwin, 2010). This is contra intuitive, yet it should be considered that the production of the procured food has a significant water and energy footprint. This means that the kitchen and storage space mainly consumes energy and water indirectly, i.e., through procurement. Food procurement will be investigated in more detail in the section on Food and Beverage below.