Sustaining Accommodation SMEs

Drivers and Pathways of Sustainable Transition in the Mediterranean Tourist Accommodation Sector

Series
TURISTICA
ISSN 2820-6509

Sustaining Accommodation SMEs

Drivers and Pathways of Sustainable Transition in the Mediterranean Tourist Accommodation Sector

Emil Juvan
Guido Capanna Piscè
Federica Murmura
Giada Pierli
Alessio Travasi
Massimiliano Rumignani
Gian Andrea Paolo Garancini
Manos Ligerakis
Jana Čakardžić
Dino Mujkić

Sustaining Accommodation SMEs: Drivers and Pathways of Sustainable Transition in the Mediterranean Tourist Accommodation Sector

Emil Juvan, University of Primorska, emil.juvan@upr.si
Guido Capanna Piscè, University of Urbino, guido.capannapisce@uniurb.it
Federica Murmura, University of Urbino, federica.murmura@uniurb.it
Giada Pierli, University of Urbino, giada.pierli@uniurb.it
Alessio Travasi, University of Urbino, alessio.travasi@uniurb.it)
Massimiliano Rumignani, AMBIT Cluster, max.rumignani@ambitcluster.org
Gian Andrea Paolo Garancini, 3WIN, gianandrea.garancini@gmail.com
Manos Ligerakis, 3WIN, ligerakismanos@gmail.com
Jana Čakardžić, SMOC, jana.carkadzic@smoc.ba
Dino Mujkić, SMOC, dino.mujkic@smoc.ba

Reviewers · Uglješa Stankov, University of Novi Sad
Luca Giraldi, University of Turin
Leonidas Papakonstantinidis, University of Peloponnese

Copy Editor · Tina Orel
Cover Photo, Design, and Layout · Alen Ježovnik

Turistica · ISSN 2820-6509
Series Editor · Simon Kerma

Published by · University of Primorska Press
Titov trg 4, 6000 Koper · www.hippocampus.si
Editor in Chief · Simona Kustec
Managing Editor · Alen Ježovnik
Koper · 2026

Free Electronic Edition
https://www.hippocampus.si/ISBN/978-961-293-560-3.pdf
https://www.hippocampus.si/ISBN/978-961-293-564-1/index.html
https://doi.org/10.26493/978-961-293-560-3

During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT-5 for the linguistic editing and improving readability of parts of the manuscript text. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the book.

Interreg Euro-MED
Co-funded by the European Union

MAST

Kataložni zapis o publikaciji (CIP) pripravili v Narodni in univerzitetni knjižnici v Ljubljani
COBISS.SI-ID 272582147
ISBN 978-961-293-560-3 (PDF)
ISBN 978-961-293-564-1 (HTML)

Contents

List of Figures · 6
List of Tables · 7

Part One | Conceptual and Policy Framework

1 Introduction · 11
1.1 Sustainability Concepts and Landscape · 13
2 Theoretical Foundations of Sustainable Transition · 19
2.1 The Supply-Side and Demand-Side Perspective · 20
3 Policy Context for Sustainability Transitions · 25
4 Sustainability Standards as Enablers of the Sustainable Transition · 29
4.1 Sustainability Standards in the Accommodation Sector · 31
4.2 ISO 21401: Structure, Principles and Role as a Driver of Sustainable Transition · 34

Part Two | Research Design and Methodology

5 Research Framework and Objectives · 39
5.1 Qualitative Study: Perceptions, Barriers, and Drivers of Sustainability · 43
5.2 Quantitative Study: Measuring the Triple Bottom Line Performance of SMEs · 48

Part Three | Empirical Insights

6 Analysis · 57
6.1 Qualitative Insights · 57
6.2 Quantitative Insights · 64

Part Four | Interpretation and Implications

7 Discussion · 143
8 Implications for Policy and Practice · 147
8.1 Capacity Building and Training Mechanisms · 152
8.2 Financial and Market-Based Incentives · 153
8.3 Tourism Ecosystem for Sustainable Transition · 155
8.4 Regulation · 160
8.5 Self-Regulation · 162
8.6 Sustainability Certification Landscape · 164
8.7 Harmonisation and Long-Term Governance · 166
8.8 International Leadership and Knowledge Transfer · 167
9 Conclusions and Future Research · 169

References · 173

List of Figures

1.1 Relationship between Policy Areas and the Key Dimensions of Sustainability · 15
2.1 Anchored in Sustainable Balance, Sissi, Crete · 21
3.1 MAST Consortium Meeting at SMOC, Sarajevo · 26
4.1 Meeting with Accommodation SMES in Barcelona · 31
4.2 Meeting with Accommodation SMES in Pesaro, Italy · 35
5.1 Group Discussions on Drivers and Barriers for Sustainable Tourist Accommmodation Sector · 41
5.2 Boutique Hotel, Portorose: Sustainable Pioneer in Tourist Accommodation · 46
8.1 Integrated Policy and Practice Framework for Supporting Sustainable Transition of Accommodation Sector · 151

List of Tables

1.1 Alignment between SDGs and ISO 21401 Sustainability Operationalisation · 16
6.1 Environmental Sustainability Main Drivers and Examples · 59
6.2 Environmental Sustainability Main Issues and Examples · 60
6.3 Socio-Cultural Sustainability Main Issues and Examples · 61
6.4 Socio-Cultural Sustainability Main Drivers and Examples · 62
6.5 Economic Sustainability Main Issues and Examples · 63
6.6 Economic Sustainability Main Drivers and Examples · 64
6.7 Sample Characteristics · 66
6.8 Operational Characteristics · 67
6.9 Sustainability Orientation and Success Rate · 69
6.10 Degree of Sustainability Implementation: Slovenia · 71
6.11 Adoption of Sustainability Practices: Slovenia · 74
6.12 Degree of Sustainability Implementation: Italy · 75
6.13 Adoption of Sustainability Practices: Italy · 77
6.14 Degree of Sustainability Implementation: Bosnia and Hercegovina · 80
6.15 Adoption of Sustainability Practices: Bosnia and Herzegovina · 82
6.16 Degree of Sustainability Implementation: Spain · 84
6.17 Adoption of Sustainability Practices: Spain · 87
6.18 Degree of Sustainability Implementation: Greece · 88
6.19 Adoption of Sustainability Practices: Greece · 91
6.20 Sustainability Status Quo across the Mediterranean Accommodation Sector · 93
6.21 Cross Mediterranean Differences in the Adoption of Sustainability Practices · 94
6.22 ISO 21401 Alignment: Slovenia · 97
6.23 ISO Alignment: Italy · 99
6.24 ISO 21401 Alignment: Bosnia and Hercegovina · 101
6.25 ISO 21401 Alignment: Spain · 102
6.26 ISO 21401 Alignment: Greece · 104
6.27 ISO 21401 Readiness Level: A Cross Mediterranean Perspective · 106
6.28 ISO 21401 Barriers: Slovenia · 109
6.29 ISO 21401 Barriers: Italy · 110
6.30 ISO 21401 Barriers: Bosnia and Herzegovina · 111
6.31 ISO 21401 Barriers: Spain · 112
6.32 ISO 21401 Barriers: Greece · 113
6.33 Cross Mediterranean Differences in ISO 21401 Adoption Barriers · 115

6.34 Prevalence of ISO 21401 Barriers and Their Classification · 117
6.35 ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions: Slovenia · 122
6.36 ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions: Italy · 124
6.37 ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions: Bosnia and Hercegovina · 126
6.38 ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions: Spain · 128
6.39 ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions: Greece · 130
6.40 Cross Mediterranean Differences in ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions · 131
6.41 Prevalence of ISO 21401 Adoption Needs and Their Classification · 134
6.42 Association between Sustainability Value Orientation and Sustainability-Related Behaviour · 138
8.1 Summary of Policy and Practice Recommendations · 149

Part One

Conceptual and Policy Framework

Introduction

1

Mediterranean tourism is undergoing a period of accelerated transformation. The region's natural and cultural wealth continues to attract millions of visitors annually, yet mounting scientific and policy evidence indicates that its ecological and social foundations are becoming increasingly fragile. Climate assessments consistently identify the Mediterranean as one of the most climate sensitive regions globally, with rising temperatures, water scarcity and biodiversity loss already affecting the stability of tourism systems (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022). Concurrently, demographic shifts, evolving traveller expectations and heightened awareness of social equity are reshaping what visitors, residents and policymakers expect from tourism development.

In this context, sustainability has moved from a voluntary aspiration to a strategic necessity. International analyses of tourism performance underscore that continued reliance on resource intensive operations is no longer viable in destinations where environmental limits are tightening and where public tolerance for negative externalities is diminishing. Reports examining global tourism trends highlight that destinations which delay the transition towards more efficient, inclusive and climate-responsive practices are likely to face increasing operational risks, higher costs and declining competitiveness in the coming decades (United Nations Environment Programme & World Tourism Organisation, 2023). These challenges are particularly pronounced in the Mediterranean, where concentrated visitor flows, fragile ecosystems and spatial constraints amplify the impacts of unsustainable tourism practices, consistent with broader assessments of climate vulnerability and adaptation pressures identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022). The accommodation sector is central to these dynamics. Accommodation providers influence patterns of energy and water consumption, waste production, land use and supply chain structures. They play a decisive role in shaping guest behaviour, supporting local employment and sustaining the economic vitality of host communities. Independent evaluations of tourism value chains consistently indicate that a significant proportion of tourism's environmental footprint originates from accommodation activity, and that improvements in resource efficiency can generate substantial cost savings for businesses and measurable benefits for

destinations (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2020). Simultaneously, the sector affects social outcomes through the quality of employment it offers, its engagement with local suppliers and its contribution to community wellbeing.

Despite the well documented advantages of sustainable management, adoption among accommodation enterprises remains uneven. Research focusing on small and medium-sized tourism enterprises across Europe and beyond finds that many of them lack the managerial capacity, financial flexibility or technical knowledge required to implement structured sustainability systems (European Commission, 2022). Barriers frequently reported in the literature include limited access to investment capital, uncertainty regarding the return on sustainability-related investments, insufficient staff training, low awareness of available tools and complex or fragmented regulatory environments (e.g., Bohdanowicz, 2006; Revell et al., 2010; Font et al., 2016; Myung et al., 2020). These constraints are especially acute in regions characterised by strong seasonality and high dependence on tourism revenues, conditions that describe much of the Mediterranean.

At the same time, international tourism analyses indicate that sustainability-oriented business models can enhance resilience and long-term viability. Improvements in energy and water efficiency reduce exposure to rising utility costs. Fair and safe working environments improve staff retention and service quality. Stronger integration with local supply chains increases economic circulation within the destination (e.g., Chan, 2008; Bianco et al., 2023). Transparent sustainability communication supports market differentiation and aligns with growing consumer interest in responsible travel options. As global tourism strategies increasingly emphasise regeneration, climate readiness and inclusive development, accommodation enterprises that adapt early stand to benefit from these evolving expectations.

This book is situated within this broader context of structural change. It explores the sustainability transition of accommodation enterprises in the Mediterranean by bringing together conceptual foundations, empirical evidence and policy relevant insights. The analysis is grounded in the understanding that sustainability encompasses environmental responsibility, social wellbeing and economic performance, and that these three dimensions are inseparable from the daily decisions made by accommodation managers, employees and guests.

The Mediterranean is not a uniform region. Countries differ in policy

maturity, institutional frameworks, labour market structures and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, they share common challenges that transcend national borders, including climate vulnerability, resource stress and the need for more balanced forms of development. Comparative perspectives therefore offer valuable opportunities for learning and alignment. International tourism policy literature increasingly stresses the importance of coordinated regional approaches that reduce fragmentation, support shared standards and create conditions for continuous improvement.

Sustainable accommodation management should thus be understood as a strategic priority with implications that extend well beyond individual businesses. Destinations that support and encourage sustainable practices protect the resources upon which their appeal depends. They contribute to community wellbeing and economic stability. They build resilience in the face of climate-related risks and shifting market conditions. The Mediterranean accommodation sector has a central role to play in this transition. Its choices will shape not only its own competitiveness but also the long-term sustainability of the destinations in which it operates. The preceding discussion establishes that sustainability in Mediterranean tourism is no longer a peripheral concern but a structural condition for long-term viability, resilience and competitiveness. While these challenges manifest at the destination and policy levels, their resolution ultimately depends on how sustainability is understood, interpreted and operationalised within tourism businesses themselves. In this respect, accommodation enterprises occupy a particularly influential position, as their daily decisions simultaneously shape environmental impacts, social outcomes and economic value creation.

To meaningfully analyse and support the sustainability transition of the accommodation sector, it is therefore necessary to move from broad policy ambitions to a clear conceptual foundation. This requires clarifying what sustainability means in operational terms, how its different dimensions interact, and how global sustainability objectives translate into concrete practices at the level of accommodation management. The following section addresses this need by outlining the core sustainability concepts, frameworks and policy alignments that underpin the analysis presented in this book.

1.1 Sustainability Concepts and Landscape

Sustainability in tourism is a multidimensional concept that encompasses environmental responsibility, social wellbeing and economic per-

formance. While widely endorsed in principle, sustainability often remains abstract unless it is translated into concrete operational expectations that can guide decision-making within tourism enterprises. For the accommodation sector in particular, understanding sustainability requires moving beyond general definitions toward a structured interpretation that links global objectives, policy frameworks and management practices.

Following the objectives of the MAST project, this book adopts a working definition of sustainable tourism that emphasizes the balanced consideration of economic, social and environmental impacts, while addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, host communities and the environment. Complementing this, ISO 21401:2018 (ISO 20401) (International Organization for Standardization, 2018, 2024) frames sustainability as a systemic condition in which present needs are met without compromising future generations, explicitly integrating environmental, social and economic dimensions into accommodation management systems. An important implication of this definition is that sustainability is not inherently positive or negative in its effects. Tourism activities may contribute to regeneration, employment and cultural preservation, but they may also generate environmental degradation, social pressure or economic leakage. Understanding sustainability therefore requires systematic attention to impacts, behaviours and management responses across all three dimensions. To structure this understanding, the accommodation sector is examined through three interrelated pillars:

- Environmental sustainability, referring to resource efficiency, energy and water use, waste management and responsible interaction with natural systems.
- Socio-cultural sustainability, referring to respect for local cultures, fair labour conditions, community engagement, inclusion and minimisation of negative social impacts.
- Economic sustainability, referring not only to profitability but also to long-term viability, equitable value distribution, quality employment and resilience.

Operationalising these dimensions is essential for translating sustainability from principle into practice. At the global level, this operationalisation is increasingly shaped by international policy frameworks that define priority areas, performance expectations and accountability mechanisms for tourism development.

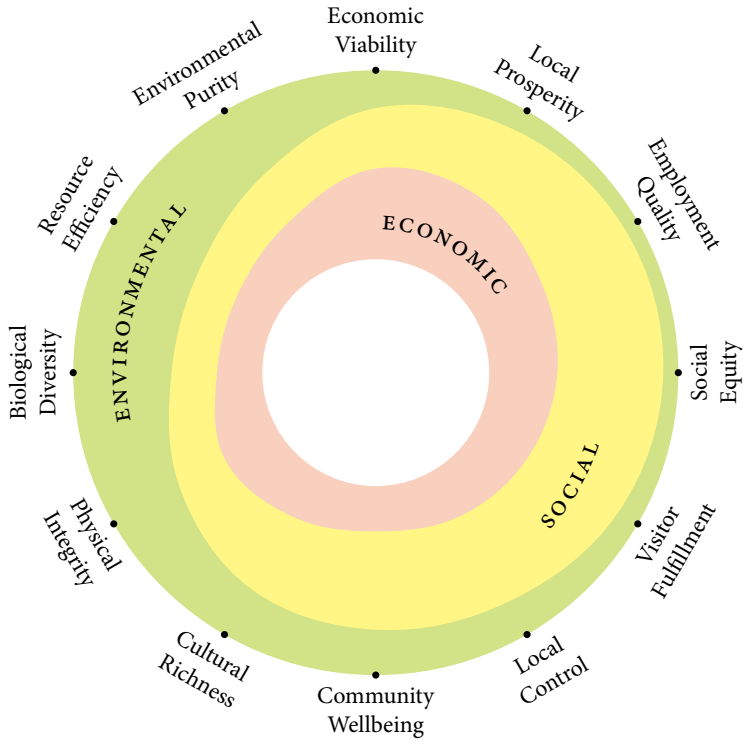

Figure 1.1 Relationship between Policy Areas and the Key Dimensions of Sustainability (adapted from World Tourism Organization & United Nations Environment Programme, 2005, p. 19)

To illustrate how sustainability objectives are translated into actionable policy domains, Figure 1.1 presents the relationship between twelve tourism-relevant policy areas and the three core dimensions of sustainability. Rather than treating environmental, social and economic sustainability as isolated domains, the figure highlights their interconnected nature and demonstrates how policy interventions often contribute to multiple dimensions simultaneously.

Figure 1.1 shows that many policy areas, such as resource efficiency, climate action, community engagement or employment quality, cut across traditional sustainability boundaries. This reflects the reality faced by accommodation providers, where a single management decision (for example, investing in energy-efficient infrastructure or sourcing locally) can generate environmental benefits, improve economic performance and strengthen social outcomes at the same time. The figure therefore serves

Table 1.1 Alignment between SDGs and ISO 21401 Sustainability Operationalisation

SDG	Operationalisation of sustainability	ISO 21401 synergy
SDG 6 Clean Water & Sanitation	6.1 Have plans for Water risk assessment. 6.3 Do sewage treatment. 6.4 Use water-saving equipment to minimize water consumption. (e.g., water-saving showerheads and toilets) 6.4 Set goals for reducing water consumption and has regular checking records.	A.3 Natural areas, biodiversity, flora and fauna A.4 Architecture and local construction impact A.5 Landscaping A.6 Solid waste, effluents and emissions A.8 Conservation and management of water usage A.9 Hazardous subst. management
SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy	7.2 Favour the use of renewable sources, furthermore, the share of renewable energy in total energy supply is monitored and managed (e.g., solar panels on the roof). 7.3 Use the air circulation equipment to ensure the air is not excessively ventilated, and excessive energy is used for cooling. 7.3 Use equipment and practices to minimize energy use (e.g., use LED lights to reduce power consumption and purchase 'Energy Star' appliances wherever possible).	A.3 Natural areas, biodiversity, flora and fauna A.4 Architecture and local construction impact A.6 Solid waste, effluents and emissions A.7 Energy efficiency
SDG 8 Decent work and Economic Growth	8.5 Everyone can get equal pay for equal work and protecting the rights of disabled to work. 8.8 Protecting the rights of labour, child labour and women in industries and promoting a safe working environment.	A.9 Hazardous subst. management B.2 Local communities B.3 Work and income B.4 Work conditions B.5 Cultural aspects B.6 Health and education B.7 Native population C.1 Economic viability of the organisation C.2 Quality and guest satisfaction C.3 Health and safety of guests and workers

Continued on the next page

as a conceptual bridge between high-level sustainability objectives and the integrated decision-making context of accommodation enterprises.

While Figure 1.1 provides a conceptual overview of how sustainability dimensions intersect at the policy level, accommodation providers re-

Table 1.1 *Continued from the previous page*

SDG	Operationalisation of sustainability	ISO 21401 synergy
SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and production	12.2 Buy organic, fair trade, eco-friendly toiletries and in room products. 12.5 Provide recycling bins in public areas. (e.g., lobby and poolside). 12.5 Donate leftover guest amenities, old furniture, and appliances to charities. 12.5 Buy previously used or recycled-content products whenever possible.	A.6 Solid waste, effluents and emissions A.7 Energy efficiency A.8 Conservation and management of water usage A.9 Hazardous subst. management B.2 Local communities B.5 Cultural aspects B.7 Native population C.1 Economic viability of the organisation C.2 Quality and guest satisfaction
SDG 13 Climate action	13.1 Have climate risk management plan and regularly monitor the negative impact of climate change (e.g., the flood, typhoon, and drought where the lodging facility located). 13.3 Carbon Footprint per tourist/night is monitored and managed during their stay. 13.3 Take action to avoid and reduce significant annual emissions from all sources controlled by the lodging facility.	A.2 Preparation and response to environmental emergencies A.4 Architecture and local construction impact A.5 Landscaping A.6 Solid waste, effluents and emissions A.7 Energy efficiency
SDG 14 Life below water	14.1 Wastewater and solid waste are disposed of to a municipal or government approved treatment system, (e.g., island resorts avoiding direct beach dumping directly on the beachside to reduce marine pollution)	A.3 Natural areas, biodiversity, flora and fauna A.9 Hazardous subst. management

Continued on the next page

quire more concrete guidance on how global sustainability goals translate into operational requirements. In this respect, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (see https://tourism4sdgs.org) have become an increasingly influential reference point for tourism policy, research and practice. They serve not only as normative aspirations but also as benchmarks for assessing the relevance and societal contribution of sectoral initiatives. Table 1.1 responds to this need by presenting a structured alignment between selected SDGs and the operational require-

Table 1.1 *Continued from the previous page*

SDG	Operationalisation of sustainability	ISO 21401 synergy
SDG 15 Life on land	15.2 Preserve and cultivate of local planting tree species, strengthening green landscaping and plant maintenance operations. 15.4 Ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems and increase ecological diversity. 15.5 Being aware of, and mitigate activity with potential to disturb wildlife and habitats around the property.	A.2 Preparation and response to environmental emergencies A.3 Natural areas, biodiversity, flora and fauna A.4 Architecture and local construction impact A.5 Landscaping A.6 Solid waste, effluents and emissions A.8 Conservation and management of water usage A.9 Hazardous subst. management

ments of ISO 21401 for accommodation establishments. The table illustrates how abstract global goals such as clean water and sanitation, decent work, responsible consumption or climate action can be translated into specific management actions and performance areas within accommodation operations. The Sustainable Development Goals represent pivotal social guidance for sustainable transition and are increasingly becoming important benchmark for the excellence and practical value of scientific research and development projects. For example, research proposals, project proposals and scientific manuscripts are expected to demonstrate the contribution of their outputs, deliverables and findings to SDG. Given the multifaceted nature of tourism and its linkage to the Global Sustainable Goals, this book adopts the following operationalisation of sustainability of accommodation sector (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2023). By operationalisation of sustainability, we refer to activities (practical steps) ensuring that ISO 21401 standards contribute to specific SDG indicators. Importantly, Table 1.1 does not imply a one-to-one correspondence between individual SDGS and isolated practices. Instead, it demonstrates that ISO 21401 operationalises sustainability through integrated management domains that simultaneously contribute to multiple SDGS. This alignment underscores the relevance of ISO 21401 as a practical instrument for embedding global sustainability objectives into day-to-day accommodation management, while also providing a transparent framework for monitoring and reporting sustainability performance.

Theoretical Foundations of Sustainable Transition

2

Sustainable management in the accommodation sector draws on theoretical foundations that explain how organisations influence environmental, socio-cultural and economic systems and how they shift toward more responsible patterns of operation. Two frameworks are particularly instructive in this regard. The first is the Triple Bottom Line (Stoddard et al., 2012), which conceptualises sustainability as a balanced integration of environmental, social and economic performance. The second is Stern's Value-Belief-Norm theory (Stern et al., 1999), which explains environmentally significant behaviour through a combination of values, beliefs, personal responsibility and a wider set of contextual, capability and habitual factors. Together with the supply-side and demand-side perspectives common in tourism research, these frameworks offer a coherent conceptual basis for understanding sustainability in accommodation enterprises.

The Triple Bottom Line framework provides a holistic approach to organisational performance, emphasising that environmental protection, social wellbeing and economic viability must be pursued simultaneously. In tourism and hospitality, the Triple Bottom Line is widely recognised as both a practical and normative foundation for sustainable development (Stoddard et al., 2012). The environmental dimension includes resource efficiency, emissions reduction, waste management, and biodiversity protection. Accommodation establishments are among the most energy- and water-intensive components of the tourism system, which makes environmental performance particularly relevant to this sector (Khan et al., 2021; Filimonau, 2021). The social dimension encompasses labour conditions, community wellbeing, cultural heritage, accessibility and equity. The economic dimension concerns financial stability, local value creation, employment quality, and resilience. The value of the Triple Bottom Line lies in its recognition that sustainability depends on alignment across all three domains rather than on isolated interventions focused on only one.

Stern's Value-Belief-Norm theory (Stern et al., 1999) complements this structural perspective with a behavioural foundation. This theoretical

lens suggests that environmentally significant behaviour arises when individuals hold values that support environmental protection, believe that environmental conditions threaten those values and feel a personal responsibility to act. This creates a personal moral norm that motivates pro-environmental behaviour. However, this approach was extended by introducing four broad categories of causal influences: attitudinal dispositions, personal capabilities, contextual factors and habitual routines as determinants of sustainable action (Stern, 2000). Attitudinal factors include values, beliefs, and personal norms. Capabilities encompass knowledge, skills, literacy and financial resources. Contextual factors include regulations, technology, social norms, incentives and material conditions. Habits and routines shape daily practices, particularly in structured work environments such as accommodation establishments.

This broader conceptualisation is particularly relevant for accommodation operations, where environmental behaviour results from the interplay of personal motivation and operational realities. Staff and managers may possess strong pro-environmental values, yet their ability to act can be limited by financial constraints, technological systems, staffing pressures, organisational routines or guest expectations. Conversely, supportive organisational systems, clear procedures and available resources can enable sustainability practices even when individual environmental convictions are modest. By framing behaviour as the outcome of both internal motivations and external conditions, Stern's theory provides a nuanced understanding of how sustainability practices emerge in accommodation enterprises.

2.1 The Supply-Side and Demand-Side Perspective

Sustainability transitions in the accommodation sector are shaped by the interaction of supply-side and demand-side dynamics, which together explain how sustainability-related behaviour emerges, stabilises or remains fragmented in practice. The supply-side perspective focuses on the internal conditions of accommodation enterprises that enable or constrain sustainability action, while the demand-side perspective highlights the expectations, behaviours, and pressures originating from tourists, intermediaries, and host communities. Taken together, these perspectives emphasise that sustainability is neither solely a managerial choice nor purely a response to market demand, but rather the outcome of interdependent organisational and behavioural processes.

From the supply-side perspective, sustainability is primarily deter-

Figure 2.1
Anchored in Sustainable Balance, Sissi, Crete (photo by Marina Pagomenou)

mined by the organisational capacities of accommodation enterprises. Key actors include owners, general managers, department heads, employees, and, where relevant, parent companies or franchise networks. Their decisions shape whether sustainability is addressed through isolated operational measures or embedded within structured management systems. Supply-side sustainability behaviour is reflected in actions such as investments in energy- and water-efficient infrastructure, implementation of waste management and procurement practices, staff training, monitoring and reporting of environmental and social performance, and the adoption of formal sustainability standards or certifications. Through these practices, accommodation providers operationalise environmental responsibility, social wellbeing, and economic viability in accordance with the Triple Bottom Line framework.

The drivers of supply-side sustainability behaviour are closely linked to organisational capabilities and contextual conditions. Leadership commitment influences whether sustainability is prioritised strategically or treated as a secondary concern. Financial capacity determines the feasibility of investments with high upfront costs, such as energy-efficient technologies or certification processes. Technological infrastructure and building characteristics affect which measures can realistically be implemented, particularly in older properties common in Mediterranean desti-

nations. Managerial systems and staff expertise shape the ability to plan, monitor, and improve sustainability performance over time. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that accommodation enterprises with stronger organisational capabilities are more likely to adopt structured sustainability systems and achieve more consistent environmental and social outcomes (Saarinen et al., 2021; Kuo et al., 2022). Where such capabilities are limited, sustainability practices tend to remain incremental, informal, and highly dependent on individual initiative rather than institutionalised processes, a pattern confirmed by the qualitative findings presented later in this book.

The demand-side perspective highlights the role of external actors whose expectations and behaviours influence sustainability transitions in the accommodation sector. These actors include leisure and business tourists, tour operators and online booking platforms, corporate clients, destination management organisations, and local communities. Demand-side sustainability behaviour is expressed through: stated preferences for responsible accommodation; responses to sustainability communication and certification labels; acceptance or rejection of sustainability-related measures during the stay; and purchasing decisions influenced by price, comfort, and perceived value. Community expectations regarding employment quality, cultural preservation, and environmental protection further shape the social licence under which accommodation enterprises operate.

The drivers of demand-side behaviour are diverse and often contradictory. Environmental and social values, awareness of sustainability issues, and concern for destination impacts motivate expressed support for responsible tourism. Concurrently, situational factors such as convenience, habitual consumption patterns, travel purpose, time constraints, and price sensitivity frequently override sustainability considerations in practice. Empirical research in tourism repeatedly identifies a gap between stated sustainability preferences and actual behaviour, reflecting Stern's observation that pro-environmental intentions do not automatically translate into action unless contextual conditions enable such behaviour (Stern, 2000). This intention-behaviour gap creates a complex demand environment for accommodation providers, in which sustainability is symbolically valued but inconsistently rewarded through market behaviour.

As a result, accommodation enterprises face sustainability expectations that influence branding, communication, and reputational posi-

tioning, yet provide uncertain economic signals regarding the return on sustainability investments. Qualitative and quantitative evidence presented in later chapters demostrates that this ambiguity contributes to managerial caution, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises with limited financial buffers. Sustainability measures perceived to compromise guest comfort or increase costs are often avoided, even when environmental or social benefits are recognised.

Sustainability transitions in the accommodation sector therefore emerge at the intersection of supply-side capacity and demand-side behaviour. Supply-side conditions determine what enterprises are able to implement, while demand-side dynamics influence what is perceived as legitimate, desirable, and economically viable. Approaches that rely exclusively on voluntary behavioural change by guests tend to produce limited and unstable outcomes. More effective strategies embed sustainability within infrastructure, service design, and organisational routines, thereby reducing reliance on individual behaviour while maintaining service quality. This emphasis on contextual and structural interventions aligns with Stern's theoretical framework and helps explain the central role of standards, protocols, and governance mechanisms in stabilising sustainability practices across the sector.

Together with the Triple Bottom Line framework and Stern's Value-Belief-Norm theory, the supply-side and demand-side perspectives provide a coherent conceptual foundation for analysing sustainability management in the accommodation sector. They highlight that sustainability is simultaneously behavioural and structural, shaped by the interaction of organisational systems, human motivations, contextual constraints, and market dynamics. This integrated perspective underpins the empirical analysis presented in subsequent chapters and informs the identification of pathways through which Mediterranean accommodation enterprises can progress toward more resilient, equitable, and environmentally responsible business models.

Policy Context for Sustainability Transitions

3

Sustainability transitions in the accommodation sector emerge from the interaction between organisational capacities, market dynamics, and policy environments. While accommodation enterprises make autonomous operational decisions, these decisions are embedded within policy frameworks that shape how sustainability is interpreted, prioritised, and enacted in practice. Policy therefore constitutes a central structural condition influencing sustainability-related behaviour, rather than merely a peripheral or normative reference. This chapter positions the policy context as an active driver of accommodation sector sustainability, drawing on established empirical research and behavioural theory. Anchored in the Triple Bottom Line framework and Stern's theory of environmentally significant behaviour, policy is conceptualised as a contextual force that shapes incentives, constraints, expectations, and norms across environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability.

From a Triple Bottom Line perspective, tourism-related policy frameworks simultaneously address environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic viability. Environmental policies typically target resource efficiency, emissions reduction, waste management, and climate adaptation, often through regulatory requirements, technical standards, or incentive schemes. Social policy instruments address labour standards, occupational health and safety, equality, and community wellbeing. Economic policy seeks to enhance SME competitiveness, innovation, resilience, and balanced regional development. Empirical research in tourism demonstrates that accommodation enterprises respond to these policy domains not in isolation, but through integrated management decisions that reflect trade-offs and synergies across the three dimensions (Stoddard et al., 2012; Saarinen, 2014).

Within Stern's framework, policy primarily functions as a contextual factor shaping sustainability-related behaviour by altering the conditions under which decisions are made. Regulations, minimum standards, incentives, reporting obligations, and governance arrangements influence what accommodation providers perceive as mandatory, desirable or feasible. Behavioural research shows that such contextual interventions are

Figure 3.1
MAST Consortium Meeting at SMOC, Sarajevo (photo by Jana Čakardžić)

often more effective in stabilising environmentally significant behaviour than approaches relying solely on information provision or voluntary motivation (Stern, 2000). Tourism studies provide empirical support for this mechanism. Research on sustainability governance in accommodation and protected destinations demonstrates that where policy signals are clear, coherent and consistently applied, sustainability practices are more likely to become institutionalised as routine management activities rather than discretionary initiatives (Font et al., 2016; Bramwell & Lane, 2013). In contrast, fragmented policy frameworks and overlapping regulatory requirements tend to increase uncertainty and administrative burden, reinforcing informal, incremental approaches to sustainability rather than systematic implementation (Halkos & Tzeremes, 2013; Ruhanen et al., 2019).

Policy also shapes sustainability outcomes by influencing organisational capabilities. Financial incentives, technical assistance programmes, training initiatives and simplified standards can enhance the ability of accommodation enterprises, particularly SMEs, to adopt structured sustainability practices. Empirical studies show that access to targeted support mechanisms significantly increases the likelihood that accommodation providers invest in energy efficiency, adopt environmental management systems and engage with sustainability standards (Hjalager, 2010; Alonso-Almeida et al., 2017). In the absence of such support, sustainability efforts often remain limited to low-cost, easily reversible actions.

The attitudinal effects of policy operate more indirectly but remain

important. Research indicates that when sustainability is embedded in regulatory frameworks or widely recognised standards, it becomes normalised as an expected component of professional practice rather than a value-driven choice (Gössling & Buckley, 2016). This normalisation reduces reliance on individual environmental commitment and mitigates competitive disadvantages for early adopters, particularly in markets characterised by strong price competition and narrow profit margins.

National and destination-level policy contexts contribute to differentiated sustainability outcomes across regions. Variations in regulatory strictness, enforcement capacity, institutional coordination and policy coherence are associated with differences in sustainability adoption among accommodation enterprises, even within similar market and environmental conditions (Bramwell et al., 2017). At the same time, these studies consistently highlight substantial variation within policy contexts, indicating that policy creates enabling environments rather than deterministic outcomes.

Taken together, existing empirical research supports the view that sustainability transitions in the accommodation sector are policy-mediated processes shaped by the interaction of contextual conditions, organisational capabilities and behavioural responses. Policy frameworks do not replace managerial responsibility, but structure the space within which responsibility is exercised. Effective policy environments align environmental, social, and economic objectives, reduce interpretive ambiguity, enhance organisational capacity and stabilise expectations across the sector.

Sustainability Standards as Enablers of the Sustainable Transition

4

Sustainability transitions in tourism depend not only on voluntary commitments or the goodwill of individual enterprises but also on institutional mechanisms that systematically shape behaviour. Across environmental psychology and sustainability research, scholars emphasise that meaningful behavioural change occurs when attitudinal motivations align with contextual enablers (Stern, 2000). In tourism, where managerial decisions are often constrained by operational pressures, market demands and regulatory uncertainty, sustainability standards provide precisely this enabling context. They translate broad sustainability principles into operational requirements, reduce ambiguity, and create a structured pathway for accommodation providers to implement, monitor and improve sustainability performance. Standards therefore serve both a practical and a behavioural function. Practically, they provide explicit guidelines and performance criteria that providers can follow. Behaviourally, they modify the organisational context (the 'C' in Stern's ABC model of environmentally significant behaviour), thereby making sustainable choices easier, more likely, or institutionally expected (Guagnano et al., 1995; Stern et al., 1999). By shaping this context, standards help overcome the persistent 'attitude-behaviour gap' commonly observed within the tourism sector, where positive sustainability intentions often fail to translate into concrete actions (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2016). Concurrently, sustainability standards reflect principles embedded in the Triple Bottom Line framework, which calls for balancing environmental, social, and economic performance (Stoddard et al., 2012). The accommodation sector, traditionally driven by economic metrics, increasingly faces expectations from guests, partners and regulators to demonstrate responsible environmental stewardship and community engagement. Standards support this evolution by offering a credible, auditable structure for integrating sustainability into day-to-day management (Hussain et al., 2018). In this sense, sustainability standards act not as external add-ons but as transitional governance tools. They guide organisations through the behavioural, managerial and cultural changes needed for long-term sustainability, thereby contributing to systemic transformation within the tourism supply chain.

The role of standards in enabling sustainable transition can be understood through three complementary mechanisms:

1. *Standards operationalise sustainability principles.* Sustainability is a complex concept, and its implementation is often hindered by ambiguity about what actions matter and how performance should be assessed. Standards resolve this by offering codified requirements, performance indicators and procedures for evaluation. This aligns with Stoddard et al.'s (2012) argument that sustainability frameworks exert their value when they provide measurable guidance for environmental and social improvement.
2. *Standards modify the behavioural context.* According to Stern's ABC model, contextual forces can override even strong pro-environmental attitudes. In organisations, these forces include routines, incentives, infrastructure and norms (Stern, 2000). Standards intervene directly in this sphere by:
   - instituting mandatory procedures,
   - establishing documentation and monitoring routines,
   - creating managerial accountability,
   - and signalling expected norms to employees.

   This reduces behavioural barriers and supports consistent, routinised sustainable practices.
3. Standards strengthen credibility and external accountability. Beyond shaping internal practices, standards play a critical role in signalling commitment to sustainability to external stakeholders, including consumers, regulators, and partners. Through certification, auditing, and transparent reporting, they reduce information asymmetry and mitigate risks of greenwashing. This enhances trust and legitimacy, which are essential for market differentiation and stakeholder engagement. At the same time, external verification introduces an additional layer of accountability, encouraging organisations to maintain compliance over time rather than treating sustainability as a one-off initiative. In this way, standards not only guide action but also anchor it within broader systems of recognition, comparison, and continuous improvement.

In the tourism market, where greenwashing and strategic under-communication of sustainability practices are widely recognised challenges (Font et al., 2017), third-party standards enhance trust by independently

Figure 4.1 Meeting with Accommodation SMEs in Barcelona (photo by Massimiliano Rumignani)

verifying the credibility of sustainability claims. Such transparency aligns with governance mechanisms shown to strengthen sustainability performance across sectors (Hussain et al., 2018).

4.1 Sustainability Standards in the Accommodation Sector

In the accommodation sector, sustainability standards have become essential tools for translating broad commitments to sustainability into concrete operational practices. They clarify expectations, provide common reference points for environmental and social performance, and support the professionalisation of sustainability within hotel management. Conceptually, standards reduce interpretive ambiguity and establish a shared understanding of what it means for accommodation providers to operate responsibly. They also create the structural conditions that enable behavioural change, aligning with system-transition perspectives and behavioural theory, which emphasise that sustainability is achieved not only through intentions but through changes in organisational routines, incentives and institutional norms (Stern, 2000).

Within this landscape, sustainability standards in the accommodation sector can be grouped into three broad categories, each playing a distinct role in shaping the sustainable transition.

1. The first group consists of voluntary certification schemes, which include national ecolabels, regional programmes and globally recog-

nised schemes accredited by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. Examples such as Green Key, Travelife, Green Globe, EarthCheck, Nordic Swan and the EU Ecolabel for Tourist Accommodation provide sector-specific criteria covering energy and water management, waste reduction, chemical use, social responsibility, accessibility and community engagement. These schemes rely on third-party assessment and periodic renewal, offering hotels both managerial guidance and a credible signal of responsible practice to guests and partners. Empirical studies show that certified hotels tend to adopt more systematic environmental procedures, achieve measurable improvements in resource efficiency, and often report reputational or marketing benefits (Chan, 2008; Esparon et al., 2014).

2. A second category includes regulatory frameworks mandated at national or destination level. These may take the form of environmental performance requirements, minimum energy efficiency thresholds, water-use restrictions, waste-sorting obligations, or destination-based quality and sustainability schemes. Practical examples include mandatory energy performance certificates for accommodation buildings, legally required waste separation systems for hotels, seasonal water-use restrictions during drought periods in Mediterranean destinations, or local regulations obliging accommodation providers to monitor and report energy and water consumption. In some destinations, regulatory requirements are further complemented by destination-based quality or sustainability schemes that define minimum environmental and social standards for accommodation providers operating within protected areas or high-pressure tourism zones. While less widely studied in academic literature than voluntary programmes, regulatory standards influence the accommodation sector by establishing baseline expectations and reducing the risk of uneven implementation. In destinations where such frameworks exist, they help stabilise sustainability as a system-wide norm rather than an optional initiative. They also lessen the burden on individual hotels to interpret sustainability independently, embedding sustainability in local tourism governance structures.

3. The third category comprises international management system standards, such as ISO 14001 and, more recently, ISO 21401, which is specifically designed for accommodation establishments. These

> standards emphasise structured environmental and sustainability management through processes such as impact assessment, performance monitoring, staff training, corrective action and continual improvement. Research suggests that hotels adopting management system standards develop stronger internal environmental routines, more robust monitoring practices and clearer governance structures around sustainability (Mensah, 2006; Kasim, 2009). Unlike some eco-labels, which can be interpreted as product-oriented quality signals, management system standards work primarily by reshaping internal organisational processes, thereby supporting long-term behavioural and cultural change (Chan, 2011).

Taken together, these three sustainability frameworks contribute in complementary ways to the sector's sustainable transition. Voluntary schemes provide market differentiation and external validation; regulatory frameworks establish baseline expectations and system-wide consistency; and international standards professionalise sustainability management and embed it into the operational fabric of accommodation businesses. Their combined influence is reflected in empirical studies demonstrating that certified and standards-aligned hotels generally outperform non-certified peers in areas such as energy and water efficiency, waste management and environmental monitoring (Chan, 2008; Pirani & Arafat, 2021). Research also points to economic and organisational benefits, including increased guest satisfaction, enhanced reputation, improved staff engagement with sustainability and overall competitiveness (Tzschentke et al., 2008; Martínez et al., 2014; Esparon et al., 2014; Bianco et al., 2023).

However, despite these benefits, the overall implementation rate of sustainability standards remains modest. Certified hotels represent a small proportion of global supply, with adoption concentrated among larger, chain-affiliated or higher-end establishments (Knowles et al., 1999; Font et al., 2017). Many small and independent properties face financial, administrative and informational barriers, while the proliferation of overlapping certification schemes can further complicate adoption decisions (Font et al., 2017). These challenges highlight the structural constraints within the tourism system and reinforce the insight, emphasised in triple-bottom-line research, that sustainability transitions require aligned incentives, coherent governance and supportive networks (Stoddard et al., 2012; Hussain et al., 2018).

Despite uneven uptake, sustainability standards remain one of the most important mechanisms guiding the accommodation sector toward more responsible practices. They provide clarity, structure and credibility, and they operate at multiple levels of the tourism system, from individual hotels to market signalling to destination-wide governance making them indispensable components of the sector's transition to sustainability.

4.2 ISO 21401: Structure, Principles and Role as a Driver of Sustainable Transition

ISO 21401 represents a significant development in the landscape of sustainability standards for the accommodation sector because it is the first international management system standard designed specifically for hotels and similar establishments. While earlier standards such as ISO 14001 provided important environmental management principles, they were generic and required hotels to interpret how sustainability applied to their operations. 21401 narrows this gap by translating sustainability expectations directly into the context of hospitality, offering a sector-tailored framework that integrates environmental, social and economic considerations in accordance with Triple Bottom Line thinking (Stoddard et al., 2012).

As a management system standard, ISO 21401 is built on the logic of systematic improvement. It requires accommodations to identify their significant sustainability impacts, set objectives and targets, establish operational controls, monitor outcomes and undertake regular evaluations to ensure progress. This structure embeds sustainability within the organisational routines that guide daily operations. Rather than prescribing specific technologies or performance thresholds, the standard focuses on governance quality, planning processes, and continuous improvement. This distinguishes ISO 21401 from certification schemes that reward achievement of predefined criteria; instead, it fosters the development of a sustainability management system capable of evolving over time as technologies, expectations and organisational capacities change.

The principles underpinning ISO 21401 reflect the understanding that sustainability outcomes emerge from the interaction of managerial intentions and contextual factors. By requiring clear leadership responsibility, documentation, staff training, internal communication, supplier engagement and transparent processes for corrective action, the standard shapes the organisational environment in which sustainability decisions are made. In behavioural terms, it modifies the contextual drivers that

Figure 4.2 Meeting with Accommodation SMEs in Pesaro, Italy (photo by Luca Giraldi)

influence practice-precisely the type of intervention emphasised in environmental behaviour theory (Stern, 2000). Through this mechanism, ISO 21401 supports the internalisation of sustainability, making responsible practices less dependent on individual motivation and more embedded in the system of organisational routines.

ISO 21401 also plays a role within the wider tourism-system transition. Its alignment with ISO 41201 common structure allows accommodation providers who already use other management standards (for example, ISO 9001 or ISO 14001) to integrate sustainability into their existing systems. This compatibility reduces implementation barriers and positions sustainability as part of broader organisational excellence rather than an external add-on. Moreover, the emphasis on stakeholder engagement, social responsibility and community relations reflects a growing recognition that sustainability in hospitality must address both internal operations and the external environments in which hotels operate. These requirements situate ISO 21401 within the contemporary shift toward more holistic governance models in tourism (Hussain et al., 2018).

Although empirical research on 21401:2018 is still emerging, insights from studies of related management system standards offer useful indications. Hotels that implement structured environmental or sustainability management systems often show improvements in monitoring capacity, reductions in resource consumption, enhanced staff awareness, and

more consistent adherence to environmental procedures (Kasim, 2009; Testa & Iraldo, 2010; Chan & Hawkins, 2010). These systems also contribute to organisational learning by formalising sustainability responsibilities and embedding them within training, procurement and operational planning. In this sense, ISO 21401 is likely to serve as a driver of long-term cultural and behavioural transformation, strengthening the institutional basis for sustainability across the accommodation sector.

The broader impact of ISO 21401 ultimately depends on its adoption and integration within hotel groups, independent properties and destination-level governance structures. While uptake may initially be stronger among larger or internationally affiliated hotels, the standard's compatibility with existing management systems and its sector-specific orientation makes it a promising tool for supporting the sustainable transition beyond early adopters. By embedding sustainability into managerial routines, clarifying expectations and enabling consistent evaluation, ISO 21401 contributes to the gradual reconfiguration of practices, norms and performance standards that underpin a sustainable tourism system.

Part Two
Research Design and Methodology

Research Framework and Objectives 5

To effectively guide the sustainable transition of accommodation sector SMEs, it was paramount to adopt a robust theoretical framework capable of analysing the complex psychological and situational factors that influence behaviour. Moreover, this chapter provides a comprehensive definition of the overarching research questions and objectives that informed the data collection across all methodological phases. This ensured that the findings would provide the necessary empirical support for developing the project's practical tools, namely the Sustainability Protocol and the Self-Assessment Tool.

The fundamental approach of this study is guided by a sophisticated conceptual model that fundamentally views sustainability not merely as a regulatory requirement or an abstract goal, but as a complex set of observable behaviours influenced by a multitude of intersecting factors, commonly referred to as drivers. Within the field of accommodation, sustainability is manifested through the specific actions (or lack of actions) demonstrated by key stakeholders, including owners, managers, employees, and even tourists themselves. The transition towards greater sustainability is therefore contingent upon an accurate understanding and strategic engagement with these underlying determinants. In this particular theoretical framework, the term 'driver' is delineated as any psychological or situational attribute that either effectively fosters or actively hinders a desired sustainable behaviour. While there is a substantial body of empirical evidence relating to the motivations behind sustainable behaviour in general, a significant proportion of this evidence is drawn from general behavioural theories applicable to everyday life, most notably the models synthesised by Stern (2000, 2005). However, contemporary research specifically focused on the tourism environment suggests a critical distinction: the drivers that influence actions during a tourism experience may well differ from the factors governing routine behaviour in daily life. For instance, a tourist may engage in pro-environmental actions at home yet perceive different constraints or freedoms while staying in an accommodation establishment.

In order to address this complexity and ensure theoretical rigour, the conceptual framework for identifying these drivers in the tourism context

is rooted in the detailed work of Stern (2005) on Environmentally Significant Behaviour. This framework systematically categorises the factors influencing behaviour into three main groups, which collectively determine a business's readiness for adopting structured sustainability standards like ISO 21401:

1. *Contextual Factors.* These represent external conditions that either facilitate or constrain pro-environmental action. These factors encompass the availability of technology, the embodied environmental impact of existing infrastructure (e.g., the energy efficiency of buildings or materials in consumer products), binding legal and regulatory requirements, and the material costs or rewards (payoffs) associated with sustainable action. Furthermore, factors such as the convenience of sustainable options (e.g., readily available public transit or efficient recycling systems) and prevailing social norms and expectations within the community or market also fall into this category. Stern's work highlights that these contextual influences are generally the strongest determinants of behaviour, often overshadowing individual personal factors.
2. *Personal Capabilities.* This category comprises the resources and skills possessed by individuals or organisations that determine their capacity to engage in sustainable practices. The following elements are of particular significance: financial resources that are necessary for initial investment, literacy (that is to say, general knowledge or understanding), social status, and, crucially, specific knowledge and skills related to particular behaviours. For instance, an SME manager may possess the requisite attitude to implement energy efficiency measures; however, they may lack the personal capabilities in terms of specialised knowledge or financial capital to execute complex retrofitting projects.
3. *Attitudinal Factors.* The following internal psychological factors have been identified as key indicators of an individual's propensity to engage in sustainable behaviour. This encompasses deeply held personal values, general environmentalist predispositions (abstract norms), and specific norms or beliefs associated with particular behaviours. Additionally pertinent are non-environmental attitudes, such as prioritising profit over environmental care or valuing speed over sustainability. The individual's perception of the costs and benefits of taking sustainable action is also a relevant factor.

Figure 5.1 Group Discussions on Drivers and Barriers for Sustainable Tourist Accommmodation Sector (photo by Luca Giraldi)

The qualitative analysis within this study, employing deductive thematic analysis, specifically utilised the Theory of Environmentally Significant Behavior (Stern, 2000) to structure the interpretation of management perspectives, allowing the researchers to systematically express beliefs and motivations against this robust theoretical framework.

The primary objective of this research endeavour, which delineated the comprehensive methodological framework outlined in this chapter, was to conduct a meticulous investigation into the prevailing state of sustainability within the Mediterranean accommodation sector. The overarching objectives of the study were threefold: firstly, to assess the key sustainability impacts (both positive and negative) generated by the accommodation sector; secondly, to evaluate the existing sustainability practices currently being deployed by businesses; and thirdly, to uncover the key issues and challenges that the sector faces in executing a successful sustainable transition.

The goal was explicitly pragmatic: to furnish research-based empirical substantiation that would form the basis for the subsequent development of an effective and highly efficient Sustainability Protocol and a practical Self-Assessment Instrument, designed to assist businesses in systematically evaluating their performance and identifying clear areas for im-

provement. A fundamental contribution of the resulting report is thus to offer comprehensive insights into the primary issues impacting the implementation of sustainable practices within the accommodation sector SMEs, thereby guiding strategic recommendations for crucial improvements.

To achieve these aims, the research was structured through distinct inquiries for both the quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative online survey was precisely calibrated to generate measurable data focusing on three specific, high-priority areas related to the potential adoption of formal standards:

1. Determining the level of readiness among accommodation businesses for the eventual adoption of the comprehensive ISO 21401 sustainability standard.
2. Identifying the perceived barriers that hinder the adoption of any standardized sustainable approach.
3. Mapping the organisational needs and support mechanisms identified by the SMEs as essential prerequisites for successfully implementing the ISO 21401 standard within their organisations.

In parallel, the qualitative study aimed for depth and nuance, seeking to provide rich qualitative insights into the lived experience of sustainability within the sector. The investigation examined the specific sustainable practices in which businesses were engaged, analysed their perceived impacts, and documented the barriers preventing a smooth sustainable transition. It also captured management's beliefs regarding the value and feasibility of structured sustainability standards, and identified specific obstacles impeding formal standards implementation. In order to achieve the ambitious objectives of this research, a rigorous mixed methodological approach was intentionally implemented, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This multi-faceted design was deemed essential, as it allowed for the collection of comprehensive and complementary data covering the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions of sustainability. This enabled the identification of both generalized trends and specific contextual issues and opportunities. The overarching objective of this mixed approach was to furnish substantial evidence for the subsequent development of the Sustainability Protocol and the Self-Assessment Tool.

The methodology was structured sequentially across three distinct yet interconnected phases:

1. *Scoping Study.* This initial phase involved a systematic and exhaustive review of extant scientific literature and relevant strategic policy documents. The objective was to ascertain the state-of-the-art knowledge concerning sustainability-related challenges and practices prevalent among accommodation SMEs in the Mediterranean region.
2. *Qualitative Interviews.* This phase focused on collecting in-depth data through semi-structured interviews, providing nuanced insights into management perceptions, organisational drivers, and the specific challenges faced by accommodation sector SMEs.
3. *Online Quantitative Survey.* The final phase enabled the collection of extensive, scalable quantitative data concerning current sustainability practices, performance baselines and organisational readiness for standards such as ISO 21401 across a broader geographical base.

It must be acknowledged that due to resource limitations, the generalizability of the findings across the entire wider Mediterranean region is somewhat restricted. However, the strategic utilisation of this mixed approach effectively compensates for this limitation by collecting both broad quantitative data on implementation levels and detailed qualitative data on the underlying behavioural drivers and perceived organisational impacts. The triangulation of data sources was found to be a critical component in the acquisition of both quantifiable metrics pertaining to the readiness level for ISO 21401 and in-depth insights into the motivations underpinning stakeholder behaviour.

5.1 Qualitative Study: Perceptions, Barriers, and Drivers of Sustainability

The qualitative analysis was an essential element of the methodological approach, which was multi-faceted in nature. This approach was chosen specifically to gather rich, in-depth insights that quantitative methods alone cannot provide. This phase was pivotal in exploring the nuanced perceptions and motivations of accommodation sector managers regarding their environmental, social, and economic practices, allowing for a detailed examination of the key issues and barriers that prevent a smooth transition. The present study employed semi-structured interviews with the objective of capturing the lived experiences of sustainability within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). The investigation sought to translate abstract concepts into concrete operational realities and to

assess their underlying beliefs about formalised standards, such as ISO 21401.

The qualitative research was conducted through semi-structured interviews, a method chosen because it facilitates open-ended, richly detailed responses while simultaneously ensuring that all predetermined key thematic areas pertaining to environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability are systematically addressed. This balance between structure and fluidity is crucial for generating nuanced academic data. The sampling strategy was designed to achieve maximum diversity within the constraints of the project, focusing on the accommodation sector SMEs across the consortium countries. Specifically, a target of a minimum of five (5) SMEs was set for each of the participating countries: Italy, Greece, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In total, twenty-two (22) interviews were conducted, ensuring that the selection was varied in terms of critical operational metrics such as business size (number of rooms), quality classification, types of amenities and services offered, and geographic location or destination typology.

The definition of an SME employed throughout the study adhered to established European standards, requiring the business to have fewer than 250 permanent employees and either a total turnover of ≤€50 million or a total balance sheet of ≤€43 million. Prior to conducting the interviews, rigorous ethical protocols were followed, including securing the informed consent of every participant and guaranteeing the anonymity of the collected data. Each interviewee was assigned a unique confidential code for tracking purposes (e.g., SI1 for Slovenia, IT1 for Italy).

It is important to highlight the differentiated methodological contribution from one of the consortium partners. In contrast to the interview-based qualitative methodology used elsewhere, Spain's input for this phase focused exclusively on an extensive analysis of national and international sustainability certifications relevant to the Spanish hotel sector. This alternative approach provided valuable contextual insight, as Spanish hotels were examined based on their demonstrable adoption of various sustainability certifications, serving as key, formalized measures of performance within the tourism sector. The Spanish research highlighted that, in a highly competitive market, certifications are frequently leveraged as strategic tools for differentiation and reputation-building. The research involved the compilation of a detailed dataset, including a table of nearly 100 Spanish hotels, which provided concrete examples of how these certifications are practically applied across the country. This

focus on formal standards provided a complementary perspective to the perceptual data gathered through interviews.

The semi-structured interview protocol was designed, with a detailed guide ensuring comprehensive coverage of all aspects of sustainability management systems environmental, socio-cultural, and economic within the accommodation SMEs. The guide covered a critical sequence of questioning areas, the details of which are provided below. The initial questions focused on establishing the interviewee's perspective on sustainability in tourism, the perceived importance of sustainability as a guiding principle for their business, and a breakdown of which specific aspects (social, environmental, economic) were considered most crucial, along with the justifications for these priorities. This was followed by a comprehensive account of the prevailing sustainability management system within the organisation, encompassing environmental practices (e.g., energy-efficient lighting, green roof, recycling), social initiatives (e.g., guest satisfaction, returning guests), and economic strategies (e.g., energy savings). The discussion then moved to evaluating the success of their current practices. The interviewees were asked to describe their methods for planning and monitoring sustainable progress, with particular reference to the equipment, processes and metrics utilised across the three dimensions of sustainability. It is imperative to note that the participants were prompted to identify the primary impediments, issues, challenges, and barriers hindering their success or progress toward sustainable transition.

Regarding formalized standards, the protocol addressed the existence of any sustainable labels or certificates. In instances where a certificate was held (e.g., Green Key), the discussion encompassed its implementation timeline, its specific impact on environmental, social, and economic performance, and the key challenges encountered during implementation, such as limitations related to staff, financial costs, and infrastructure. In instances where no label was held, the manager was invited to elaborate on the underlying rationales and the organisational or external conditions that would need to be fulfilled to encourage the adoption of a label. The final segment of the interview protocol involved an exposition of the ISO 21401 Standard, with particular emphasis on its objective of establishing environmental, social, and economic requirements for a sustainability management system in tourism accommodation establishments. The participants were firstly queried about their extant knowledge of the standard. The participants were then invited to hypothesise about what

Figure 5.2
Boutique Hotel, Portorose: Sustainable Pioneer in Tourist Accommodation (photo by Marcel Bešter)

specific information they would require to make an informed decision regarding implementation, and what kind of concrete obstacles or barriers they would anticipate, including those related to knowledge, monitoring, employees, staff capacity, financial costs, and existing infrastructure. This structured interrogation enabled the researchers to capture both current practices and proactive concerns regarding future standardisation efforts.

The data processing was undertaken through Deductive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) following Theory of Environmentally Significant Behaviour (Stern, 2000). This technique entailed the implementation of a pre-existing theoretical structure for the categorization of the collected qualitative insights, thereby ensuring that the analysis remained rigorously focused on deriving the main issues and behavioural drivers as understood through an established academic lens. The primary analytical structure was the detailed framework based on the Theory of Environmentally Significant Behaviour (Stern, 2000, 2005). The model provided the three overarching codes for interpreting the contextual, capability-related, and attitudinal factors expressed by the accommodation managers. More specifically:

1. *Contextual Factors.* Codes captured references to the availability of technology, the embodied environmental impact of the organisation (e.g., energy efficiency of the buildings), legal and regulatory requirements, perceived material costs and rewards (payoffs), con-

venience issues (e.g., access to recycling), and the influence of social norms and expectations.

2. *Personal Capabilities.* Codes focused on limitations or strengths related to financial resources, organisational literacy, social status, and, critically, behaviour-specific knowledge and skills required for sustainable operations.
3. *Attitudinal Factors.* This coding captured internal motivations, including personal values, general environmentalist predisposition (abstract norms), behaviour-specific (concrete) norms and beliefs, non-environmental attitudes (e.g., prioritizing profit over green initiatives), and the perceived costs and benefits associated with implementing sustainability actions.

To distinguish motivations and challenges clearly, the analysis actively segregated all identified factors into categories that either explicitly supported (Pro) sustainability and ISO 21401 standard adoption or opposed (Against) them. A separate code, Anticipated Needs, was also used to capture the practical support required for successful transition, such as access to detailed knowledge, technical support, or financial resources. Results from this qualitative study also informed the development of quantitative survey.

In addition to the interview analysis, the complementary Scoping Study (Phase 1) was initially designed as a structured scoping exercise aimed at systematically mapping sustainability issues, actions, drivers and impacts related to accommodation SMEs. The study employed a focused content analysis template to organise evidence across environmental, cultural, social and economic dimensions. For each identified issue or challenge, the intended analytical logic was to document the actions or behaviours adopted by SMEs, the resulting sustainability impacts supported by factual evidence, and the underlying drivers shaping these outcomes, culminating in practice-oriented recommendations. During implementation, however, it became evident that the available literature was uneven in both coverage and level of detail, particularly with respect to SME-specific practices and empirically documented impacts in the Mediterranean context. As a result, this phase did not develop into a full scoping review in the formal methodological sense. Instead, the literature analysis remained intentionally selective and exploratory, focusing on sources that could meaningfully support the interpretation of interview findings rather than providing an exhaustive mapping of exist-

ing research. This adaptive approach allowed support the triangulation of perceived challenges emerging from the interviews with documented evidence and drivers identified in extant literature, while maintaining methodological proportionality and transparency given the limitations of the available evidence base.

5.2 Quantitative Study: Measuring the Triple Bottom Line Performance of SMEs

The quantitative analysis was designed to complement the in-depth qualitative findings by collecting measurable and scalable data across a wider network of accommodation providers in the Euro-Med region. This systematic component was crucial for establishing a measurable Sustainability Baseline by quantifying the current implementation levels of various environmental, socio-cultural, and economic practices. The survey specifically aimed to determine the sector's statistical readiness level for the ISO 21401 standard, identify widespread perceived barriers (such as high costs and lack of knowledge), and articulate the organisational needs required for successful standard adoption.

Quantitative research was conducted via an online survey, constituting the third critical component of the methodology. This survey aimed to gather scalable, numerical data on sustainability practices, organisational challenges, and the broader perceptions regarding the ISO 21401 standard across accommodation providers in the Euro-Med region. The survey was deliberately designed to focus narrowly on services pertaining exclusively to the provision of accommodation (e.g., rooms) and directly related services, such as food provision, even for businesses engaged in multiple economic activities (e.g., construction or transportation). The questionnaire was systematically divided into four principal sections (A, B, C, and D), each dedicated to measuring specific constructs essential for the research objectives:

- *Section A.* Basic Information of the Study Participant and Organisation: This section established the organisational baseline by collecting demographic data, including the year of establishment, the country of operation, the NACE code activities (specifically I5510, I5520, I5530 for accommodation), the respondent's working position (Manager, Owner, Operations staff), the organisational size (number of permanent staff, number of rooms), the types of amenities offered (e.g., SPA, Restaurant, Pool), and the type of area where the

unit is located (rural, urban, coastal). Of particular note was the inclusion of the Sustainability Orientation measure within this section, which requested that respondents evaluate the significance of sustainability as a guiding principle and their perceived success in practising it, utilising a highly differentiated 0–9 interval scale.

- *Section B: ISO 21401 Readiness Level.* This extensive section aimed to quantify the current state of sustainable implementation. The study commenced with the administration of binary (YES/NO) questions, the purpose of which was to ascertain the adoption of fundamental sustainable practices. These practices included the presence of an environmental label, a sustainability strategy, and specific infrastructure such as waste handling systems. The core of the readiness assessment comprised two sets of items measured on a 6-point interval scale (0 – not at all implemented, to 6 – Extremely well implemented):

  1. The first set evaluated the implementation level of 37 specific sustainability practices across the Triple Bottom Line dimensions environmental (e.g., utilisation of efficient equipment, sustainable planting), economic (e.g., sustainable procurement, supporting local employment), and socio-cultural (e.g., promoting gender equality, reflecting local art in design).
  2. The second set was specifically designed to assess the extent of implementation of 17 requirements directly aligned with the ISO 21401 standard. These requirements encompass issues such as risk identification, architectural adaptation to the environment, circular economy models, energy consumption minimisation, and professional training for local populations.

- *Section C.* Perceived Barriers to the Adoption of ISO 21401: This section employed a scale ranging from 0 (Not at all pertinent) to 6 (Completely pertinent) to assess the perceived relevance of 15 barriers that may prevent or complicate the adoption of ISO 21401. The items covered practical and organisational constraints such as limited staff or time availability, high implementation and renewal costs, insufficient knowledge of the standard's benefits, perceptions of excessive rigidity or bureaucratic burden related to documentation requirements, and the lack of adequate monitoring tools. The selection and formulation of these survey items were informed by insights emerging from the preceding qualitative interviews and the

complementary scoping study, ensuring that the listed barriers reflected challenges reported by accommodation SMEs in practice and those identified in targeted external literature, while remaining aligned with existing research on sustainability standard adoption.

- *Section D.* Identified Needs for the Adoption of ISO 21401: This section was designed to identify forms of external support considered necessary to facilitate the adoption of ISO 21401. Participants were invited to rate the importance of 15 potential actions using a scale ranging from 0 (Not at all important) to 6 (Extremely important). The items included policy-relevant and practice-oriented measures such as comprehensive staff support by external auditors, credible evidence demonstrating tangible benefits (e.g., documented cost reductions), and cost caps for auditing processes (not exceeding an average middle-management wage). Additional measures included adapting requirements to business size and organisational capacity, governmental co-funding of monitoring tools, and developing online self-assessment and benchmarking platforms. The selection and formulation of these items were informed by insights from the qualitative interviews and the complementary scoping study, ensuring that the identified needs reflected both empirically observed constraints among accommodation SMEs and gaps highlighted in the targeted review of external literature.

The online survey was disseminated across a wide array of accommodation providers throughout the Euro-Med region, with the methodological target of securing a minimum of 50 SME responses per consortium country, in order to achieve significant reach and scalability.

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND HANDLING

While the preceding sections describe how individual constructs were measured through the survey instrument, this section explains how the collected quantitative data were subsequently handled, aggregated, and analysed. The analytical procedures were designed to reflect the exploratory and diagnostic nature of the study, as well as the applied objective of informing sustainability transition processes in the accommodation sector.

Across all survey sections, the analysis prioritised transparency and interpretability over statistical complexity. Given the ordinal and binary nature of most variables, the analysis relied primarily on descriptive statis-

tics, complemented by selected inferential tests to assess cross-country differences. For sustainability practices measured using a binary response format, analysis focused on the presence or absence of practices. Responses were coded accordingly and analysed by calculating the percentage of respondents reporting adoption of each practice. These results were first examined at the country level and subsequently synthesised across the Mediterranean sample to identify practices that are widely adopted versus those that remain rare. This approach allows a clear distinction between adoption and non-adoption, without implying differences in implementation depth.

For sustainability practices measured on ordinal scales capturing the extent of implementation, responses were analysed using a threshold-based aggregation strategy. To strengthen interpretive clarity, responses were grouped into low implementation (scores 0–1) and high implementation (scores 5–6), while midpoint responses were excluded from selected analyses. This forced-contrast approach highlights practices that are clearly embedded in organisational routines as opposed to those that are weakly implemented or symbolic. A similar aggregation logic was applied to constructs capturing sustainability orientation and perceived success. Responses were grouped into low endorsement (scores 0–2) and high endorsement (scores 7–9). This strategy emphasises polarised evaluations and allows meaningful cross-country comparison of normative commitment and self-assessed performance, while avoiding overinterpretation of moderate responses.

Organisational readiness for ISO 21401 adoption was analysed by calculating the share of respondents reporting high readiness (scores 5–6) for each readiness dimension. Readiness was treated as a multidimensional construct, with results reported at the item level rather than aggregated into a single index. Country-specific analyses were complemented by cross-Mediterranean synthesis tables to identify areas of relative strength and weakness. Perceived barriers to ISO 21401 adoption were analysed by aggregating responses into low pertinence (scores 0–2) and high pertinence (scores 5–6) categories. The proportion of respondents identifying each barrier as highly pertinent was calculated. Barriers were subsequently interpreted using Stern's environmentally significant behaviour framework, which distinguishes between attitudinal factors, personal capabilities, and contextual constraints. This theoretical alignment was applied at the interpretation stage to explain dominant behavioural mechanisms rather than as a statistical classification. The same

analytical logic was applied to ISO 21401 adoption needs and enabling conditions. Responses were aggregated into high importance (scores 5–6) versus lower importance categories, and percentages were calculated for each enabling condition. Needs were aligned with Stern's behavioural categories to allow direct comparison with the barrier analysis and to support a behavioural diagnosis of adoption feasibility.

Where variables were binary or dichotomised, chi-square tests of independence were applied to examine whether response distributions differed significantly across countries. These tests were used selectively and diagnostically, supporting identification of contextual variation rather than causal inference. Countries with insufficient response counts were excluded from inferential testing to preserve analytical robustness. Degrees of freedom and *p*-values are reported alongside descriptive statistics where inferential tests are presented. No composite indices were constructed and no parametric modelling was employed. This reflects both the heterogeneity of the sample and the study's emphasis on producing results that are directly interpretable for policy makers and practitioners. The analytical approach therefore complements the detailed survey design by translating measured constructs into empirically grounded insights on sustainability practices, ISO 21401 readiness, barriers, and enabling conditions across Mediterranean accommodation contexts.

To examine the relationship between sustainability values and observable sustainability related behaviour, an association analysis was conducted between the importance attributed to sustainability as a guiding principle of the business and three behavioural constructs capturing sustainability engagement. The importance of sustainability as a guiding principle was treated as a value-based driver, consistent with Stern's (2000) environmentally significant behaviour framework. Responses were aggregated into low importance (scores 0–2) and high importance (scores 7–9), with midpoint responses excluded to strengthen interpretive contrast.

Behavioural engagement was operationalised using three constructs. First, sustainability practice adoption was derived from binary indicators capturing whether specific practices were present within the organisation. A composite adoption indicator was created by calculating the number of practices adopted by each respondent and subsequently dichotomised into lower versus higher adoption levels. Second, sustainability practice implementation was operationalised based on the share of practices reported at high implementation intensity (scores 5–6),

and subsequently dichotomised to distinguish between weak and strong implementation profiles. Third, organisational readiness for ISO 21401 adoption was captured by the share of readiness items reported at high readiness levels (scores 5–6), again dichotomised for analytical clarity.

Associations between sustainability importance and each behavioural construct were examined at the cross Mediterranean level using chi-square tests of independence. This analytical approach allows assessment of whether strong sustainability value orientation is systematically associated with higher levels of behavioural engagement and institutional readiness, without implying causal direction. The analysis is diagnostic in nature and aims to empirically assess the presence and strength of value-behaviour alignment within the accommodation sector.

Part Three
Empirical Insights

Analysis

6

This chapter presents the empirical insights gathered from accommodation SMEs across the Mediterranean. It begins by describing who participated in the study and the business environments in which they operate. These basic characteristics matter because they shape how establishments approach sustainability and what capacity they have to change. The analysis then turns to the current state of sustainability practice. Environmental, social and economic aspects are examined together to show how SMEs manage their resources, their people and their long-term business resilience. This view reflects the multidimensional nature of sustainability and helps reveal where progress is strongest and where gaps remain. Next, the chapter explores what motivates SMEs to engage in the sustainable transition and what holds them back. The findings highlight concrete needs, practical challenges and structural barriers that influence their decisions. These insights help explain the uneven pace of transition across the region. The chapter concludes by comparing patterns across Mediterranean countries. Although the study participants share many similarities as small and medium accommodation providers, national policy settings, market pressures and institutional support differ. These differences shape how sustainability is understood and implemented on the ground.

Together, these elements provide a clear picture of how Mediterranean accommodation SMEs are positioned within the sustainability transition and what conditions influence their ability to move forward.

6.1 Qualitative Insights

The qualitative analysis constituted a core component of the research design, intended to capture the depth and complexity of sustainability-related practices that cannot be adequately understood through quantitative data alone. Through semi-structured interviews with accommodation SME managers, this phase explored everyday operational realities, managerial perceptions, and the behavioural determinants shaping the sustainable transition of the sector across Italy, Greece, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The qualitative approach was essential for translating abstract sustainability principles into the concrete contexts in which accommodation businesses operate.

The analysis is grounded in two complementary frameworks. The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework (Elkington, 1997; Stoddard et al., 2012) provides the structural lens through which environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability are examined, while Stern's Theory of Environmentally Significant Behaviour (Stern et al., 1999; Stern, 2000) offers a behavioural perspective by distinguishing between attitudinal factors, personal capabilities, and contextual factors that enable or constrain sustainable action. Together, these frameworks allow for an integrated interpretation of sustainability practices that links observable behaviour with underlying motivations and structural conditions.

Qualitative findings consistently indicate that managerial attitudes toward sustainability are largely positive. Many managers express strong personal commitment to environmental responsibility, social fairness, and long-term business viability. However, the ability to translate these intentions into formalised and systematic sustainability practices is frequently constrained by contextual conditions and limited organisational capabilities. Structural factors such as building characteristics, financial constraints, regulatory complexity, and destination-level infrastructure strongly shape what actions are feasible in practice. At the same time, deficits in knowledge, time, staffing, and monitoring capacity limit the adoption of structured sustainability management systems.

By applying the combined TBL and Stern frameworks, the qualitative analysis reveals not only what sustainability measures SMEs implement, but also why implementation remains uneven across the sector. Environmental and social practices are often subordinated to economic imperatives related to survival and resilience, particularly in highly seasonal and resource-constrained contexts. This behavioural perspective helps explain the persistent gap between positive sustainability intentions and consistent implementation, highlighting the need for enabling tools, supportive governance structures, and capability-building mechanisms to facilitate meaningful and lasting change.

Across all three TBL dimensions, qualitative findings demonstrate that positive sustainability attitudes are widespread among accommodation SMEs. However, implementation remains uneven due to contextual constraints and limited organisational capabilities. Stern's framework helps explain why favourable attitudes alone do not translate into systematic action, highlighting the importance of enabling contexts and targeted support mechanisms. These insights provide a behavioural foundation for interpreting the quantitative results presented in the following section.

Table 6.1 Environmental Sustainability Main Drivers and Examples

Main drivers	Examples
Compliance with sustainability standards	• We have commenced the Green Key certificate procedure and we're hopeful that by the end of 2024, we will be certified. From 145 mandatory points in the certification process, we have already completed 50. 80 is the minimal requirement in order to obtain the certificate.
Certification seen as essential	• We have commenced the Green Key certificate procedure and we're hopeful that by the end of 2024, we will be certified. This is additional work for our staff in every aspect, however, something completely worth working towards. • The certification process is strict, and we must comply with the standards provided by our group. Certifications like these set us apart from competitors and align us with global sustainability goals.
Eco-conscious guests	• It's all about an experience and this is what highlights any aspect of sustainability [...] Satisfied guests return to our small hotel. Our guests are also able to seed if they wish! This interactive experience is something eco-conscious guests particularly enjoy.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability is the most clearly articulated and operationalised dimension among accommodation SMEs. Interviewees most frequently referred to energy efficiency, water conservation, and waste management as core sustainability practices. These measures are primarily framed in pragmatic terms, closely linked to cost reduction and operational efficiency rather than environmental values alone. Common examples include the use of energy-efficient lighting, water-saving devices, waste separation, and reductions in single-use products.

Despite this operational focus, the qualitative findings reveal significant gaps in understanding the actual environmental impacts of accommodation activities. Managers, employees, and guests often lack awareness of how everyday decisions, such as investment choices, food provisioning practices, or consumption behaviour translate into environmental outcomes. Existing research and interview evidence nonetheless converge on the conclusion that the most significant environmental pressures generated by the accommodation sector relate to water use, waste generation, and carbon emissions associated with energy consumption.

From a behavioural perspective, contextual factors play a decisive role in shaping environmental action. The physical characteristics of buildings, particularly older properties, were repeatedly cited as limiting fac-

Table 6.2 Environmental Sustainability Main Issues and Examples

Main issues	Examples
Financial barriers	• [One of the problems] is money available to invest in pro-sustainable equipment, measurements etc.
Lack of knowledge and skills	• We're acquainted with other ISO standards, but not this one in particular. We would need clear goals … for example, this year this much food waste and next year this many % less. But we cannot measure that, nor we have knowledge and people to set proper standards/objectives for us.
Percieved complexity of environmental certification processes	• The bureaucracy for implementing certain actions/sustainability projects is a burden …

tors for implementing advanced efficiency measures. High upfront investment costs and uncertainty regarding return on investment further constrain decision-making, especially in destinations characterised by short operating seasons. In addition, the availability of destination-level infrastructure, such as recycling systems, renewable energy access, and water management services, strongly influences what measures can realistically be adopted.

Personal capabilities represent an additional constraint. While general awareness of environmental issues is high, many managers report limited technical knowledge and insufficient monitoring tools to assess environmental performance systematically. Time pressure, staff shortages, and restricted financial capacity further limit the ability to move beyond incremental and informal measures toward comprehensive environmental management systems.

Attitudinal factors nevertheless act as important enablers. Interviewees frequently expressed a strong sense of responsibility toward protecting local natural resources, often linked to long-term dependence on destination attractiveness. However, these values are consistently balanced against concerns related to guest comfort, service quality, and operational reliability, illustrating the pragmatic trade-offs that characterise SME decision-making.

Environmental standards and certifications emerge as both drivers and barriers within this behavioural landscape. While certifications are increasingly perceived as relevant for attracting environmentally conscious guests and responding to market expectations, perceptions remain ambivalent. Some managers regard certifications as essential strategic tools,

whereas others view them as complex, costly, and administratively burdensome, particularly for smaller establishments. The lack of credible evidence demonstrating the market value of certification further reinforces scepticism and delays adoption.

Qualitative evidence points to several enabling solutions. Financial incentives such as subsidies, tax reductions, and dedicated funding schemes are perceived as critical for supporting investments in energy-efficient technologies and renewable energy systems. Simplifying and streamlining certification processes would substantially reduce perceived barriers, particularly for SMEs. Finally, structured training, practical guidance, and knowledge-sharing initiatives are essential for strengthening organisational capacity, improving understanding of environmental impacts, and supporting gradual, confidence-based improvement.

SOCIO-CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

Socio-cultural sustainability is primarily understood through relationships with employees, guests, and local communities. Interviewees emphasised guest satisfaction, repeat visitation, and staff wellbeing as central objectives. Practices such as fair treatment of employees, flexible working arrangements, and attention to service quality were commonly mentioned, though often without formalised social responsibility strategies.

Qualitative findings highlight several persistent socio-cultural challenges. Accommodation providers frequently struggle to balance the economic imperative of attracting tourists with the responsibility to minimise negative social and cultural impacts. These challenges are particularly pronounced for smaller establishments with limited financial and

Table 6.3 Socio-Cultural Sustainability Main Issues and Examples

Main issues	Examples
Relationship between tourism-service providers and local populations	• We would need full cooperation with cultural institutuions [...] Lack of cooperation and proper information flow makes it difficult to offer meaningful cultural experiences for guests. • We're trying to offer packages that would allow our guests to explore local events and culture, but there's little cooperation from the local population.
Limited financial resources and staff	• We can't afford to pay competitive wages [...] It's a problem when trying to retain staff, especially during the high season. • We're continuously short of waiters and other key staff, especially during high season, as many leave for better-paying jobs in neighbouring countries.

Table 6.4 Socio-Cultural Sustainability Main Drivers and Examples

Main drivers	Examples
Corporate social responsibility	• We do our best to minimise waste and use local suppliers where possible. Our guests appreciate this, and we see it as part of our responsibility to the community and environment.
Guest Expectations	• Our guests appreciate when we provide something different ... • At check-in, our guests are tolk about this project [seeding forest] and they too can donate money if they wish. We find that guests appreciate these small initiatives.
Brand reputation	• We are part of a larger brand, and maintaining the standards of sustainability is not just important for us, but for the reputation of the entire brand.

human resources. The preservation of cultural heritage and meaningful engagement with local communities remain uneven and highly dependent on individual managerial commitment. Gender inequality emerged as a significant issue, especially within culinary and operational roles. Interviewees highlighted unequal pay, limited career advancement opportunities for women, and demanding working conditions. These inequalities reflect broader societal structures and limit the sector's ability to benefit from a diverse and inclusive workforce.

Contextual factors again play a central role. Labour market conditions, seasonality, and staff shortages constrain the ability of SMEs to invest in training, offer long-term contracts, or formalise human resource policies. Regulatory requirements related to labour standards are generally perceived as necessary but administratively demanding, particularly for small teams.

Personal capabilities shape social sustainability mainly through managerial skills and organisational capacity. Many managers rely on personal experience rather than formal training to address social issues, resulting in uneven implementation across businesses. Limited time and staff capacity further restrict opportunities for monitoring and improving social impacts systematically.

Attitudinally, interviewees express strong commitment to maintaining good relationships with employees and local communities. Social responsibility is often framed as a moral obligation and as essential for reputation and guest trust. At the same time, social initiatives are frequently constrained when perceived to conflict with economic viability or operational feasibility. Drivers of socio-cultural sustainability include corporate social responsibility and growing guest demand for authentic, place-

based experiences. Engagement with local communities and cultural authenticity are increasingly recognised as sources of guest satisfaction, loyalty, and competitive differentiation.

Proposed solutions focus on strengthening local linkages and institutional support. These include sourcing local products, supporting local artisans, and actively contributing to the preservation of cultural traditions. Policy instruments such as tax incentives or subsidies can further encourage local sourcing and cultural investment. Guest awareness initiatives also play an important role by promoting respectful behaviour and enhancing the socio-cultural quality of the tourism experience.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Economic sustainability constitutes the underlying reference point for decision-making across all sustainability dimensions. Interviewees consistently frame sustainability through the lens of business survival, resilience, and long-term competitiveness. Cost control, risk reduction, and adaptation to market pressures are dominant concerns, particularly in contexts characterised by strong seasonality and external shocks. Qualitative findings reveal that economic sustainability remains one of the least clearly defined dimensions within the accommodation sector. Divergent interpretations persist, ranging from narrow understandings focused on profitability to broader perspectives emphasising fair wages, job security, and reduced inequality.

Economic leakage emerged as a major concern. Revenue flows to foreign-owned hotels and international supply chains weaken the capacity of local communities to benefit from tourism. Interviewees expressed frustration regarding ownership structures that prioritise international suppliers over local businesses. While tourism contributes to employment growth, concerns remain regarding low wages, limited career progression, and job instability, particularly in lower-skilled positions.

Within Stern's framework, contextual and capability-related factors

Table 6.5 Economic Sustainability Main Issues and Examples

Main issues	Examples
Economic leakage	• We import most of the recycled objects we're obliged to use …
Limited career advancement	• The only challenge we continuously face is the lack of waiters who come and go. Sometimes we need more waiters in the hotel due to the number of guests, especially in the high season from May to October …
Low wages	• We can't afford to pay competitive wages.

Table 6.6 Economic Sustainability Main Drivers and Examples

Main drivers	Examples
Brand reputation	• We believe it will improve our standing with eco-conscious travelers and boost our reputation in the long run. • [...] This not only aligns us with global sustainability standards but enhances our brand reputation.
Guest satisfaction	• We are continuously thinking of products to provide for our guests [...] I think this is why they return or recommend our place ... • Many of our guests ask us about local traditions, cuisine, and culture, so we've tried to create packages that help them connect with the local community and cultural heritage.

strongly shape economic behaviour. Limited access to finance, rising energy costs, and uncertainty about market returns constrain sustainability investments. Many managers emphasise that while sustainability is desirable, economic stability remains a prerequisite for long-term commitment. Attitudinally, sustainability is often viewed as a means rather than an end. Interviewees recognise potential economic benefits such as cost savings, improved reputation, and guest loyalty, yet remain sceptical about the immediate financial returns of formal standards and certifications without external support or clear evidence.

Economic drivers of sustainability include enhanced brand reputation and growing demand from eco-conscious travellers. Larger establishments in particular report that sustainability initiatives improve guest satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Solutions identified in the qualitative analysis emphasise strengthening the local economic base and improving the economic case for sustainability. Promoting local ownership and local supply chains can reduce economic leakage and increase destination-level resilience. Educating accommodation providers about long-term cost savings associated with energy efficiency and sustainable operations can further encourage adoption. When sustainability is framed as a pathway to resilience, efficiency, and competitiveness rather than as an added burden, SMEs are more likely to engage in structured and sustained sustainability transitions.

6.2 Quantitative Insights

While the qualitative analysis provided rich insight into how accommodation SMEs perceive sustainability and experience the transition in

practice, quantitative analysis is essential for establishing scale, comparability, and patterns across a wider population. This section therefore complements the preceding qualitative findings by examining the extent to which sustainability practices, readiness for ISO 21401, perceived barriers, and identified needs are distributed across accommodation SMEs in the Mediterranean.

The quantitative analysis serves three interrelated purposes. First, it establishes a measurable baseline of sustainability implementation across the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions of the Triple Bottom Line. Second, it assesses the degree of organisational readiness for adopting ISO 21401 as a structured sustainability management system. Third, it identifies the dominant barriers and support needs that shape SMEs' capacity to engage in a systematic sustainability transition.

Importantly, the quantitative results are not interpreted in isolation. They are explicitly read through the behavioural lens provided by Stern's theory of environmentally significant behaviour (Stern, 2000). From this perspective, survey results reflect the interaction between attitudinal orientations toward sustainability, organisational capabilities such as knowledge and financial resources, and contextual conditions including regulatory environments, infrastructure, labour availability, and administrative burden. This framework allows observed patterns in implementation and readiness to be understood not merely as performance outcomes, but as the behavioural consequences of enabling and constraining conditions. Taken together, the quantitative insights provide an empirical counterpoint to the qualitative findings. They reveal where sustainability practices are most widespread, where gaps persist, and which structural conditions most strongly shape SMEs' capacity to transition from intention to systematic implementation. These findings form a critical evidentiary basis for the discussion and policy implications developed in the subsequent chapters.

PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING ACCOMMODATION SMES

The quantitative study successfully engaged a diverse cohort of 211 accommodation providers distributed across the Mediterranean basin. This geographic coverage reflects both mature, highly regulated European Union destinations and emerging non-EU markets, providing essential variation for comparative analysis (Saarinen et al., 2021). The geographic distribution is anchored by the region's three tourism economic pow-

Table 6.7 Sample Characteristics

Country of operation	Number of respondents	Percentage
Spain	55	26.1
Greece	53	25.1
Italy	52	24.6
Slovenia	36	17.1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10	4.7
Other Mediterranean	5	2.4
Total	211	100.0

erhouses: Spain (n = 55, 26.1%), Greece (n = 53, 25.1%), and Italy (n = 52, 24.6%). These three countries account for 75.8% of the sample and represent the established, high-volume Mediterranean tourism markets. Slovenia (n = 36, 17.1%) provides significant representation from the Adriatic region, a distinct sub-Mediterranean market with different governance structures and market characteristics. Bosnia and Herzegovina (n = 10, 4.7%) and other Mediterranean nations – Albania, France, Portugal, Croatia, and Malta (n = 6, 2.9%) – provide contrast points, with Bosnia particularly representing the emerging Balkans market with lower institutional maturity and tourism development compared to EU-member Mediterranean states.

This stratification mirrors actual tourism significance within the Mediterranean region and creates meaningful variation in institutional environment, regulatory sophistication, and market structure that is essential for understanding the drivers and barriers of sustainable transition.

The sample is overwhelmingly characterised by micro and small enterprises. A substantial majority 69.7% (n = 147) operates with between 0 and 50 permanent employees, meeting the European definition of microenterprise (less than 10 employees) or small enterprise (10–49 employees). An additional 30.3% employ between 51 and 250 staff, meeting the small-to-medium definition. The entire sample comprises SMEs; no large hotel chains are represented.

Similarly, at the property level, 49.3% (N = 104) manage 50 rooms or fewer, and 19.9% operate 51–100 rooms. Only 30.8% exceed 100 rooms. These small properties, often family-run, represent the characteristic Mediterranean accommodation: the family hotel rather than the chain property, the family-managed pension rather than the corporate resort.

This structural finding is paramount for interpreting ISO 21401 readi-

Table 6.8 Operational Characteristics

Characteristic	Metric	Value
Business Age	Mean	24.7 years
	Standard Deviation	17.7 years
	Range	1–88 years
Operational Scale	Micro (≤50 employees)	69.7%
	Small (51–250 employees)	30.3%
Property Capacity	≤50 rooms	49.3%
	51–100 rooms	19.9%
	>100 rooms	30.8%
Organisational Logic	Specialised Labour	46.0%
	Flexible/Multitasking	54.0%

ness. The standard was designed for 'accommodation establishments of all sizes' (International Organization for Standardization, 2024), yet its requirements for issue identification, objective-setting, competence management, documented procedures, internal audit, and management review presume administrative capacity severely restricted in organisations of this scale (International Organization for Standardization, 2024). For an 8-person family hotel with 30 rooms, dedicating substantial management time to sustainability administration comes at direct cost to revenue-generating operations. This represents what Stern (2000) identifies as a Contextual Factor: the absence of administrative capacity is not volitional but structural to the organisation's scale. The regulatory framework presupposes a level of administrative infrastructure-dedicated sustainability personnel, formal documentation systems, scheduled management review meetings-that fundamentally misaligns with the operational realities of micro-enterprises.

The sample reflects a mature industry with deep historical roots, yet with significant heterogeneity in business age. Mean business age is 24.7 years (SD = 17.7 years), with a range spanning from recently established startups (1–3 years) to century-old establishments founded in the 1920s–1930s. This temporal heterogeneity has profound implications for contextual factors affecting sustainability (Stern, 2000).

Older establishments typically possess greater market resilience and established customer bases, yet they often contend with buildings constructed before modern energy codes, with poor insulation, inefficient HVAC systems, and infrastructure not designed for circular resource

flows. Retrofitting such buildings to meet ISO 21401 environmental requirements incurs substantially higher capital expenditure than designing new sustainability into greenfield properties – a contextual constraint particularly acute for SMEs with limited access to capital.

Furthermore, the survey revealed that 46.0% of respondents operate under a logic of specialised labour, with clear departmental divisions. Whilst operationally efficient, this structure can hinder the cross-functional integration required by holistic Sustainability Management Systems. Energy reduction, waste minimisation, and water stewardship require coordinated action across housekeeping, kitchen, maintenance, and front-of-house operations. In specialised structures, such integration requires explicit coordination mechanisms and formal communication protocols-administrative overhead that Stern's (2000) framework identifies as a Contextual Barrier. Conversely, 54.0% operate under a logic of flexible multitasking, where individual staff members perform multiple functions. This structure enables rapid decision-making and adaptation but diffuses responsibility for sustainability objectives across numerous role boundaries, making systematic implementation more challenging.

The sample's environmental positioning is shaped by geography: 52.1% ($n = 110$) are located in predominantly coastal areas, placing them on the frontline of climate change impacts-rising sea levels, increased storm intensity, water scarcity exacerbated by tourism demand, and ecosystem degradation. These properties face both existential risk and operational vulnerability, creating both urgency and practical pressure for climate adaptation (Saarinen et al., 2021).

Regarding formal sustainability engagement, 57.3% of respondents reported holding some form of environmental label or certification (Green Key, Travelife, Green Globe, EU Ecolabel, or national certifications), and 62.6% indicated having a formal sustainability strategy or action plan. These figures suggest the awareness phase has been largely achieved: the sector is not ignorant of sustainability imperatives. Rather, the sector is in the difficult phase of operationalising commitments into the rigorous, documented systems required by ISO 21401 (International Organization for Standardization, 2024). This observation aligns with the 'attitude-behaviour gap' extensively documented in environmental psychology, demonstrating that awareness and stated intentions do not automatically translate into systematic, documented, continuously improving practice (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2016). The presence of environmental

Table 6.9 Sustainability Orientation and Success Rate

Item	Country	Very low 0–2 (%)	Very high 7–9 (%)
Importance of sustainability as a guiding principle	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.0	60.0
	Slovenia	5.6	94.4
	Greece	7.5	90.6
	Italy	1.9	69.2
	Spain	3.6	65.5
Success in practicing sustainability as a guiding principle	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.0	50.0
	Slovenia	2.8	75.0
	Greece	1.9	67.9
	Italy	1.9	65.4
	Spain	5.5	47.3

Notes Importance of sustainability as a guiding principle: 0 – not important at all, 9 – extremely important. Perceived success in practicing sustainability as a guiding principle: 0 – not successfull at all, 9 – extremely successful.

labels and sustainability plans indicates that proprietors recognise the importance of sustainability and have invested in articulating commitments. The remaining challenge is not attitudinal but structural: translating these articulated aspirations into formalised, auditable management systems.

Table 6.9 presents country-level patterns in sustainability orientation and perceived success in implementation. Across all five countries, sustainability is widely recognised as an important guiding principle for accommodation businesses. High ratings of importance (7–9) clearly dominate, particularly in Slovenia and Greece, where sustainability appears close to being normalised as a core business value. Very low importance ratings (0–2) remain marginal in all contexts, indicating limited outright resistance to sustainability as a strategic orientation.

However, when shifting from orientation to practice, a consistent gap becomes visible. While a substantial share of respondents still rate their sustainability practices as highly successful, the proportion of high scores is systematically lower than for perceived importance. This pattern suggests that sustainability is more firmly established at the level of values and intentions than at the level of operational execution. The gap is most pronounced in Spain and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where high importance ratings are not matched by equally strong perceptions of successful implementation. Chi-square (χ^2) tests were conducted to examine cross-country differences in sustainability orientation and perceived im-

plementation success, comparing low (0–2) and high (7–9) responses. No statistically significant differences were observed between countries for either the perceived importance of sustainability as a guiding principle ($\chi^2(4) = 1.42$, $p = 0.83$) or the perceived success in practicing sustainability ($\chi^2(4) = 3.11$, $p = 0.54$). These results indicate broadly similar response patterns across countries, suggesting that variations observed in Table 6.9 reflect differences in magnitude rather than structurally distinct national profiles.

Overall, the findings captured in Table 6.9 point to a shared Mediterranean and Western Balkan pattern in which sustainability is broadly endorsed as a guiding principle, yet unevenly translated into practice. This reinforces the relevance of implementation-oriented support mechanisms, such as structured tools, protocols, and capacity-building measures, to help accommodation businesses move from commitment to consistent and effective sustainability action.

SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICE LANDSCAPE

Table 6.10 presents the sustainability practices among Slovenian accommodation providers by contrasting the share of respondents reporting high levels of implementation with those reporting very low levels of implementation across individual sustainability practices. Interpreted through the Triple Bottom Line perspective, the results highlight clear differences between environmental, social, and organisational aspects of sustainability implementation.

Within the environmental dimension, the Slovenian sample shows a clear predominance of high implementation over low implementation for core operational practices. A substantial share of respondents report high implementation of waste handling infrastructure as well as clear objectives related to reducing electricity consumption, water use, and waste generation, while only a very small share report very low implementation. This indicates that environmental sustainability is largely embedded through operational practices that are directly linked to everyday resource use and environmental performance.

At the same time, more advanced environmental practices display a less consistent implementation pattern. For measures such as sensor-based water technologies and explicit greenhouse gas emission reduction objectives, the share of respondents reporting high implementation is lower and low implementation becomes more visible. This suggests that although basic environmental practices are well established, the adoption

Table 6.10 Degree of Sustainability Implementation: Slovenia

Sustainability practice/implementation level	(1)	(2)
Sustainable procurement (e.g., buying local, suppliers with green labels).	2.8	66.7
Encouraging and raising supplier awareness to implement sustainable practices of production and supply through meetings, lectures and information tools (e.g., written instructions/recommendations).	8.3	44.4
Facilities for self-production (e.g., garden, herd for meat, chickens for eggs, herbal garden, etc.).	55.6	22.2
Collaboration with local community (e.g., DMO, NGO's, societies, clubs)	2.8	50.0
Ensuring and promoting gender equality within and outside your business/ organisation.	8.3	55.6
Ensuring and promoting equal rights for minorities and vulnerable groups.	13.9	52.8
Legal compliance to laws, regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.	0.0	86.1
Use of electricity efficient equipment/infrastructure.	0.0	63.9
Use of water efficient equipment/infrastructure (e.g., water saving tap heads, double toiled sinks, etc).	0.0	61.1
Use of eco/bio cleaning detergents and supplies.	0.0	69.4
Using promotional tools encouraging guests to support sustainable practices.	8.3	47.2
Renewable construction materials.	8.3	44.4
Environmentally efficient design.	13.9	38.9
Multiple use (suitable for reuse) equipment and materials (e.g., soap dispensers, storage containers, furniture, etc.)	2.8	72.2
Automated-sensor based lighting/heating/cooling system.	22.2	47.2
Avoidance of single use materials (e.g., plastic table ware, plastic cutlery, single packaging).	2.8	83.3
Renewable energy (e.g., solar panels, renewable electricity from supplier, eco-labelled electricity)	36.1	22.2
Ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities (customers, guests, employees, etc.).	8.3	41.7
Sustainable planting/gardening (including local endemic plants, water saving irrigation system, etc.)	36.1	33.3
System for monitoring water use, at the resource (e.g., per room, per kitchen, per common areas, etc.).	55.6	8.3

Continued on the next page

of more advanced or systemic environmental measures remains uneven across the Slovenian accommodation sector.

The social dimension of sustainability is characterised by a more fragmented implementation profile. Practices related to people oriented and

Table 6.10 *Continued from the previous page*

Sustainability practice/implementation level	(1)	(2)
System for monitoring electricity use, at the resource (e.g., per room, per kitchen, per common areas, etc.).	47.2	5.6
Ensuring water quality and safety by implementing regular controls.	13.9	66.7
Ensuring procedures to evaluate satisfaction levels and complaints from local communities.	16.7	41.7
Support for local community social responsibility initiatives and projects.	0.0	55.6
Automated monitoring of environmental performance (e.g., water use, electricity use, etc.)	36.1	22.2
Support local employment opportunities.	0.0	61.1
Local art/craft/culture is reflected in design, furnishings and services.	8.3	58.3
Conducting education activities with the local community through site visits, lectures, competitions, practices promotion in the local media (e.g., newspapers, radio).	16.7	50.0
Preservation of own natural area by implementing conservation practices.	16.7	41.7
Raising guest awareness through the website, reservation system, check-in, accommodation facilities, social areas, (e.g., verbal information, displays, signs, brochures or guides).	8.3	61.1
Collaborating with other accommodation facilities and other actors for sustainable development of the destination, (e.g., collective purchasing, waste collection and social activities).	25.0	41.7
Training employees on sustainable behaviour (e.g., meetings, workshops, courses, lectures, seminars, conferences, volunteer programmes.	5.6	44.4
Use of certified equipment for less noise or gas emission.	41.7	22.2
Thermal insulation of walls, ceilings and windows.	5.6	66.7
Monitoring of overall sustainability performance.	16.7	16.7
Reporting on overall sustainability performance to customers, business partners, local community.	38.9	16.7

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low (0–1), (2) high (5–6); in percent. Practices were measured as a degree of implementation on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all implemented, 6 – extremely well implemented.

organisational aspects, such as the presence of a dedicated sustainability team or coordinator and structured internal procedures, are reported as highly implemented by a relatively small share of respondents, while low implementation remains present. This indicates that social sustainability is often addressed informally and embedded within existing roles rather than through clearly defined responsibilities, structured training, or formal internal arrangements.

Finally, several practices captured in Table 6.10 relate to how sustainability is organised and coordinated within businesses, without belonging exclusively to a single TBL dimension. These include sustainability strategies, action plans, and formal policies. The results show that high implementation of such practices is reported by only a moderate share of the Slovenian sample, while low implementation remains visible. This suggests that sustainability is more often implemented through individual practices than through explicitly articulated frameworks that connect environmental and social actions into a coherent approach.

Overall, the Slovenian results presented in Table 6.10 indicate a sustainability status quo characterised by strong implementation of basic environmental practices, weaker and less formalised social sustainability arrangements, and limited use of integrative organisational instruments. Viewed through the Triple Bottom Line lens, this pattern points to a sustainability transition that is progressing primarily through operational measures, while the coordination and integration of sustainability across different dimensions remains a key challenge.

Table 6.11 demonstrates the adoption of sustainability practices reported by Slovenian SMEs. It can be seen that Slovenian accommodation providers most frequently report the presence of practices related to basic environmental management. The highest adoption levels are observed for waste handling infrastructure and for clear objectives aimed at reducing electricity consumption, water use, and waste generation. These practices are reported by a large share of respondents and represent the most commonly adopted sustainability measures in the Slovenian sample.

In contrast, several practices show notably lower adoption levels. These include the presence of a dedicated sustainability team or coordinator, the existence of a formal sustainability strategy or action plan, and the use of environmental labels or certificates. Lower adoption is also observed for more specialised or advanced practices, such as sensor-based water technologies, biodiversity-related measures, and explicit greenhouse gas reduction objectives. These practices are reported by a smaller share of respondents and constitute the least commonly adopted elements in the table.

When viewed through the Triple Bottom Line perspective, the adoption pattern in Slovenia is clearly uneven across sustainability dimensions. Practices that are most widely adopted are predominantly associated with the environmental dimension, particularly those linked to operational resource management and pollution prevention. In contrast,

Table 6.11 Adoption of Sustainability Practices: Slovenia

Sustainability practice/adoption	Yes
Environmental label/certificate/standard.	47.2
Team responsible for sustainable operations (e.g., sustainability team, coordinator).	22.2
Sustainability strategy/action plan/policy.	38.9
Waste handling infrastructure (e.g., waste separation bins, waste paper balling machine).	97.2
Community-based or own sustainable waste water treatment system.	63.9
Written procedures on energy use in empty facilities.	47.2
Sensor based water toilet flushing, taps	30.6
System for ensuring regular checks on water, electricity leakage.	36.1
Prohibition of artificial feeding of animals, to prevent their domestication.	41.7
Clear objectives on reduction of electricity consumption.	55.6
Clear objectives on reduction of water consumption.	58.3
Clear objectives on reduction of waste production.	55.6
Clear objectives on reduction of noise due to operations.	33.3
Clear objectives on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.	38.9

Notes In percent. Adoption was measured using forced binary question format.

practices linked to the social dimension, such as structured responsibilities and internal organisation of sustainability work, are less frequently adopted. Similarly, practices that reflect a more strategic or formalised approach to sustainability, including planning instruments and external certification, are less prevalent.

Overall, the Slovenian table indicates that sustainability adoption is strongest where practices relate to tangible environmental actions embedded in everyday operations, while adoption is weaker for practices that require formal organisational arrangements or address sustainability in a more strategic and integrative manner across the Triple Bottom Line dimensions.

Table 6.12 presents the sustainability status quo among Italian accommodation providers by contrasting the share of respondents reporting high levels of implementation with those reporting very low levels of implementation across individual sustainability practices. Interpreted through the Triple Bottom Line perspective, the results reveal a sustainability profile characterised by relatively strong engagement with environmental operational practices, alongside more uneven implementation of social and organisational aspects.

Table 6.12 Degree of Sustainability Implementation: Italy

Sustainability practice/implementation level	(1)	(2)
Sustainable procurement (e.g., buying local, suppliers with green labels).	1.9	51.9
Encouraging and raising supplier awareness to implement sustainable practices of production and supply through meetings, lectures and information tools (e.g., written instructions/recommendations).	11.5	23.1
Facilities for self-production (e.g., garden, herd for meat, chickens for eggs, herbal garden, etc.).	55.8	15.4
Collaboration with local community (e.g., DMO, NGO's, societies, clubs)	13.5	48.1
Ensuring and promoting gender equality within and outside your business/ organisation.	1.9	42.3
Ensuring and promoting equal rights for minorities and vulnerable groups.	3.8	48.1
Legal compliance to laws, regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.	5.8	63.5
Use of electricity efficient equipment/infrastructure.	1.9	61.5
Use of water efficient equipment/infrastructure (e.g., water saving tap heads, double toiled sinks, etc).	1.9	59.6
Use of eco/bio cleaning detergents and supplies.	3.8	51.9
Using promotional tools encouraging guests to support sustainable practices.	11.5	34.6
Renewable construction materials.	9.6	21.2
Environmentally efficient design.	1.9	17.3
Multiple use (suitable for reuse) equipment and materials (e.g., soap dispensers, storage containers, furniture, etc.)	1.9	48.1
Automated-sensor based lighting/heating/cooling system.	9.6	36.5
Avoidance of single use materials (e.g., plastic table ware, plastic cutlery, single packaging).	7.7	53.8
Renewable energy (e.g., solar panels, renewable electricity from supplier, eco-labelled electricity)	23.1	46.2
Ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities (customers, guests, employees, etc.).	3.8	80.8
Sustainable planting/gardening (including local endemic plants, water saving irrigation system, etc.)	28.8	30.8

Continued on the next page

Within the environmental dimension, the Italian sample shows a clear predominance of high implementation over low implementation for several core practices. A large share of respondents reports high implementation of waste handling infrastructure as well as clear objectives related to the reduction of electricity consumption, water use, and waste gen-

Table 6.12 *Continued from the previous page*

Sustainability practice/implementation level	(1)	(2)
System for monitoring water use, at the resource (e.g., per room, per kitchen, per common areas, etc.).	13.5	36.5
System for monitoring electricity use, at the resource (e.g., per room, per kitchen, per common areas, etc.).	15.4	30.8
Ensuring water quality and safety by implementing regular controls.	1.9	48.1
Ensuring procedures to evaluate satisfaction levels and complaints from local communities.	3.8	30.8
Support for local community social responsibility initiatives and projects.	5.8	40.4
Automated monitoring of environmental performance (e.g., water use, electricity use, etc.)	17.3	23.1
Support local employment opportunities.	1.9	61.5
Local art/craft/culture is reflected in design, furnishings and services.	13.5	32.7
Conducting education activities with the local community through site visits, lectures, competitions, practices promotion in the local media (e.g., newspapers, radio).	25.0	19.2
Preservation of own natural area by implementing conservation practices.	13.5	36.5
Raising guest awareness through the website, reservation system, check-in, accommodation facilities, social areas, (e.g., verbal information, displays, signs, brochures or guides).	9.6	40.4
Collaborating with other accommodation facilities and other actors for sustainable development of the destination, (e.g., collective purchasing, waste collection and social activities).	23.1	28.8
Training employees on sustainable behaviour (e.g., meetings, workshops, courses, lectures, seminars, conferences, volunteer programmes.	7.7	38.5
Use of certified equipment for less noise or gas emission.	17.3	25.0
Thermal insulation of walls, ceilings and windows.	9.6	42.3
Monitoring of overall sustainability performance.	15.4	21.2
Reporting on overall sustainability performance to customers, business partners, local community.	25.0	21.2

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low (0–1), (2) high (5–6); in percent. Practices were measured as a degree of implementation on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all implemented, 6 – extremely well implemented.

eration. Very low implementation of these practices is reported by only a small proportion of respondents, indicating that basic environmental sustainability measures are well established within Italian accommodation businesses. These practices are closely linked to operational efficiency and routine management of resources, suggesting that environ-

Table 6.13 Adoption of Sustainability Practices: Italy

Sustainability practice/adoption	Yes
Environmental label/certificate/standard.	42.3
Team responsible for sustainable operations (e.g., sustainability team, coordinator).	36.5
Sustainability strategy/action plan/policy.	53.8
Waste handling infrastructure (e.g., waste separation bins, waste paper balling machine).	94.2
Community-based or own sustainable waste water treatment system.	63.5
Written procedures on energy use in empty facilities.	38.5
Sensor based water toilet flushing, taps	42.3
System for ensuring regular checks on water, electricity leakage.	63.5
Prohibition of artificial feeding of animals, to prevent their domestication.	26.9
Clear objectives on reduction of electricity consumption.	78.8
Clear objectives on reduction of water consumption.	80.8
Clear objectives on reduction of waste production.	82.7
Clear objectives on reduction of noise due to operations.	63.5
Clear objectives on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.	57.7

Notes In percent. Adoption was measured using forced binary question format.

mental sustainability is primarily embedded through day-to-day operational activities.

However, the pattern becomes more mixed when considering more advanced environmental practices. For measures such as sensor-based water technologies, greenhouse gas emission reduction objectives, and biodiversity related practices, the share of respondents reporting high implementation is lower, while low implementation remains visible. This indicates that although environmental sustainability is widely acknowledged, the adoption of more technologically advanced or strategically-oriented environmental measures is less consistent across the Italian sample.

The social dimension of sustainability displays a fragmented implementation profile. Practices related to organisational responsibilities and people-oriented arrangements, such as the presence of a dedicated sustainability team or coordinator and structured internal procedures, are reported as highly implemented by a relatively limited share of respondents. Concurrently, low implementation is not uncommon for these items. This suggests that social sustainability in Italian accommodation businesses is often addressed in an informal manner, integrated into existing roles and practices rather than supported through clearly de-

fined responsibilities or systematic training activities. In addition, several practices captured in Table 6.12 relate to how sustainability is articulated and coordinated within organisations, without belonging exclusively to a single Triple Bottom Line dimension. Sustainability strategies, action plans, and formal policies show only moderate levels of high implementation, alongside a noticeable share of low implementation responses. This pattern suggests that sustainability is more frequently operationalised through individual practices than through explicitly defined and integrated organisational frameworks.

Overall, the Italian results presented in Table 6.12 point to a sustainability status quo in which environmental practices related to resource efficiency are relatively well embedded, while social and organisational aspects of sustainability remain less consistently implemented. Viewed through the Triple Bottom Line lens, this indicates a sustainability transition that is progressing primarily through operational environmental measures, with further potential for strengthening social practices and improving the coordination and integration of sustainability across different dimensions of business operations.

The table on adoption of sustainability practices demonstrates that Italian (Table 6.13) accommodation providers most frequently report the presence of practices related to basic environmental management. The highest adoption levels are observed for waste handling infrastructure and for clear objectives aimed at reducing electricity consumption, water use, and waste generation. These practices are reported by a large share of respondents and represent the most commonly adopted sustainability measures in the Italian sample.

In contrast, several practices show notably lower adoption levels. These include the presence of a dedicated sustainability team or coordinator, the existence of a formal sustainability strategy or action plan, and the use of environmental labels or certificates. Lower adoption is also observed for more specialised or advanced practices, such as sensor-based water technologies, biodiversity-related measures, and explicit greenhouse gas reduction objectives. These practices are reported by a smaller share of respondents and constitute the least commonly adopted elements in the table.

When viewed through the Triple Bottom Line perspective, the adoption pattern in Italy is uneven across sustainability dimensions. Practices that are most widely adopted are predominantly associated with the environmental dimension, particularly those linked to operational resource

management and pollution prevention. In contrast, practices linked to the social dimension, such as structured responsibilities and internal organisation of sustainability work, are less frequently adopted. Similarly, practices that reflect a more strategic or formalised approach to sustainability, including planning instruments and external certification, are less prevalent.

Overall, the Italian table indicates that sustainability adoption is strongest where practices relate to tangible environmental actions embedded in everyday operations, while adoption is weaker for practices that require formal organisational arrangements or address sustainability in a more strategic and integrative manner across the Triple Bottom Line dimensions.

Table 6.14 presents the sustainability status quo among accommodation providers in Bosnia and Herzegovina by contrasting the share of respondents reporting high levels of implementation with those reporting very low levels of implementation across individual sustainability practices. Viewed through the Triple Bottom Line perspective, the results reveal a sustainability profile that is less mature and more uneven compared to some other contexts, with clear differences across environmental, social, and organisational aspects of sustainability implementation.

Within the environmental dimension, the Bosnian and Herzegovinian sample shows moderate levels of high implementation for basic operational practices such as waste handling infrastructure and objectives related to reducing electricity, water use, and waste generation. However, in contrast to Slovenia and Italy, a more noticeable share of respondents reports very low implementation for several environmental items. This suggests that while environmental sustainability practices are present, their adoption is less widespread and less consistently embedded across accommodation businesses. Environmental sustainability in this context appears to be shaped by incremental and often ad hoc measures rather than by systematically applied operational standards.

More advanced environmental practices show particularly limited diffusion. For measures such as sensor-based water technologies, greenhouse gas emission reduction objectives, and biodiversity related practices, the share of respondents reporting high implementation is relatively low, while low implementation remains visible. This pattern indicates that technological upgrading and more strategic environmental interventions face significant barriers, potentially related to financial constraints, limited access to support mechanisms, or lower institutional pressure.

Table 6.14 Degree of Sustainability Implementation: Bosnia and Hercegovina

Sustainability practice/implementation level	(1)	(2)
Sustainable procurement (e.g., buying local, suppliers with green labels).	10.0	20.0
Encouraging and raising supplier awareness to implement sustainable practices of production and supply through meetings, lectures and information tools (e.g., written instructions/recommendations).	30.0	10.0
Facilities for self-production (e.g., garden, herd for meat, chickens for eggs, herbal garden, etc.).	70.0	0.0
Collaboration with local community (e.g., DMO, NGO's, societies, clubs)	50.0	10.0
Ensuring and promoting gender equality within and outside your business/ organisation.	0.0	10.0
Ensuring and promoting equal rights for minorities and vulnerable groups.	20.0	10.0
Legal compliance to laws, regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.	50.0	0.0
Use of electricity efficient equipment/infrastructure.	0.0	20.0
Use of water efficient equipment/infrastructure (e.g., water saving tap heads, double toiled sinks, etc).	10.0	20.0
Use of eco/bio cleaning detergents and supplies.	10.0	20.0
Using promotional tools encouraging guests to support sustainable practices.	30.0	0.0
Renewable construction materials.	30.0	0.0
Environmentally efficient design.	10.0	30.0
Multiple use (suitable for reuse) equipment and materials (e.g., soap dispensers, storage containers, furniture, etc.)	10.0	40.0
Automated-sensor based lighting/heating/cooling system.	20.0	20.0
Avoidance of single use materials (e.g., plastic table ware, plastic cutlery, single packaging).	30.0	40.0
Renewable energy (e.g., solar panels, renewable electricity from supplier, eco-labelled electricity)	40.0	10.0
Ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities (customers, guests, employees, etc.).	10.0	40.0
Sustainable planting/gardening (including local endemic plants, water saving irrigation system, etc.)	70.0	0.0

Continued on the next page

The social dimension of sustainability is characterised by weak formalisation. Practices related to organisational responsibilities, such as the presence of a dedicated sustainability team or coordinator, as well as structured internal procedures, are reported as highly implemented by only a small share of respondents. At the same time, low implementation

Table 6.14 *Continued from the previous page*

Sustainability practice/implementation level	(1)	(2)
System for monitoring water use, at the resource (e.g., per room, per kitchen, per common areas, etc.).	30.0	0.0
System for monitoring electricity use, at the resource (e.g., per room, per kitchen, per common areas, etc.).	30.0	0.0
Ensuring water quality and safety by implementing regular controls.	30.0	20.0
Ensuring procedures to evaluate satisfaction levels and complaints from local communities.	30.0	0.0
Support for local community social responsibility initiatives and projects.	40.0	0.0
Automated monitoring of environmental performance (e.g., water use, electricity use, etc.)	40.0	0.0
Support local employment opportunities.	30.0	20.0
Local art/craft/culture is reflected in design, furnishings and services.	20.0	10.0
Conducting education activities with the local community through site visits, lectures, competitions, practices promotion in the local media (e.g., newspapers, radio).	40.0	10.0
Preservation of own natural area by implementing conservation practices.	60.0	0.0
Raising guest awareness through the website, reservation system, check-in, accommodation facilities, social areas, (e.g., verbal information, displays, signs, brochures or guides).	30.0	0.0
Collaborating with other accommodation facilities and other actors for sustainable development of the destination, (e.g., collective purchasing, waste collection and social activities).	40.0	10.0
Training employees on sustainable behaviour (e.g., meetings, workshops, courses, lectures, seminars, conferences, volunteer programmes.	40.0	20.0
Use of certified equipment for less noise or gas emission.	50.0	0.0
Thermal insulation of walls, ceilings and windows.	40.0	20.0
Monitoring of overall sustainability performance.	50.0	10.0
Reporting on overall sustainability performance to customers, business partners, local community.	40.0	20.0

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low (0–1), (2) high (5–6); in percent. Practices were measured as a degree of implementation on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all implemented, 6 – extremely well implemented.

is more common than in other country contexts. This suggests that social sustainability is largely addressed informally, if at all, and that structured approaches to employee engagement, training, and responsibility allocation remain underdeveloped.

Several practices in Table 6.14 relate to how sustainability is articulated

Table 6.15 Adoption of Sustainability Practices: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Sustainability practice/adoption	Yes
Environmental label/certificate/standard.	30.0
Team responsible for sustainable operations (e.g., sustainability team, coordinator).	30.0
Sustainability strategy/action plan/policy.	30.0
Waste handling infrastructure (e.g., waste separation bins, waste paper balling machine).	40.0
Community-based or own sustainable waste water treatment system.	30.0
Written procedures on energy use in empty facilities.	50.0
Sensor based water toilet flushing, taps	20.0
System for ensuring regular checks on water, electricity leakage.	40.0
Prohibition of artificial feeding of animals, to prevent their domestication.	20.0
Clear objectives on reduction of electricity consumption.	80.0
Clear objectives on reduction of water consumption.	90.0
Clear objectives on reduction of waste production.	60.0
Clear objectives on reduction of noise due to operations.	30.0
Clear objectives on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.	20.0
Adoption was measured using forced binary question format.	

Notes In percent. Adoption was measured using forced binary question format.

and coordinated within organisations, without belonging exclusively to a single Triple Bottom Line dimension. Sustainability strategies, action plans, and formal policies display low levels of high implementation and a comparatively high presence of low implementation responses. This indicates that sustainability is rarely approached through explicit frameworks or coordinated planning processes, and is instead implemented through isolated practices where possible.

Overall, the results presented in Table 6.14 indicate a sustainability status quo in Bosnia and Herzegovina characterised by lower overall implementation intensity, greater variability across practices, and limited formalisation of social and organisational sustainability measures. Viewed through the Triple Bottom Line lens, this suggests that the sustainability transition in this context is still at an early stage, with considerable potential for progress through targeted capacity building, institutional support, and structured guidance that could help accommodation businesses move from fragmented practices towards more consistent and integrated sustainability implementation.

Accommodation providers in Bosnia and Herzegovina report com-

paratively lower adoption levels across most sustainability practices (Table 6.15). Among the practices listed, those related to basic environmental management are the most frequently adopted. These include waste handling infrastructure and objectives aimed at reducing electricity consumption, water use, and waste generation, which are reported by a larger share of respondents than other practices.

In contrast, several practices show notably low levels of adoption. These include the presence of a dedicated sustainability team or coordinator, the existence of a formal sustainability strategy or action plan, and the use of environmental labels or certificates. Adoption is also limited for more specialised or advanced practices, such as sensor-based water technologies, biodiversity-related measures, and explicit greenhouse gas reduction objectives. These practices are reported by only a small proportion of respondents and represent the least commonly adopted elements in the table.

When viewed through the Triple Bottom Line perspective, the adoption pattern in Bosnia and Herzegovina is uneven across sustainability dimensions. Practices that are most widely adopted are predominantly associated with the environmental dimension, particularly those linked to basic operational resource management. In contrast, practices linked to the social dimension, such as structured responsibilities and internal organisation of sustainability work, are less frequently adopted. Similarly, practices that reflect a more formalised or strategic approach to sustainability remain relatively rare.

Overall, the Bosnian and Herzegovinian table indicates that sustainability adoption is concentrated in a limited set of basic environmental practices, while social and more formalised sustainability practices are considerably less prevalent across accommodation providers.

Table 6.16 presents the sustainability status quo among Spanish accommodation providers by contrasting the share of respondents reporting high levels of implementation with those reporting very low levels of implementation across individual sustainability practices. Interpreted through the Triple Bottom Line perspective, the results reveal a sustainability profile characterised by relatively strong engagement with basic environmental practices, combined with notable variability in social and organisational aspects of sustainability implementation.

Within the environmental dimension, the Spanish sample shows a clear predominance of high implementation over low implementation for core operational practices. A substantial share of respondents reports

Table 6.16 Degree of Sustainability Implementation: Spain

Sustainability practice/implementation level	(1)	(2)
Sustainable procurement (e.g., buying local, suppliers with green labels).	10.9	36.4
Encouraging and raising supplier awareness to implement sustainable practices of production and supply through meetings, lectures and information tools (e.g., written instructions/recommendations).	25.5	27.3
Facilities for self-production (e.g., garden, herd for meat, chickens for eggs, herbal garden, etc.).	58.2	23.6
Collaboration with local community (e.g., DMO, NGO's, societies, clubs)	20.0	27.3
Ensuring and promoting gender equality within and outside your business/ organisation.	9.1	65.5
Ensuring and promoting equal rights for minorities and vulnerable groups.	9.1	52.7
Legal compliance to laws, regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.	25.5	56.4
Use of electricity efficient equipment/infrastructure.	1.8	61.8
Use of water efficient equipment/infrastructure (e.g., water saving tap heads, double toiled sinks, etc).	7.3	58.2
Use of eco/bio cleaning detergents and supplies.	14.5	45.5
Using promotional tools encouraging guests to support sustainable practices.	5.5	43.6
Renewable construction materials.	30.9	23.6
Environmentally efficient design.	23.6	29.1
Multiple use (suitable for reuse) equipment and materials (e.g., soap dispensers, storage containers, furniture, etc.)	3.6	56.4
Automated-sensor based lighting/heating/cooling system.	10.9	54.5
Avoidance of single use materials (e.g., plastic table ware, plastic cutlery, single packaging).	5.5	65.5
Renewable energy (e.g., solar panels, renewable electricity from supplier, eco-labelled electricity)	14.5	47.3
Ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities (customers, guests, employees, etc.).	1.8	80.0
Sustainable planting/gardening (including local endemic plants, water saving irrigation system, etc.)	23.6	38.2

Continued on the next page

high implementation of waste handling infrastructure and clear objectives related to reducing electricity consumption, water use, and waste generation, while very low implementation is reported by only a limited proportion of respondents. This suggests that environmental sustainability in Spanish accommodation businesses is largely embedded through

Table 6.16 *Continued from the previous page*

Sustainability practice/implementation level	(1)	(2)
System for monitoring water use, at the resource (e.g., per room, per kitchen, per common areas, etc.).	38.2	23.6
System for monitoring electricity use, at the resource (e.g., per room, per kitchen, per common areas, etc.).	34.5	27.3
Ensuring water quality and safety by implementing regular controls.	16.4	56.4
Ensuring procedures to evaluate satisfaction levels and complaints from local communities.	16.4	34.5
Support for local community social responsibility initiatives and projects.	14.5	41.8
Automated monitoring of environmental performance (e.g., water use, electricity use, etc.)	21.8	34.5
Support local employment opportunities.	1.8	69.1
Local art/craft/culture is reflected in design, furnishings and services.	9.1	41.8
Conducting education activities with the local community through site visits, lectures, competitions, practices promotion in the local media (e.g., newspapers, radio).	41.8	23.6
Preservation of own natural area by implementing conservation practices.	30.9	38.2
Raising guest awareness through the website, reservation system, check-in, accommodation facilities, social areas, (e.g., verbal information, displays, signs, brochures or guides).	12.7	40.0
Collaborating with other accommodation facilities and other actors for sustainable development of the destination, (e.g., collective purchasing, waste collection and social activities).	9.1	30.9
Training employees on sustainable behaviour (e.g., meetings, workshops, courses, lectures, seminars, conferences, volunteer programmes.	1.8	40.0
Use of certified equipment for less noise or gas emission.	29.1	23.6
Thermal insulation of walls, ceilings and windows.	21.8	40.0
Monitoring of overall sustainability performance.	14.5	40.0
Reporting on overall sustainability performance to customers, business partners, local community.	29.1	29.1
Practices were measured as a degree of implementation on a 7- point scale, where 0 – not at all implemented; 6 – extremely well implemented.		

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low (0–1), (2) high (5–6); in percent. Practices were measured as a degree of implementation on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all implemented, 6 – extremely well implemented.

routine operational measures that are closely linked to resource efficiency and regulatory compliance.

Concurrently, more advanced environmental practices display a less consistent pattern. For measures such as sensor-based water technologies

and explicit greenhouse gas emission reduction objectives, the share of respondents reporting high implementation is lower and low implementation becomes more visible. This indicates that while basic environmental measures are widely adopted, the transition towards more technologically advanced or strategically oriented environmental practices remains uneven across the Spanish sample.

The social dimension of sustainability is characterised by mixed levels of implementation. Practices related to organisational responsibilities, such as the presence of a dedicated sustainability team or coordinator, as well as structured internal procedures, are reported as highly implemented by a moderate share of respondents, while low implementation remains present. This suggests that social sustainability practices are emerging but are not yet consistently formalised or embedded across accommodation businesses.

Several practices included in Table 6.16 relate to how sustainability is articulated and coordinated within organisations, without belonging exclusively to a single Triple Bottom Line dimension. Sustainability strategies, action plans, and formal policies show moderate levels of high implementation, alongside a non-negligible share of low implementation responses. This pattern suggests that sustainability in Spain is increasingly recognised at the organisational level, but is still more often implemented through individual practices than through fully integrated and coordinated frameworks.

Overall, the Spanish results presented in Table 6.16 point to a sustainability status quo characterised by relatively strong implementation of basic environmental practices, emerging but uneven social sustainability arrangements, and partial use of organisational instruments to support sustainability. Viewed through the Triple Bottom Line lens, this indicates a transition that is progressing beyond basic compliance, while still facing challenges related to consistency, coordination, and strategic integration.

Table 6.17 reports on the adoption of sustainability practices in Spanish accommodation sector. Most frequently reported practices pertain to basic environmental management. The highest adoption levels are observed for waste handling infrastructure and for clear objectives aimed at reducing electricity consumption, water use, and waste generation. These practices are reported by a large share of respondents and represent the most commonly adopted sustainability measures in the Spanish sample.

In contrast, several practices show notably lower adoption levels. These include the presence of a dedicated sustainability team or coordinator, the

Table 6.17 Adoption of Sustainability Practices: Spain

Sustainability practice/adoption	Yes
Environmental label/certificate/standard.	45.5
Team responsible for sustainable operations (e.g., sustainability team, coordinator).	58.2
Sustainability strategy/action plan/policy.	60.0
Waste handling infrastructure (e.g., waste separation bins, waste paper balling machine).	98.2
Community-based or own sustainable waste water treatment system.	54.5
Written procedures on energy use in empty facilities.	45.5
Sensor based water toilet flushing, taps	60.0
System for ensuring regular checks on water, electricity leakage.	45.5
Prohibition of artificial feeding of animals, to prevent their domestication.	38.2
Clear objectives on reduction of electricity consumption.	67.3
Clear objectives on reduction of water consumption.	67.3
Clear objectives on reduction of waste production.	61.8
Clear objectives on reduction of noise due to operations.	47.3
Clear objectives on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.	34.5

Notes In percent. Adoption was measured using forced binary question format.

existence of a formal sustainability strategy or action plan, and the use of environmental labels or certificates. Lower adoption is also observed for more specialised or advanced practices, such as sensor based water technologies, biodiversity related measures, and explicit greenhouse gas reduction objectives. These practices are reported by a smaller share of respondents and constitute the least commonly adopted elements in the table.

When viewed through the Triple Bottom Line perspective, the adoption pattern in Spain is uneven across sustainability dimensions. Practices that are most widely adopted are predominantly associated with the environmental dimension, particularly those linked to operational resource management and pollution prevention. In contrast, practices linked to the social dimension, such as structured responsibilities and internal organisation of sustainability work, are less frequently adopted. Similarly, practices that reflect a more strategic or formalised approach to sustainability, including planning instruments and external certification, are less prevalent.

Overall, the Spanish table indicates that sustainability adoption is strongest where practices relate to tangible environmental actions em-

Table 6.18 Degree of Sustainability Implementation: Greece

Sustainability practice/implementation level	(1)	(2)
Sustainable procurement (e.g., buying local, suppliers with green labels).	3.8	56.6
Encouraging and raising supplier awareness to implement sustainable practices of production and supply through meetings, lectures and information tools (e.g., written instructions/recommendations).	7.5	47.2
Facilities for self-production (e.g., garden, herd for meat, chickens for eggs, herbal garden, etc.).	34.0	28.3
Collaboration with local community (e.g., DMO, NGO's, societies, clubs)	13.2	50.9
Ensuring and promoting gender equality within and outside your business/ organisation.	3.8	75.5
Ensuring and promoting equal rights for minorities and vulnerable groups.	7.5	73.6
Legal compliance to laws, regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.	3.8	75.5
Use of electricity efficient equipment/infrastructure.	1.9	75.5
Use of water efficient equipment/infrastructure (e.g., water saving tap heads, double toiled sinks, etc).	3.8	77.4
Use of eco/bio cleaning detergents and supplies.	1.9	69.8
Using promotional tools encouraging guests to support sustainable practices.	3.8	71.7
Renewable construction materials.	9.4	45.3
Environmentally efficient design.	5.7	64.2
Multiple use (suitable for reuse) equipment and materials (e.g., soap dispensers, storage containers, furniture, etc.)	3.8	71.7
Automated-sensor based lighting/heating/cooling system.	9.4	67.9
Avoidance of single use materials (e.g., plastic table ware, plastic cutlery, single packaging).	3.8	69.8
Renewable energy (e.g., solar panels, renewable electricity from supplier, eco-labelled electricity)	13.2	64.2
Ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities (customers, guests, employees, etc.).	7.5	66.0
Sustainable planting/gardening (including local endemic plants, water saving irrigation system, etc.)	5.7	60.4

Continued on the next page

bedded in everyday operations, while adoption is weaker for practices that require formal organisational arrangements or address sustainability in a more strategic and integrative manner across the Triple Bottom Line dimensions.

Table 6.18 presents the sustainability status quo among Greek accom-

Table 6.18 *Continued from the previous page*

Sustainability practice/implementation level	(1)	(2)
System for monitoring water use, at the resource (e.g., per room, per kitchen, per common areas, etc.).	26.4	47.2
System for monitoring electricity use, at the resource (e.g., per room, per kitchen, per common areas, etc.).	18.9	47.2
Ensuring water quality and safety by implementing regular controls.	1.9	90.6
Ensuring procedures to evaluate satisfaction levels and complaints from local communities.	9.4	67.9
Support for local community social responsibility initiatives and projects.	3.8	75.5
Automated monitoring of environmental performance (e.g., water use, electricity use, etc.)	13.2	43.4
Support local employment opportunities.	1.9	84.9
Local art/craft/culture is reflected in design, furnishings and services.	7.5	41.5
Conducting education activities with the local community through site visits, lectures, competitions, practices promotion in the local media (e.g., newspapers, radio).	15.1	35.8
Preservation of own natural area by implementing conservation practices.	9.4	50.9
Raising guest awareness through the website, reservation system, check-in, accommodation facilities, social areas, (e.g., verbal information, displays, signs, brochures or guides).	5.7	64.2
Collaborating with other accommodation facilities and other actors for sustainable development of the destination, (e.g., collective purchasing, waste collection and social activities).	18.9	43.4
Training employees on sustainable behaviour (e.g., meetings, workshops, courses, lectures, seminars, conferences, volunteer programmes.	7.5	52.8
Use of certified equipment for less noise or gas emission.	13.2	56.6
Thermal insulation of walls, ceilings and windows.	3.8	60.4
Monitoring of overall sustainability performance.	7.5	62.3
Reporting on overall sustainability performance to customers, business partners, local community.	13.2	50.9

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low (0–1), (2) high (5–6); in percent. Practices were measured as a degree of implementation on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all implemented, 6 – extremely well implemented.

modation providers by contrasting the share of respondents reporting high levels of implementation with those reporting very low levels of implementation across individual sustainability practices. Interpreted through the Triple Bottom Line perspective, the results reveal a sustainability profile with comparatively strong implementation across environ-

mental practices and a more developed engagement with organisational and social aspects than observed in several other contexts.

Within the environmental dimension, the Greek sample demonstrates a clear dominance of high implementation over low implementation for most core practices. A large share of respondents report high implementation of waste handling infrastructure, resource efficiency objectives related to electricity and water consumption, and waste reduction measures, while very low implementation is reported by only a small proportion of the sample. This suggests that environmental sustainability practices are widely embedded within Greek accommodation businesses and are implemented as part of standard operational routines.

More advanced environmental practices also show relatively high levels of implementation compared to other countries. For measures such as sensor-based water technologies and greenhouse gas emission reduction objectives, the share of respondents reporting high implementation remains substantial, while low implementation is less pronounced. This indicates a more advanced stage of environmental sustainability adoption, potentially supported by stronger policy frameworks, market expectations, or accumulated experience within the sector.

The social dimension of sustainability appears more consistently implemented than in several other country contexts. Practices related to organisational responsibilities, such as the presence of dedicated sustainability teams or coordinators and structured internal procedures, are reported as highly implemented by a relatively large share of respondents, while low implementation is comparatively limited. This suggests that social sustainability in Greek accommodation businesses is more frequently supported by formal roles and internal arrangements rather than relying solely on informal practices.

In addition, several practices in Table 6.18 relate to the articulation and coordination of sustainability within organisations. Sustainability strategies, action plans, and formal policies show relatively high levels of implementation, with fewer respondents reporting very low implementation. This pattern indicates that sustainability in Greece is more often approached through explicitly defined organisational frameworks that connect environmental and social practices into a more coherent approach.

Overall, the Greek results presented in Table 6.18 point to a sustainability status quo characterised by high implementation across environmental practices, more formalised social sustainability arrangements, and stronger use of organisational instruments to support sustainabil-

Table 6.19 Adoption of Sustainability Practices: Greece

Sustainability practice/adoption	Yes
Environmental label/certificate/standard.	92.5
Team responsible for sustainable operations (e.g., sustainability team, coordinator).	83.0
Sustainability strategy/action plan/policy.	92.5
Waste handling infrastructure (e.g., waste separation bins, waste paper balling machine).	92.5
Community-based or own sustainable waste water treatment system.	75.5
Written procedures on energy use in empty facilities.	83.0
Sensor based water toilet flushing, taps	67.9
System for ensuring regular checks on water, electricity leakage.	75.5
Prohibition of artificial feeding of animals, to prevent their domestication.	47.2
Clear objectives on reduction of electricity consumption.	92.5
Clear objectives on reduction of water consumption.	86.8
Clear objectives on reduction of waste production.	88.7
Clear objectives on reduction of noise due to operations.	67.9
Clear objectives on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.	75.5

Notes In percent. Adoption was measured using forced binary question format.

ity. Viewed through the Triple Bottom Line lens, this suggests that the sustainability transition in Greece is comparatively more advanced, with greater balance across different dimensions of sustainability implementation.

The table on adoption of sustainability practices shows that Greek accommodation providers report high adoption levels across a broad range of sustainability practices. Practices related to basic environmental management, including waste handling infrastructure and clear objectives aimed at reducing electricity consumption, water use, and waste generation, are widely adopted and reported by a large share of respondents.

In addition to these operational environmental practices, a relatively high proportion of respondents also report the adoption of practices related to organisational structuring and formalisation. These include the presence of sustainability strategies or action plans, dedicated sustainability teams or coordinators, and the use of environmental labels or certificates. Compared to other contexts, these practices appear more frequently in the Greek sample.

Adoption levels are also comparatively high for more specialised environmental practices, such as sensor-based water technologies and ex-

plicit greenhouse gas reduction objectives. While some variation across individual practices remains, fewer practices appear at very low adoption levels in Greece than in other country tables.

When viewed through the Triple Bottom Line perspective, the Greek adoption pattern appears more balanced across sustainability dimensions. Environmental practices are widely adopted, while practices related to social organisation and formalised sustainability planning are also relatively prevalent. Overall, the table indicates that sustainability adoption in Greece extends beyond basic environmental actions and includes a broader set of practices that support a more integrated approach to sustainability.

Cross Mediterranean Perspective

The sustainability status quo across the Mediterranean accommodation sector was assessed using two complementary empirical perspectives. First, the analysis examined whether individual sustainability practices are adopted or not, capturing the presence of sustainability related actions within business operations. Second, the analysis assessed the level of implementation of a different set of sustainability practices, capturing the extent to which sustainability is embedded in operational and organisational routines. Taken together, these two approaches provide a layered understanding of the current sustainability status quo across the analysed sample.

Across the Mediterranean context, the results (Table 6.20) indicate that sustainability is widely present at the level of practice adoption. A substantial share of accommodation providers report having adopted at least some sustainability practices, particularly those related to basic environmental management. Practices such as waste handling infrastructure and objectives aimed at reducing electricity consumption, water use, and waste generation are commonly adopted across countries. This suggests that sustainability is not absent from accommodation operations, but rather forms part of the operational baseline in many businesses. However, the implementation level analysis reveals a more differentiated picture. While many practices are reported as adopted, fewer are reported as highly implemented. High levels of implementation are primarily observed for practices that are closely linked to everyday operational routines and resource efficiency. In contrast, practices that require sustained organisational effort, coordination, or formalisation tend to show lower levels of high implementation and higher shares of low implementation

Table 6.20 Sustainability Status Quo across the Mediterranean Accommodation Sector

Category	Sustainability practice	%
Most frequently reported adoption of sustainability practices	Waste handling infrastructure (e.g., waste separation bins, waste paper balling machine).	92.4
	Clear objectives on reduction of electricity consumption.	75.4
	Clear objectives on reduction of water consumption.	74.9
	Clear objectives on reduction of waste production.	72.5
	Community-based or own sustainable waste water treatment system.	63.0
Most highly reported implementation level of sustainability practices	Ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities (customers, guests, employees, etc.).	67.3
	Support local employment opportunities.	67.3
	Avoidance of single use materials (e.g., plastic table ware, plastic cutlery, single packaging).	65.4
	Legal compliance to laws, regulations concerning wildlife harvesting and trade.	64.9
	Ensuring water quality and safety by implementing regular controls.	62.6

across the sample. This divergence between adoption and implementation highlights a key characteristic of the sustainability status quo in the Mediterranean accommodation sector. Sustainability is often present in principle and in practice, but it is not always embedded deeply or consistently across organisational processes. The binary adoption of practices does not necessarily translate into strong or systematic implementation, indicating that sustainability engagement frequently remains partial or incremental rather than comprehensive.

Viewed across the sample, the sustainability status quo is therefore characterised by a concentration of sustainability efforts in operational environmental practices, combined with weaker implementation of practices that require structured responsibilities, formal planning, monitoring, or integration across different dimensions of sustainability. This pattern is consistent across countries, even though overall levels of adoption and implementation vary between contexts.

Overall, the cross Mediterranean analysis suggests that the sustainability status quo is defined less by the absence of sustainability practices and more by differences in the depth and consistency with which these practices are implemented. The coexistence of relatively high adoption rates and uneven implementation levels indicates that many accommodation

Table 6.21 Cross Mediterranean Differences in the Adoption of Sustainability Practices

Sustainability practice	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Statistics
Environmental label or certificate or standard	42.3	47.2	92.5	45.5	$x^2(3) = 36.26$; $p \leq 0.001$
Team responsible for sustainable operations (e.g., sustainability team, coordinator)	36.5	22.2	83.0	58.2	$x^2(3) = 39{,}06$; $p \leq 0.001$
Sustainability strategy or action plan or policy	53.8	38.9	92.5	60.0	$x^2(3) = 30.87$; $p \leq 0.001$
Waste handling infrastructure (e.g., waste separation bins, waste paper balling machine)	94.2	97.2	92.5	96.4	$x^2(3) = 2.46$; p = n.s.
Community based or own sustainable wastewater treatment system	30.8	27.8	54.7	34.5	$x^2(3) = 5.18$; p = n.s.
Written procedures on energy use in empty facilities	61.5	44.4	83.0	60.0	$x^2(3) = 25.31$; $p \leq 0.001$
Sensor based water toilet flushing and taps	48.1	33.3	79.2	49.1	$x^2(3) = 15.39$; $p \leq 0.002$
System for ensuring regular checks on water and electricity leakage	65.4	55.6	83.0	67.3	$x^2(3) = 17.62$; $p \leq 0.001$
Prohibition of artificial feeding of animals to prevent their domestication	19.2	13.9	41.5	18.2	$x^2(3) = 4.79$; p = n.s.
Clear objectives on reduction of electricity consumption	78.8	61.1	90.6	69.1	$x^2(3) = 18.03$; $p \leq 0.001$
Clear objectives on reduction of water consumption	80.8	58.3	86.8	67.3	$x^2(3) = 11.75$; $p \leq 0.002$
Clear objectives on reduction of waste production	82.7	55.6	88.7	61.8	$x^2(3) = 18.32$; $p \leq 0.001$
Clear objectives on reduction of noise due to operations	63.5	33.3	67.9	47.3	$x^2(3) = 13.2$; $p \leq 0.004$
Clear objectives on reduction of greenhouse gas emissions	57.7	38.9	75.5	34.5	$x^2(3) = 21.56$; $p \leq 0.001$

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) Italy, (2) Slovenia, (3) Greece, (4) Spain. In percent; percentages indicate a share of respondents expressing high importance for each need or enabling condition (values 5–6).

providers are positioned at an intermediate stage of sustainability development, where basic practices are in place, but further progress depends on strengthening implementation intensity, organisational capacity, and integration across sustainability dimensions.

Table 6.21 presents a cross Mediterranean analysis of differences in the adoption of sustainability practices across accommodation providers in

Slovenia, Italy, Spain, and Greece, assessed through Chi-square tests of independence. Interpreted through the Triple Bottom Line perspective and Stern's theory of environmentally significant behaviour, the results reveal both shared adoption patterns and clearly differentiated country specific sustainability profiles. Across all four countries, adoption is most consistent for practices associated with basic environmental management at the operational level. Practices such as waste handling infrastructure show no statistically significant differences between Slovenia, Italy, Spain, and Greece, indicating a shared baseline of environmentally oriented operational behaviour across the Mediterranean accommodation sector. These practices correspond to forms of environmentally significant behaviour that are strongly shaped by contextual factors such as infrastructure availability, regulatory requirements, and routine operational norms.

In contrast, statistically significant cross-country differences emerge for practices that require higher levels of organisational structuring and strategic commitment. Greece stands out as a context in which practices such as sustainability strategies or action plans, dedicated sustainability teams or coordinators, and environmental labels or certificates are adopted by a comparatively large share of accommodation providers. This suggests that environmentally significant behaviour in Greece more frequently extends beyond operational actions and is embedded in formal organisational arrangements.

Spain occupies an intermediate position. While basic environmental practices are widely adopted, the adoption of more formalised practices related to planning, certification, and structured responsibility allocation is less consistent than in Greece. This pattern indicates that environmentally significant behaviour in Spain is partially institutionalised, combining operational environmental actions with emerging but uneven organisational integration. Italy and Slovenia display more selective adoption patterns. In both contexts, operational environmental practices are commonly adopted, but practices that require formal planning, dedicated sustainability roles, or external certification show significantly lower adoption rates. From the perspective of environmentally significant behaviour, this suggests that sustainability actions in Italy and Slovenia are more often driven by routine operational considerations and contextual constraints, rather than by sustained organisational commitment or formalised sustainability governance.

Within the Triple Bottom Line framework, these country differences are particularly visible for practices that span environmental and social

dimensions. The adoption of organisational and strategic practices reflects not only environmental intent but also internal coordination, responsibility sharing, and engagement with external stakeholders. The observed cross-country variation indicates that while environmental concerns are broadly recognised across the Mediterranean, the capacity to translate these concerns into socially embedded and organisationally structured forms of environmentally significant behaviour differs substantially between contexts.

Overall, Table 6.21 demonstrates that the sustainability status quo across the Mediterranean accommodation sector is characterised by convergence in basic environmentally significant behaviours and divergence in more complex forms of sustainability adoption. Greece demonstrates a more advanced integration of sustainability across environmental and organisational dimensions, Spain reflects an intermediate stage, while Italy and Slovenia exhibit sustainability profiles centred primarily on operational environmental practices. These patterns underscore that cross Mediterranean differences in sustainability adoption are shaped less by the presence of environmental awareness and more by country specific institutional, organisational, and contextual conditions that enable or constrain more demanding forms of environmentally significant behaviour.

ISO 21401 READINESS LEVEL

Table 6.22 presents the level of alignment of Slovenian accommodation providers with the requirements of the ISO 21401 standard. Alignment is interpreted as the extent to which practices and organisational arrangements corresponding to ISO 21401 requirements are already in place, regardless of whether formal certification has been pursued.

The results indicate that alignment is strongest for requirements related to basic environmental management and operational control. A substantial share of respondents' report alignment with requirements concerning waste management, resource efficiency, and the mitigation of environmental impacts associated with daily operations. These areas reflect ISO 21401 requirements that build upon practices commonly integrated into routine accommodation management and are therefore more likely to be met.

In contrast, lower levels of alignment are observed for requirements that depend on formalised management systems and structured organisational processes. These include requirements related to documented

Table 6.22 ISO 21401 Alignment: Slovenia

ISO 21401 requirement/Implementation level	(1)	(2)
Identification of risks to prevent and attend to accidents and emergencies.	5.6	47.2
Identification of actions to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of your business.	22.2	33.3
Preventing the introduction of exotic populations of wildlife.	27.8	41.7
Adapting the architectural design and the materials used according to the environment concerned.	11.1	47.2
Avoid the use of building materials with a major negative environmental impact.	8.3	50.0
The architecture of construction considers the safety of workers and guests.	0.0	77.8
Use of native vegetation to the fullest extent possible.	5.6	58.3
Circular economy model to reduce, reuse or recycle solid waste.	19.4	47.2
Planning and implementation of measures to minimize emissions of gases, light, ozone and odour from installations, vehicles, equipment.	19.4	19.4
Plan and implementation of measures to minimize energy. consumption, particularly from non-renewable energy sources.	11.1	36.1
Identification of operational risks and opportunities.	5.6	41.7
Development and clear communication of sustainability objectives.	19.4	30.6
Planning and monitoring attainment of sustainable objectives, with clear objectives, correction activities and responsible persons.	19.4	22.2
Implementation of regular educational/training activities for improving employee's competences for sustainable operations.	5.6	41.7
Ensuring that sustainability policies and objectives are established and are compatible with the strategic direction of the organisation	22.2	38.9
Employment, to the greatest extent possible, workers (employees, subcontractors or freelancers) from local or regional communities	0.0	63.9
Professional training of local people to provide services and supply inputs or complementary activities to the company.	16.7	19.4
Ensuring that internships or apprenticeships are not being misused in an attempt to avoid meeting obligations to employees.	2.8	38.9
Development of a business plan, even if simple, updated where necessary, to demonstrate economic viability of the business/organisation	2.8	47.2
Support to programmes for promoting tourist safety and security.	8.3	38.9

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low (0–1), (2) high (5–6); in percent. ISO aligned implementation level was measured on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all, 6 – to full extent.

sustainability policies, systematic planning, monitoring and evaluation procedures, and clearly defined responsibilities for sustainability management. The lower alignment levels reported for these items suggest that

while relevant practices may exist in practice, they are not consistently embedded within formal structures that meet the full expectations of the ISO standard.

Requirements related to stakeholder engagement, communication, and continuous improvement also show more limited alignment. This indicates that sustainability related activities in Slovenian accommodation providers are often implemented in a fragmented or practice-based manner, rather than as part of an integrated management system that explicitly links environmental, social, and organisational objectives.

Overall, Table 6.22 suggests that ISO 21401 alignment in Slovenia is characterised by a solid operational foundation combined with weaker alignment in areas requiring formalisation, documentation, and coordinated management. This pattern indicates that the main gap between current practice and full ISO 21401 alignment lies not in the absence of sustainability actions, but in the limited integration of these actions into a comprehensive and systematically managed sustainability framework.

Table 6.23 presents the level of alignment of Italian accommodation providers with the requirements of the ISO 21401 standard. Alignment is interpreted as the extent to which practices, procedures, and organisational arrangements corresponding to ISO 21401 requirements are already implemented, regardless of whether formal certification has been obtained.

The results indicate moderate levels of alignment across ISO 21401 requirements. Alignment is relatively stronger for requirements related to basic environmental management and operational practices, such as waste management and measures aimed at improving resource efficiency. These elements reflect areas where sustainability practices are more commonly integrated into everyday operations and therefore show higher levels of reported alignment. Lower levels of alignment are observed for requirements that rely on formalised management systems and structured organisational processes. These include documented sustainability policies, systematic planning and monitoring procedures, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for sustainability management. The reported alignment levels suggest that while relevant practices may exist within Italian accommodation providers, they are not consistently embedded within formal management frameworks that fully correspond to ISO 21401 expectations. Requirements related to stakeholder engagement, communication, and continuous improvement also show limited alignment. This indicates that sustainability related activities are often

Table 6.23 ISO Alignment: Italy

ISO 21401 requirement/Implementation level	(1)	(2)
Identification of risks to prevent and attend to accidents and emergencies.	0.0	61.5
Identification of actions to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of your business.	3.8	51.9
Preventing the introduction of exotic populations of wildlife.	23.1	44.2
Adapting the architectural design and the materials used according to the environment concerned.	11.5	42.3
Avoid the use of building materials with a major negative environmental impact.	3.8	50.0
The architecture of construction considers the safety of workers and guests.	3.8	67.3
Use of native vegetation to the fullest extent possible.	3.8	46.2
Circular economy model to reduce, reuse or recycle solid waste.	7.7	42.3
Planning and implementation of measures to minimize emissions of gases, light, ozone and odour from installations, vehicles, equipment.	11.5	44.2
Plan and implementation of measures to minimize energy. consumption, particularly from non-renewable energy sources.	5.8	53.8
Identification of operational risks and opportunities.	3.8	53.8
Development and clear communication of sustainability objectives.	5.8	46.2
Planning and monitoring attainment of sustainable objectives, with clear objectives, correction activities and responsible persons.	7.7	42.3
Implementation of regular educational/training activities for improving employee's competences for sustainable operations.	3.8	36.5
Ensuring that sustainability policies and objectives are established and are compatible with the strategic direction of the organisation	3.8	44.2
Employment, to the greatest extent possible, workers (employees, subcontractors or freelancers) from local or regional communities	3.8	55.8
Professional training of local people to provide services and supply inputs or complementary activities to the company.	5.8	30.8
Ensuring that internships or apprenticeships are not being misused in an attempt to avoid meeting obligations to employees.	9.6	55.8
Development of a business plan, even if simple, updated where necessary, to demonstrate economic viability of the business/organisation	1.9	42.3
Support to programmes for promoting tourist safety and security.	1.9	53.8

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low (0–1), (2) high (5–6); in percent. ISO aligned implementation level was measured on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all, 6 – to full extent.

implemented in a fragmented or practice-oriented manner, with less emphasis on structured evaluation, feedback mechanisms, and long-term management cycles.

Overall, Table 6.23 suggests that ISO 21401 alignment in Italy reflects an intermediate stage of readiness. Italian accommodation providers demonstrate a solid operational basis for alignment, particularly in environmental management, but face gaps in the formalisation, coordination, and systematic management of sustainability practices. Progress towards full ISO 21401 alignment therefore appears to depend primarily on strengthening organisational structures, documentation, and continuous improvement processes rather than on the introduction of new sustainability actions.

Table 6.24 presents the level of alignment of accommodation providers in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the requirements of the ISO 21401 standard. Alignment is understood as the extent to which practices, procedures, and organisational arrangements corresponding to ISO 21401 requirements are already in place, irrespective of formal certification status.

The results indicate generally low levels of alignment across most ISO 21401 requirements. Alignment is relatively more visible for basic operational and environmental management elements, such as waste management practices and certain resource efficiency related actions. However, even for these requirements, alignment levels remain limited and are reported by only a modest share of respondents. This suggests that while some operational sustainability practices are present, they are not yet widely or consistently aligned with ISO 21401 expectations.

Lower levels of alignment are observed for requirements that rely on formalised management systems and organisational structures. These include documented sustainability policies, systematic planning and monitoring procedures, clearly defined responsibilities for sustainability management, and internal coordination mechanisms. The limited alignment in these areas indicates that sustainability related actions are rarely embedded within structured management frameworks that correspond to ISO 21401 requirements.

Requirements related to stakeholder engagement, communication, and continuous improvement also show low levels of alignment. This suggests that sustainability practices in Bosnian and Herzegovinian accommodation providers are primarily implemented in an ad hoc or fragmented manner, rather than as part of an integrated and continuously improving sustainability management system.

Overall, Table 6.24 indicates that ISO 21401 alignment in Bosnia and Herzegovina is at an early stage of development. The main gap lies not only in the formalisation of existing practices, but also in the broader

Table 6.24 ISO 21401 Alignment: Bosnia and Hercegovina

ISO 21401 requirement/Implementation level	(1)	(2)
Identification of risks to prevent and attend to accidents and emergencies.	0.0	10.0
Identification of actions to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of your business.	0.0	10.0
Preventing the introduction of exotic populations of wildlife.	60.0	0.0
Adapting the architectural design and the materials used according to the environment concerned.	10.0	20.0
Avoid the use of building materials with a major negative environmental impact.	10.0	10.0
The architecture of construction considers the safety of workers and guests.	0.0	40.0
Use of native vegetation to the fullest extent possible.	20.0	10.0
Circular economy model to reduce, reuse or recycle solid waste.	0.0	10.0
Planning and implementation of measures to minimize emissions of gases, light, ozone and odour from installations, vehicles, equipment.	20.0	0.0
Plan and implementation of measures to minimize energy. consumption, particularly from non-renewable energy sources.	10.0	10.0
Identification of operational risks and opportunities.	20.0	20.0
Development and clear communication of sustainability objectives.	20.0	20.0
Planning and monitoring attainment of sustainable objectives, with clear objectives, correction activities and responsible persons.	10.0	0.0
Implementation of regular educational/training activities for improving employee's competences for sustainable operations.	20.0	0.0
Ensuring that sustainability policies and objectives are established and are compatible with the strategic direction of the organisation	20.0	0.0
Employment, to the greatest extent possible, workers (employees, subcontractors or freelancers) from local or regional communities	10.0	60.0
Professional training of local people to provide services and supply inputs or complementary activities to the company.	10.0	30.0
Ensuring that internships or apprenticeships are not being misused in an attempt to avoid meeting obligations to employees.	30.0	20.0
Development of a business plan, even if simple, updated where necessary, to demonstrate economic viability of the business/organisation	10.0	50.0
Support to programmes for promoting tourist safety and security.	10.0	20.0

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low (0–1), (2) high (5–6); in percent. ISO aligned implementation level was measured on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all, 6 – to full extent.

establishment of organisational structures, documentation, and management processes required by the standard. This alignment profile highlights substantial potential for capacity building and structured support

Table 6.25 ISO 21401 Alignment: Spain

ISO 21401 requirement/Implementation level	(1)	(2)
Identification of risks to prevent and attend to accidents and emergencies.	0.0	85.5
Identification of actions to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of your business.	10.9	38.2
Preventing the introduction of exotic populations of wildlife.	32.7	29.1
Adapting the architectural design and the materials used according to the environment concerned.	21.8	29.1
Avoid the use of building materials with a major negative environmental impact.	27.3	29.1
The architecture of construction considers the safety of workers and guests.	3.6	50.9
Use of native vegetation to the fullest extent possible.	21.8	40.0
Circular economy model to reduce, reuse or recycle solid waste.	10.9	50.9
Planning and implementation of measures to minimize emissions of gases, light, ozone and odour from installations, vehicles, equipment.	21.8	29.1
Plan and implementation of measures to minimize energy. consumption, particularly from non-renewable energy sources.	12.7	41.8
Identification of operational risks and opportunities.	5.5	56.4
Development and clear communication of sustainability objectives.	12.7	36.4
Planning and monitoring attainment of sustainable objectives, with clear objectives, correction activities and responsible persons.	14.5	32.7
Implementation of regular educational/training activities for improving employee's competences for sustainable operations.	14.5	30.9
Ensuring that sustainability policies and objectives are established and are compatible with the strategic direction of the organisation	18.2	30.9
Employment, to the greatest extent possible, workers (employees, subcontractors or freelancers) from local or regional communities	1.8	52.7
Professional training of local people to provide services and supply inputs or complementary activities to the company.	10.9	30.9
Ensuring that internships or apprenticeships are not being misused in an attempt to avoid meeting obligations to employees.	5.5	45.5
Development of a business plan, even if simple, updated where necessary, to demonstrate economic viability of the business/organisation	7.3	50.9

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low (0–1), (2) high (5–6); in percent. ISO aligned implementation level was measured on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all, 6 – to full extent.

to enable accommodation providers to progress from isolated sustainability actions towards a more systematic and standard aligned sustainability management approach.

Table 6.25 presents the level of alignment of Spanish accommodation

providers with the requirements of the ISO 21401 standard. Alignment refers to the extent to which practices, procedures, and organisational arrangements corresponding to ISO 21401 requirements are already implemented, independently of formal certification status.

The results indicate moderate levels of alignment across several ISO 21401 requirements. Alignment is relatively stronger for requirements related to basic environmental management and operational practices, such as waste management and measures aimed at improving resource efficiency. These requirements build on operational practices that are already familiar to many accommodation providers and therefore show higher levels of reported alignment.

Lower levels of alignment are observed for requirements that depend on formalised management systems and organisational processes. These include documented sustainability policies, systematic planning and monitoring, clearly defined roles and responsibilities for sustainability management, and structured procedures for performance evaluation. The reported alignment for these requirements suggests that while relevant practices may exist, they are not consistently formalised or managed in accordance with the full expectations of the ISO standard.

Requirements related to stakeholder engagement, communication, and continuous improvement also show mixed alignment levels. This indicates that sustainability related activities in Spanish accommodation providers are often implemented in a practice-oriented manner, with limited integration into a comprehensive and continuously managed sustainability system.

Overall, Table 6.25 suggests that ISO 21401 alignment in Spain reflects an intermediate stage of readiness. Spanish accommodation providers demonstrate a solid operational basis for alignment, particularly in environmental management, but show gaps in the formalisation, coordination, and systematic management of sustainability required to fully meet ISO 21401 requirements. This pattern indicates that further progress towards alignment would primarily depend on strengthening management structures, documentation, and continuous improvement mechanisms rather than introducing entirely new sustainability practices.

Table 6.26 presents the level of alignment of Greek accommodation providers with the requirements of the ISO 21401 standard. Alignment is understood as the extent to which practices, procedures, and organisational arrangements corresponding to ISO 21401 requirements are already in place, irrespective of whether formal certification has been ob-

Table 6.26 ISO 21401 Alignment: Greece

ISO 21401 requirement/Implementation level	(1)	(2)
Identification of risks to prevent and attend to accidents and emergencies.	5.7	81.1
Identification of actions to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of your business.	3.8	73.6
Preventing the introduction of exotic populations of wildlife.	17.0	54.7
Adapting the architectural design and the materials used according to the environment concerned.	13.2	64.2
Avoid the use of building materials with a major negative environmental impact.	11.3	66.0
The architecture of construction considers the safety of workers and guests.	5.7	88.7
Use of native vegetation to the fullest extent possible.	7.5	64.2
Circular economy model to reduce, reuse or recycle solid waste.	7.5	56.6
Planning and implementation of measures to minimize emissions of gases, light, ozone and odour from installations, vehicles, equipment.	9.4	56.6
Plan and implementation of measures to minimize energy. consumption, particularly from non-renewable energy sources.	5.7	54.7
Identification of operational risks and opportunities.	3.8	73.6
Development and clear communication of sustainability objectives.	9.4	66.0
Planning and monitoring attainment of sustainable objectives, with clear objectives, correction activities and responsible persons.	7.5	64.2
Implementation of regular educational/training activities for improving employee's competences for sustainable operations.	7.5	62.3
Ensuring that sustainability policies and objectives are established and are compatible with the strategic direction of the organisation	5.7	64.2
Employment, to the greatest extent possible, workers (employees, subcontractors or freelancers) from local or regional communities	3.8	69.8
Professional training of local people to provide services and supply inputs or complementary activities to the company.	5.7	56.6
Ensuring that internships or apprenticeships are not being misused in an attempt to avoid meeting obligations to employees.	3.8	69.8
Development of a business plan, even if simple, updated where necessary, to demonstrate economic viability of the business/organisation	3.8	81.1
Support to programmes for promoting tourist safety and security.	3.8	75.5

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low (0–1), (2) high (5–6); in percent. ISO aligned implementation level was measured on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all, 6 – to full extent.

tained. The results indicate relatively high levels of alignment across a broad range of ISO 21401 requirements. Alignment is particularly strong for requirements related to environmental management and operational

control, including waste management, resource efficiency measures, and mitigation of environmental impacts associated with daily operations. These requirements are reported as aligned by a large share of respondents, suggesting that many Greek accommodation providers already meet key operational expectations of the standard. In addition to operational practices, higher levels of alignment are also observed for requirements related to organisational structuring and formalisation. A substantial proportion of respondents report alignment with requirements concerning sustainability policies, defined roles and responsibilities, and planning processes. This indicates that sustainability related practices in Greece are more frequently embedded within structured management frameworks rather than implemented solely as isolated actions. Requirements related to stakeholder engagement, communication, monitoring, and continuous improvement also show comparatively stronger alignment than in other contexts. While not all respondents report full alignment with these elements, their relatively higher presence suggests that sustainability management in Greek accommodation providers is more often approached as an integrated and ongoing process.

Overall, Table 6.26 suggests that ISO 21401 alignment in Greece reflects a relatively advanced level of readiness. Greek accommodation providers appear to have moved beyond a purely operational focus on sustainability towards a more systematic and organised approach that corresponds closely with the structure and intent of the ISO 21401 standard. The remaining gaps in alignment relate primarily to the consistent application and continuous improvement of management processes rather than the absence of core sustainability practices.

Cross Mediterranean Perspective

Table 6.27 presents a cross Mediterranean perspective on ISO 21401 readiness levels, synthesising the extent to which accommodation providers across Slovenia, Italy, Spain, and Greece report high levels of implementation of practices and requirements relevant to the standard. Readiness is interpreted as the degree to which organisational practices, procedures, and management arrangements are already in place in a form that corresponds to ISO 21401 expectations.

At the cross Mediterranean level, the results indicate a differentiated readiness profile across ISO 21401 requirements. Higher readiness levels are observed for requirements that build on operational sustainability practices, particularly those related to environmental management and

Table 6.27 ISO 21401 Readiness Level: A Cross Mediterranean Perspective

ISO 21401 related practice or req.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Statistics
Identification of risks to prevent and attend to accidents and emergencies.	47.2	61.5	85.5	81.1	$x^2(3) = 20.3$; $p \leq 0.001$
Identification of actions to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of your business.	33.3	51.9	38.2	73.6	$x^2(3) = 18.92$; $p \leq 0.001$
Preventing the introduction of exotic populations of wildlife.	41.7	44.2	29.1	54.7	$x^2(3) = 7.36$ $p \leq 0.061$
Adapting the architectural design and the materials used according to the environment concerned.	47.2	42.3	29.1	64.2	$x^2(3) = 13.67$; $p \leq 0.003$
Avoid the use of building materials with a major negative environmental impact.	50.0	50.0	29.1	66.0	$x^2(3) = 14.9$; $p \leq 0.002$
The architecture of construction considers the safety of workers and guests.	77.8	67.3	50.9	88.7	$x^2(3) = 19.71$; $p \leq 0.001$
Use of native vegetation to the fullest extent possible.	58.3	46.2	40.0	64.2	$x^2(3) = 7.58$; $p \leq 0.056$
Circular economy model to reduce, reuse or recycle solid waste.	47.2	42.3	50.9	56.6	$x^2(3) = 2.26$; $p \leq 0.519$
Planning and implementation of measures to minimize emissions of gases, light, ozone and odour from installations, vehicles, equipment.	19.4	44.2	29.1	56.6	$x^2(3) = 15.59$; $p \leq 0.001$
Plan and implementation of measures to minimize energy. consumption, particularly from non-renewable energy sources.	36.1	53.8	41.8	54.7	$x^2(3) = 4.53$; $p \leq 0.209$
Identification of operational risks and opportunities.	41.7	53.8	56.4	73.6	$x^2(3) = 9.62$; $p \leq 0.022$
Development and clear communication of sustainability objectives.	30.6	46.2	36.4	66.0	$x^2(3) = 14.08$; $p \leq 0.003$

Continued on the next page

resource efficiency in daily operations. These requirements show relatively higher shares of respondents reporting high levels of implementation across countries, suggesting that a basic operational foundation for ISO 21401 is already present in many accommodation providers. In contrast, readiness levels are consistently lower for requirements that depend on formalised management systems and structured organisational processes. These include requirements related to documented sustainability policies, systematic planning and monitoring, defined roles and responsibilities, stakeholder engagement processes, and continuous improvement

Table 6.27 *Continued from the previous page*

ISO 21401 related practice or req.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Statistics
Planning and monitoring attainment of sustainable objectives, with clear objectives, correction activities and responsible persons.	22.2	42.3	32.7	64.2	$x^2(3) = 18.42$; $p \leq 0.001$
Implementation of regular educational/training activities for improving employee's competences for sustainable operations.	41.7	36.5	30.9	62.3	$x^2(3) = 12.23$; $p \leq 0.007$
Ensuring that sustainability policies and objectives are established and are compatible with the strategic direction of the organisation	38.9	44.2	30.9	64.2	$x^2(3) = 12.83$; $p \leq 0.001$
Employment, to the greatest extent possible, workers (employees, subcontractors or freelancers) from local or regional communities	63.9	55.8	52.7	69.8	$x^2(3) = 3.96$; $p \leq 0.226$
Professional training of local people to provide services and supply inputs or complementary activities to the company.	19.4	30.8	30.9	56.6	$x^2(3) = 15.33$; $p \leq 0.002$
Ensuring that internships or apprenticeships are not being misused in an attempt to avoid meeting obligations to employees.	38.9	55.8	45.5	69.8	$x^2(3) = 10.3$; $p \leq 0.016$
Development of a business plan, even if simple, updated where necessary, to demonstrate economic viability of the business/organisation	47.2	42.3	50.9	81.1	$x^2(3) = 19.26$; $p \leq 0.001$
Support to programmes for promoting tourist safety and security.	38.9	53.8	56.4	75.5	$x^2(3) = 13.43$; $p \leq 0.006$

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) Italy, (2) Slovenia, (3) Greece, (4) Spain. In percent; percentages indicate a share of respondents expressing high importance for each need or enabling condition (values 5–6).

mechanisms. Across the Mediterranean sample, a substantial proportion of respondents report low implementation levels for these requirements, indicating that they represent the main gaps in ISO 21401 readiness.

From a descriptive cross-country perspective, Greece consistently reports the highest shares of respondents indicating high implementation across a broad set of ISO 21401 requirements. Spain and Italy display intermediate readiness levels, with higher implementation shares for operational requirements and lower shares for management system related elements. Slovenia shows a similar pattern, with comparatively stronger

performance in operational environmental requirements and lower reported implementation for requirements related to formalisation, documentation, and structured management processes. From a cross Mediterranean perspective, Table 6.27 suggests that ISO 21401 readiness is shaped less by the absence of sustainability practices and more by differences in the degree of organisational integration and formalisation of those practices. While many accommodation providers demonstrate readiness in terms of operational actions, fewer are prepared to meet the full scope of ISO 21401 requirements that emphasise management systems, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Overall, the table indicates that the Mediterranean accommodation sector is positioned at an intermediate stage of ISO 21401 readiness. The sustainability status quo is characterised by partial alignment, where operational elements of the standard are relatively well established, but broader readiness depends on strengthening organisational structures, management processes, and the systematic integration of sustainability into decision making. This cross Mediterranean readiness profile highlights the importance of capacity building and supportive frameworks aimed at facilitating the transition from practice-based sustainability towards full standard aligned sustainability management.

ISO 21401 ADOPTION BARRIERS

This subsection examines the barriers that limit the adoption of the ISO 21401 standard across accommodation providers, interpreted through Stern's theory of environmentally significant behaviour. From this perspective, the adoption of a sustainability standard represents a form of environmentally significant organisational behaviour that is shaped not only by environmental awareness or intentions, but by a combination of contextual conditions, organisational capacities, and perceived constraints. Barriers are therefore understood as factors that increase the perceived cost, complexity, or feasibility of adopting ISO 21401. High relevance of a barrier indicates that it strongly constrains organisational behaviour, even in cases where sustainability practices are already present. Low relevance indicates that a given factor does not substantially influence adoption decisions. Interpreting barriers in this way allows for the identification of concrete needs that must be addressed in order to enable environmentally significant behaviour in the form of ISO 21401 adoption.

The following tables present country specific barrier profiles, reveal-

Table 6.28 ISO 21401 Barriers: Slovenia

Barrier	(1)	(2)
We do not have enough staff to support the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	0.0	63.9
We know very little about the benefits of adopting ISO 21401 standard.	2.8	61.1
Implementation of ISO 21401 standards is too expensive.	5.6	47.2
Our company is too small and does not fit requirements of the ISO 21401 standard.	25.0	22.2
ISO 21401 standard is too rigid and would ignore specifics of our company.	13.9	22.2
Costs of maintaining/renewing ISO 21401 standard are too high.	11.1	27.8
We do not have enough time to implement ISO 21401 standard.	8.3	41.7
Auditing processes are risky because they require disclosure of potentially private data.	11.1	22.2
ISO 21401 standard has very limited value to our customers/guests.	5.6	36.1
Adoption of ISO 21401 standard limits our ability to secure suppliers.	16.7	19.4
We know very little about how to start the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	19.4	36.1
Auditing process requires too much paper work.	5.6	41.7
We do not have proper monitoring tools to prove sustainable performance	11.1	38.9
Sustainability is not at the core of our business	72.2	2.8
Key performance indicators for many of the sustainability criteria are too vague.	13.9	11.1

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low relevance (0-1), (2) high relevance (5-6); in percent. Barriers measured on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all, 6 – to full extent.

ing how different configurations of constraints shape adoption across national contexts.

In Slovenia, the most salient barriers are organisational and procedural (Table 6.28). A large share of respondents report administrative burden, documentation requirements, and the complexity of ISO 21401 as highly relevant constraints. From Stern's perspective, these barriers represent contextual constraints that substantially increase the effort required to engage in environmentally significant behaviour, thereby reducing adoption even among organisations that already apply sustainability practices. Financial barriers are also reported as highly relevant by a substantial share of respondents. Certification costs and uncertainty regarding the economic benefits of ISO 21401 increase the perceived behavioural cost of adoption. In contrast, only a small minority of respondents report low

Table 6.29 ISO 21401 Barriers: Italy

Barrier	(1)	(2)
We do not have enough staff to support the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	3.8	36.5
We know very little about the benefits of adopting ISO 21401 standard.	5.8	57.7
Implementation of ISO 21401 standards is too expensive.	3.8	28.8
Our company is too small and does not fit requirements of the ISO 21401 standard.	11.5	26.9
ISO 21401 standard is too rigid and would ignore specifics of our company.	3.8	25.0
Costs of maintaining/renewing ISO 21401 standard are too high.	7.7	25.0
We do not have enough time to implement ISO 21401 standard.	3.8	36.5
Auditing processes are risky because they require disclosure of potentially private data.	32.7	7.7
ISO 21401 standard has very limited value to our customers/guests.	11.5	26.9
Adoption of ISO 21401 standard limits our ability to secure suppliers.	23.1	7.7
We know very little about how to start the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	7.7	61.5
Auditing process requires too much paper work.	5.8	40.4
We do not have proper monitoring tools to prove sustainable performance	13.5	23.1
Sustainability is not at the core of our business	48.1	13.5
Key performance indicators for many of the sustainability criteria are too vague.	11.5	11.5

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low relevance (0-1), (2) high relevance (5-6); in percent. Barriers measured on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all, 6 – to full extent.

relevance for these barriers, indicating that financial considerations are a widespread concern. Barriers related to lack of environmental concern or low perceived importance of sustainability are reported as having low relevance by most respondents. This suggests that motivation is largely present and that adoption is constrained primarily by capacity and contextual factors rather than by values or intentions. Knowledge and expertise related barriers show mixed responses, with a notable share reporting high relevance, indicating unmet needs for guidance and technical support.

In Italy, barriers related to financial cost and administrative effort dominate the response pattern. A majority of respondents reports certification costs and procedural complexity as highly relevant barriers, indicating that environmentally significant behaviour in the form of ISO

Table 6.30 ISO 21401 Barriers: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Barrier	(1)	(2)
We do not have enough staff to support the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	20.0	50.0
We know very little about the benefits of adopting ISO 21401 standard.	10.0	50.0
Implementation of ISO 21401 standards is too expensive.	10.0	20.0
Our company is too small and does not fit requirements of the ISO 21401 standard.	30.0	30.0
ISO 21401 standard is too rigid and would ignore specifics of our company.	20.0	10.0
Costs of maintaining/renewing ISO 21401 standard are too high.	20.0	20.0
We do not have enough time to implement ISO 21401 standard.	20.0	30.0
Auditing processes are risky because they require disclosure of potentially private data.	30.0	20.0
ISO 21401 standard has very limited value to our customers/guests.	20.0	10.0
Adoption of ISO 21401 standard limits our ability to secure suppliers.	20.0	10.0
We know very little about how to start the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	10.0	70.0
Auditing process requires too much paper work.	10.0	30.0
We do not have proper monitoring tools to prove sustainable performance	20.0	30.0
Sustainability is not at the core of our business	40.0	10.0
Key performance indicators for many of the sustainability criteria are too vague.	40.0	10.0

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low relevance (0–1), (2) high relevance (5–6); in percent. Barriers measured on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all, 6 – to full extent.

21401 adoption is strongly constrained by economic and organisational resource considerations. Staff capacity and time availability are also perceived as highly relevant by a large share of respondents. Within Stern's framework, these barriers reflect capacity constraints, limiting the ability of organisations to engage in sustained, complex behaviours such as implementing and maintaining a formal sustainability management system.

By contrast, barriers related to lack of environmental awareness or lack of interest in sustainability are reported as having low relevance by most respondents. This indicates that Italian accommodation providers are generally motivated, but that behavioural costs associated with adoption remain high due to organisational and financial limitations.

The results for Bosnia and Herzegovina (Table 6.30) show a concentration of high relevance responses across nearly all barrier categories.

Table 6.31 ISO 21401 Barriers: Spain

Barrier	(1)	(2)
We do not have enough staff to support the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	14.5	70.9
We know very little about the benefits of adopting ISO 21401 standard.	12.7	65.5
Implementation of ISO 21401 standards is too expensive.	7.3	58.2
Our company is too small and does not fit requirements of the ISO 21401 standard.	32.7	34.5
ISO 21401 standard is too rigid and would ignore specifics of our company.	23.6	30.9
Costs of maintaining/renewing ISO 21401 standard are too high.	14.5	60.0
We do not have enough time to implement ISO 21401 standard.	23.6	56.4
Auditing processes are risky because they require disclosure of potentially private data.	30.9	23.6
ISO 21401 standard has very limited value to our customers/guests.	23.6	36.4
Adoption of ISO 21401 standard limits our ability to secure suppliers.	40.0	14.5
We know very little about how to start the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	12.7	63.6
Auditing process requires too much paper work.	10.9	65.5
We do not have proper monitoring tools to prove sustainable performance	20.0	65.5
Sustainability is not at the core of our business	50.9	21.8

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low relevance (0–1), (2) high relevance (5–6); in percent. Barriers measured on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all, 6 – to full extent.

A very large share of respondents reports financial constraints as highly relevant, signalling limited capacity to absorb certification costs and organisational investments.

Administrative complexity and lack of internal organisational structures are also reported as highly relevant by most respondents. From Stern's perspective, this represents a context in which multiple reinforcing constraints suppress environmentally significant behaviour, making ISO 21401 adoption difficult regardless of motivation.

Barriers related to limited access to information, guidance, and external support are also frequently rated as highly relevant, indicating that constraints extend beyond individual organisations to the broader institutional environment. Barriers related to lack of environmental concern are comparatively less prominent, suggesting that adoption is primarily constrained by structural and capacity-related factors.

In Spain, the distribution of responses points to administrative and

Table 6.32 ISO 21401 Barriers: Greece

Barrier	(1)	(2)
We do not have enough staff to support the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	35.8	24.5
We know very little about the benefits of adopting ISO 21401 standard.	22.6	24.5
Implementation of ISO 21401 standards is too expensive.	26.4	24.5
Our company is too small and does not fit requirements of the ISO 21401 standard.	50.9	11.3
ISO 21401 standard is too rigid and would ignore specifics of our company.	37.7	13.2
Costs of maintaining/renewing ISO 21401 standard are too high.	28.3	26.4
We do not have enough time to implement ISO 21401 standard.	39.6	13.2
Auditing processes are risky because they require disclosure of potentially private data.	47.2	11.3
ISO 21401 standard has very limited value to our customers/guests.	39.6	15.1
Adoption of ISO 21401 standard limits our ability to secure suppliers.	26.4	20.8
We know very little about how to start the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	32.1	24.5
Auditing process requires too much paper work.	26.4	20.8
We do not have proper monitoring tools to prove sustainable performance	41.5	18.9
Sustainability is not at the core of our business	64.2	9.4

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low relevance (0–1), (2) high relevance (5–6); in percent. Barriers measured on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not at all, 6 – to full extent.

procedural barriers as the most relevant. A sizeable share of respondents identify documentation requirements and perceived complexity as highly relevant, indicating that the effort required to comply with ISO 21401 is a key limiting factor.

Financial barriers are reported with moderate relevance. While a portion of respondents perceive costs as highly relevant, a comparable share report lower relevance, reflecting heterogeneity in organisational capacity across the sector. Barriers related to internal expertise and staff capacity also show a mixed response pattern.

Most respondents report low relevance for barriers related to lack of environmental concern or low perceived importance of sustainability. This suggests that motivation is not the primary limiting factor and that needs in Spain are concentrated on reducing administrative burden and supporting organisational capacity.

The Greek results indicate a comparatively lower prevalence of highly

relevant barriers. While administrative complexity and documentation requirements are still reported as relevant by some respondents, a larger share report these barriers as having lower relevance compared to other country contexts. Financial barriers are reported as highly relevant by a smaller share of respondents, suggesting that economic constraints play a less dominant role in shaping adoption decisions. Capacity-related barriers, including lack of staff or expertise, also show lower relevance for most respondents. Within Stern's framework, this pattern indicates that contextual and capacity constraints exert weaker limiting effects on environmentally significant behaviour in Greece. As a result, accommodation providers appear better positioned to translate existing sustainability practices into formal ISO 21401 adoption.

The Table 6.33 presents a cross Mediterranean analysis of perceived barriers to ISO 21401 adoption, reporting the share of respondents in Slovenia, Italy, Spain, and Greece who identify each barrier as highly relevant, alongside Chi-square tests of cross-country differences. Interpreted through Stern's theory of environmentally significant behaviour, the results provide insight into how different types of constraints shape the feasibility of adopting a formal sustainability standard across national contexts.

At the cross Mediterranean level, the most prominent barriers are those that increase the perceived effort and organisational cost of adoption. Administrative burden, documentation requirements, and the complexity of ISO 21401 are identified as highly relevant by a substantial share of respondents across countries. These barriers represent contextual constraints that raise the behavioural cost of environmentally significant organisational behaviour, making adoption difficult even in organisations that already engage in sustainability practices. Financial barriers also show high relevance across the Mediterranean sample, although their intensity varies by country. Certification costs and uncertainty regarding economic benefits are frequently identified as highly relevant, particularly in Italy and Slovenia. From Stern's perspective, these barriers increase the material cost of environmentally significant behaviour, thereby limiting adoption where financial margins are constrained. The Chi-square results indicate statistically significant cross-country differences for several cost-related barriers, suggesting that economic context plays a key role in shaping adoption feasibility. Barriers related to organisational capacity, such as limited staff availability, lack of time, and insufficient internal expertise, also emerge as important constraints. A

Table 6.33 Cross Mediterranean Differences in ISO 21401 Adoption Barriers

Barrier to ISO 21401 adoption	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Statistics
We do not have enough staff to support the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	63.9	36.5	70.9	24.5	$x^2(3) = 29.64$; $p \leq 0.001$
We know very little about the benefits of adopting ISO 21401 standard.	61.1	57.7	65.5	24.5	$x^2(3) = 21.85$; $p \leq 0.001$
Implementation of ISO 21401 standards is too expensive.	47.2	28.8	58.2	24.5	$x^2(3) = 16.4$; $p \leq 0.001$
Our company is too small and does not fit requirements of the ISO 21401 standard.	22.2	26.9	34.5	11.3	$x^2(3) = 8.34$; $p \leq 0.04$
ISO 21401 standard is too rigid and would ignore specifics of our company.	22.2	25.0	30.9	13.2	$x^2(3) = 4.95$; $p \leq 0.176$
Costs of maintaining/renewing ISO 21401 standard are too high.	27.8	25.0	60.0	26.4	$x^2(3) = 19.71$; $p \leq 0.001$
We do not have enough time to implement ISO 21401 standard.	41.7	36.5	56.4	13.2	$x^2(3) = 22.12$; $p \leq 0.001$
Auditing processes are risky because they require disclosure of potentially private data.	22.2	7.7	23.6	11.3	$x^2(3) = 7.02$ $p \leq 0.071$
ISO 21401 standard has very limited value to our customers/guests.	36.1	26.9	36.4	15.1	$x^2(3) = 7.48$; $p \leq 0.058$
Adoption of ISO 21401 standard limits our ability to secure suppliers.	19.4	7.7	14.5	20.8	$x^2(3) = 4.04$; $p \leq 0.257$
We know very little about how to start the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	36.1	61.5	63.6	24.5	$x^2(3) = 22.94$; $p \leq 0.001$
Auditing process requires too much paper work.	41.7	40.4	65.5	20.8	$x^2(3) = 22.24$; $p \leq 0.001$
We do not have proper monitoring tools to prove sustainable performance	38.9	23.1	65.5	18.9	$x^2(3) = 31.05$; $p \leq 0.001$
Sustainability is not at the core of our business	2.8	13.5	21.8	9.4	$x^2(3) = 7.83$; $p \leq 0.05$
Key performance indicators for many of the sustainability criteria are too vague.	11.1	11.5	23.6	15.1	$x^2(3) = 3.86$; $p \leq 0.277$

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) Italy, (2) Slovenia, (3) Greece, (4) Spain. In percent; percentages indicate a share of respondents expressing high importance for each need or enabling condition (values 5–6).

large share of respondents in Italy and Spain report these barriers as highly relevant, while they are less frequently reported in Greece. These findings indicate that capacity constraints interact with contextual factors to shape environmentally significant behaviour, particularly where adoption requires sustained organisational effort and coordination. By

contrast, barriers related to lack of environmental concern or low perceived importance of sustainability are consistently reported as having low relevance across all countries. Only a small share of respondents identifies motivational factors as highly relevant barriers. This pattern is critical from a Stern based perspective, as it indicates that ISO 21401 adoption is not primarily constrained by values, attitudes, or awareness, but by external and organisational conditions that shape the feasibility of action.

Cross-country differences further highlight distinct national profiles of constraint. Greece consistently reports lower shares of respondents identifying barriers as highly relevant, reflecting a context in which both contextual and capacity-related constraints exert weaker limiting effects on environmentally significant behaviour. Italy and Slovenia show higher shares of respondents reporting financial and administrative barriers, indicating stronger constraints related to cost and organisational burden. Spain occupies an intermediate position, with administrative and capacity-related barriers more prominent than financial ones.

Overall, the table indicates that barriers to ISO 21401 adoption across the Mediterranean are best understood as behavioural constraints rather than motivational deficits. The sustainability status quo is characterised by widespread recognition of sustainability and willingness to act, but uneven capacity to absorb the organisational, procedural, and economic costs associated with formal certification. From a cross Mediterranean perspective, enabling ISO 21401 adoption therefore requires interventions that reduce administrative complexity, lower financial barriers, and strengthen organisational capacity, rather than measures aimed at increasing awareness or changing attitudes.

Table 6.34 provides a structured diagnosis of why ISO 21401 adoption remains uneven even in a context where sustainability is widely recognised as important. By combining prevalence estimates with Stern's (2000) environmentally significant behaviour framework, The table offers more than just a simple list of obstacles and clarifies which behavioural mechanisms most strongly constrain organisational action.

A first and decisive insight is the dominance of contextual constraints. Ten of the fifteen barriers fall into Stern's contextual category and these also account for most of the highest prevalence values. The most frequently reported barriers are insufficient staff (68%), implementation costs (64%), insufficient time (62%), and excessive paperwork (61%). Each of these represents a constraint that operates largely independently of or-

Table 6.34 Prevalence of ISO 21401 Barriers and Their Classification

Barrier	(1)	(2)	Dominant behavioural mechanism
Insufficient staff	68	Contextual factors	Labour availability limits organisational capacity to engage in certification processes
Implementation costs too high	64	Contextual factors	Financial constraints increase the economic cost of adoption
Insufficient time	62	Contextual factors	Time scarcity constrains the feasibility of sustained organisational change
Too much paperwork	61	Contextual factors	Administrative burden increases procedural effort and compliance costs
Limited knowledge of benefits	57	Attitudinal factors	Unclear perceived benefits weaken the perceived value of adoption
Standard too rigid for our firm	54	Contextual factors	Regulatory design mismatch limits applicability to SME contexts
Costs of renewal too high	52	Contextual factors	Long-term financial sustainability of certification is questioned
Lack of monitoring tools	51	Contextual factors	Absence of supporting infrastructure limits implementation capacity
Limited knowledge of adoption process	47	Personal capabilities	Knowledge deficit prevents translation of intent into action
Firm too small for standard	46	Contextual factors	Scale mismatch between standard requirements and firm resources
Standard irrelevant to customers	42	Attitudinal factors	Low perceived market demand reduces strategic motivation
Risk of private data disclosure	35	Contextual factors	Trust and data security concerns constrain willingness to comply
Sustainability not core business	34	Attitudinal factors	Sustainability not prioritised within business strategy
Limits supplier sourcing	28	Contextual factors	Supply chain constraints reduce operational flexibility
KPIs too vague	27	Contextual factors	Lack of clarity undermines measurability and managerial confidence

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) percentage of respondents reporting high pertinence (5-6), (2) Stern's category. Barriers are aligned with Stern's (2000) environmentally significant behaviour framework based on the dominant mechanism through which they constrain organisational behaviour.

ganisational intentions. In Stern's framework, this is precisely where the attitude behaviour gap becomes most visible. Even when pro sustainability orientations exist, behaviour is shaped by feasibility conditions such as labour availability, cost structures, and administrative burden. The high shares observed here indicate that for a majority of accommoda-

tion providers, ISO 21401 is not rejected on principle but is perceived as difficult to pursue under prevailing operational conditions.

The pattern also suggests that the most salient constraints are those that directly increase the behavioural cost of certification. Staffing and time scarcity represent classic organisational bottlenecks in SMEs, where managerial and operational roles are often merged and where additional documentation and monitoring tasks must compete with day-to-day service delivery. The prevalence of paperwork as a highly pertinent barrier further confirms that administrative load is perceived not as a minor inconvenience but as a decisive friction that reduces the likelihood of initiating or sustaining certification. From a Stern perspective, these barriers illustrate how contextual factors structure the decision environment by increasing effort requirements beyond what many firms can absorb.

A second cluster of contextual barriers relates to the long-term viability and fit of the standard. Costs of renewal (52%) suggest that the barrier is not limited to entry costs but extends to the perceived sustainability of maintaining certification over time. Similarly, the perception that the standard is too rigid for the firm (54%) and that the firm is too small (46%) indicates concerns about design fit. These findings point to a mismatch between the procedural and managerial requirements of ISO 21401 and the operational realities of small accommodation businesses. Stern's framework is useful here because it highlights that adoption depends not only on motivation and capacity but also on institutional design and the compatibility of the intervention with routine organisational functioning.

Infrastructure and measurement related constraints reinforce this point. The lack of monitoring tools (51%) and the perception that key performance indicators are too vague (27%) both relate to the informational and technical foundations required for standard aligned management. In Stern's terms, these are contextual constraints because they refer to the availability and clarity of enabling systems rather than to internal motivation. Without monitoring tools and clear indicators, adoption becomes riskier, more time consuming, and less managerially credible. Importantly, these barriers connect directly to the logic of ISO 21401, which relies on systematic monitoring and continuous improvement. Where the monitoring infrastructure is weak or the indicators are perceived as unclear, organisations are less able to translate sustainability intentions into the type of structured behaviour that certification demands.

Capability constraints form a smaller but still consequential layer. Limited knowledge of the adoption process is reported as highly pertinent by

47% of respondents, indicating that nearly half experience the pathway to certification as insufficiently understandable or navigable. In Stern's terms, this is a personal capability limitation that restricts action even when motivation exists and even when the external context is not entirely prohibitive. Capability barriers typically produce a practical stall point, organisations may be willing to adopt but are uncertain how to proceed, which steps matter most, and how to translate existing practices into formalised evidence.

Attitudinal constraints are present but clearly less dominant than contextual ones, which is itself theoretically meaningful. Limited knowledge of benefits is reported by 57%, indicating that a large share of respondents perceive the business case for ISO 21401 as unclear. In Stern's framework, this is an attitudinal factor because it reflects beliefs about benefits and costs, not the physical ability to act. Two other attitudinal barriers further qualify the adoption landscape. Forty two percent perceive the standard as irrelevant to customers, and thirty four percent indicate that sustainability is not at the core of their business. These values show that while most firms are not primarily blocked by lack of interest, a substantial minority holds strategic views that reduce adoption likelihood regardless of enabling conditions. This is important for interpreting the overall pattern. Contextual and capability interventions can reduce friction and increase feasibility, but they will not fully address adoption gaps where firms do not perceive market demand or strategic relevance.

Two additional contextual barriers highlight the relational and market embedded nature of ISO 21401 adoption. The risk of private data disclosure is reported by 35%, suggesting that trust and information security concerns remain salient for a meaningful minority. Limits on supplier sourcing are reported by 28%, indicating that some firms anticipate supply chain inflexibility as a constraint. Both reinforce Stern's emphasis that environmentally significant behaviour is situated in broader networks of regulation, markets, and inter organisational dependencies. Adoption decisions are shaped not only by internal operations but by perceived exposure to external requirements, audits, and supply chain constraints.

Taken together, the table provides an empirically grounded explanation for why sustainability awareness does not automatically translate into formal ISO 21401 adoption. The highest prevalence barriers are overwhelmingly contextual and they cluster around time, staffing, costs, and administrative burden. This implies that the main obstacle is not unwill-

ingness, but the perceived inability to accommodate certification within existing resource constraints and operational routines. Stern's framework therefore points to a clear intervention logic. Where contextual barriers dominate, effective strategies must reduce the behavioural cost of adoption by simplifying procedures, reducing administrative load, and lowering financial burdens, while capability interventions should strengthen knowledge and navigational support. Attitudinal barriers require a different response, namely clarifying the business case and market relevance of certification, particularly for firms that do not yet see sustainability as central to their competitive positioning.

In summary, the Table 6.34 indicates that the adoption of ISO 21401 is constrained predominantly by feasibility-related conditions rather than by a lack of sustainability-oriented values or intentions. The findings further demonstrate that perceived barriers are heterogeneous and operate through distinct behavioural pathways. This pattern aligns closely with the theoretical framework proposed Stern (2000, 2005), which distinguishes between motivational factors, individual capabilities, and contextual constraints as separate determinants of environmentally significant behaviour. From this perspective, low uptake of sustainability standards does not primarily reflect deficits in pro-environmental motivation, but rather limitations in organisational capacity and enabling conditions, thereby indicating that policy interventions and support measures should focus on reducing contextual and capability-related barriers rather than on attitudinal change.

ISO 21401 ADOPTION NEEDS AND ENABLING CONDITIONS

While the previous subsection focused on barriers that constrain the adoption of ISO 21401, this subsection shifts attention to the conditions that respondents identify as necessary to enable adoption. Rather than asking why adoption does not occur, the analysis examines what would make adoption feasible under existing organisational and contextual constraints. Within Stern's (2000) framework, such needs can be interpreted as mechanisms that reduce the behavioural cost of environmentally significant organisational behaviour. Where barriers increase effort, risk, or uncertainty, enabling actions reduce these frictions by strengthening organisational capacity, clarifying procedures, or modifying contextual conditions. Analysing needs therefore provides a complementary perspective to the barrier analysis and helps identify leverage points for intervention. Respondents assessed the importance of a set of enabling actions

associated with ISO 21401 implementation, using a scale from not at all important to extremely important. High importance ratings indicate actions that respondents perceive as critical for enabling adoption, rather than as optional or marginal support measures.

The Slovenian results indicate a clear prioritisation of enabling actions that directly address organisational capacity and procedural complexity associated with ISO 21401 adoption. A substantial share of respondents identifies support measures related to hands-on assistance, guidance, and implementation support as extremely important, while only a small share rate these actions as not at all important. This distribution suggests that adoption needs are concentrated around feasibility and execution rather than motivation.

The most strongly endorsed needs correspond to mechanisms that reduce contextual and capability related constraints. Actions such as full staff support provided by external auditors are perceived as particularly important because they directly mitigate time scarcity, administrative burden, and limited internal expertise. By transferring part of the implementation effort outside the organisation, such support lowers the behavioural cost of adopting ISO 21401 and increases the perceived manageability of the process. Needs related to clarification and structuring of the adoption pathway also receive high importance ratings. Respondents emphasise the value of guidance that translates ISO 21401 requirements into concrete steps and practical tools. This reflects the earlier finding that limited understanding of the adoption process functions as a significant capability constraint. In behavioural terms, reducing uncertainty and increasing procedural clarity enhances the likelihood of environmentally significant organisational behaviour. On contrary, actions perceived as less critical are those that do not directly reduce immediate operational pressures. Where respondents assign lower importance to certain support measures, this suggests that Slovenian accommodation providers are primarily concerned with interventions that produce tangible reductions in time, effort, and coordination demands, rather than with more abstract or long-term forms of support.

Overall, the Slovenian needs profile indicates that ISO 21401 adoption is viewed as desirable but demanding. Respondents do not question the relevance of sustainability standards in principle. Instead, they signal that adoption becomes feasible when external support compensates for limited internal capacity and when implementation processes are simplified and guided. From the Theory of Environmentally Significant Behaviour

Table 6.35 ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions: Slovenia

Enabling action or support measure	(1)	(2)
External auditor provides a full staff support for the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	2.8	72.2
Benefits of ISO 21401 for your stakeholders (e.g., customers, suppliers, employees) are proved by credible evidence (e.g., reduced operational costs, improved quality of services).	2.8	72.2
Auditing costs of ISO 21401 would not exceed an average monthly wage of a middle management employee at your business/organisation.	5.6	77.8
ISO 21401 standard requirements are fully adjusted to the size and type of your business/organisation.	8.3	72.2
ISO 21401 standard renewal costs do not exceed half of the average monthly wage of a middle management employee in your business/organisation.	5.6	72.2
ISO 21401 auditing team fully adjust to the time availability of the staff at your business/organisation.	2.8	83.3
Information collected during auditing is fully anonymized and confidentiality statement of auditors is provided.	2.8	77.8
Requirements on sustaining sustainable supply chain take into consideration the market situation (e.g., sustainable suppliers are accounted for only if they exist).	2.8	75.0
Free consultation (in person and online) is provided to educate on how to initiate the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	5.6	66.7
Focus of auditing process on paper work/documentation is substantially reduced, to a minimum.	0.0	75.0
Governmental or other type of funding is available to support the implementation of the monitoring tools/processes.	5.6	77.8
Sustainability becomes a regulated mandatory requirement of any business organisation.	0.0	69.4
Key performance indicators for each criterion are adjusted to the size and type of the business organisation.	2.8	77.8
An online self-assessment tool is provided for your business/organisation to enter details on ISO 21401 compliance at your time and staff availability.	8.3	63.9
An online platform is provided where your business/organisation can monitor sustainability performance and benchmark the performance with other similar businesses/organisations (anonymity is ensured).	11.1	75.0

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) not at all important (0–1), extremely important (5–6); in percent. Needs and enabling conditions were measured as perceived importance on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not important at all and 6 – extremely important.

perspective (Stern, 2000), this pattern reinforces the interpretation that environmentally significant organisational behaviour in Slovenia is con-

strained by contextual and capability factors, and that effective enabling strategies must focus on reducing these constraints rather than on influencing attitudes or values.

The Italian results indicate that adoption needs are strongly oriented towards reducing the economic and organisational burden associated with ISO 21401 implementation. A large share of respondents rates enabling actions that provide direct operational and technical support as extremely important, while relatively few consider such actions to be of low importance. This pattern suggests that Italian accommodation providers perceive adoption as desirable but difficult to realise without substantial external assistance.

The most salient needs correspond to mechanisms that alleviate contextual constraints, particularly those related to cost, administrative complexity, and time pressure. Support measures that involve comprehensive assistance from external auditors or consultants are viewed as critical because they help manage documentation requirements, coordinate implementation tasks, and reduce the internal workload required to comply with the standard. These actions directly lower the behavioural cost of environmentally significant organisational behaviour. Needs related to financial feasibility are also highly prominent. Respondents attach strong importance to actions that clarify or reduce the financial implications of adoption, reflecting earlier findings that cost-related barriers play a central role in shaping adoption decisions in Italy. From a behavioural perspective, reducing financial uncertainty and spreading costs over time increases the perceived viability of certification and lowers resistance to engagement. Capacity building needs are similarly evident. Many respondents highlight the importance of guidance and knowledge transfer that help organisations understand both the benefits of ISO 21401 and the practical steps required for implementation. This indicates that adoption is constrained not by lack of interest, but by limited internal resources to manage a complex and unfamiliar process. In Stern's terms, strengthening personal and organisational capabilities is a key enabling condition for environmentally significant behaviour. Actions perceived as less important tend to be those that do not directly address immediate operational or financial constraints. This suggests that Italian accommodation providers prioritise enabling measures that have a clear and immediate impact on feasibility, rather than those aimed at broader awareness or strategic reframing.

Overall, the Italian needs profile indicates that ISO 21401 adoption de-

Table 6.36 ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions: Italy

Enabling action or support measure	(1)	(2)
External auditor provides a full staff support for the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	5.8	61.5
Benefits of ISO 21401 for your stakeholders (e.g., customers, suppliers, employees) are proved by credible evidence (e.g., reduced operational costs, improved quality of services).	3.8	63.5
Auditing costs of ISO 21401 would not exceed an average monthly wage of a middle management employee at your business/organisation.	1.9	46.2
ISO 21401 standard requirements are fully adjusted to the size and type of your business/organisation.	5.8	51.9
ISO 21401 standard renewal costs do not exceed half of the average monthly wage of a middle management employee in your business/organisation.	3.8	40.4
ISO 21401 auditing team fully adjust to the time availability of the staff at your business/organisation.	13.5	40.4
Information collected during auditing is fully anonymized and confidentiality statement of auditors is provided.	19.2	34.6
Requirements on sustaining sustainable supply chain take into consideration the market situation (e.g., sustainable suppliers are accounted for only if they exist).	5.8	53.8
Free consultation (in person and online) is provided to educate on how to initiate the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	1.9	69.2
Focus of auditing process on paper work/documentation is substantially reduced, to a minimum.	5.8	63.5
Governmental or other type of funding is available to support the implementation of the monitoring tools/processes.	3.8	71.2
Sustainability becomes a regulated mandatory requirement of any business organisation.	5.8	51.9
Key performance indicators for each criterion are adjusted to the size and type of the business organisation.	5.8	48.1
An online self-assessment tool is provided for your business/organisation to enter details on ISO 21401 compliance at your time and staff availability.	5.8	42.3
An online platform is provided where your business/organisation can monitor sustainability performance and benchmark the performance with other similar businesses/organisations (anonymity is ensured).	5.8	40.4

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) not at all important (0–1), extremely important (5–6); in percent. Needs and enabling conditions were measured as perceived importance on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not important at all and 6 – extremely important.

pends heavily on interventions that reduce contextual and capability related barriers. Respondents signal that adoption becomes realistic when

external support, financial clarity, and procedural guidance are provided in an integrated manner. From a Stern based perspective, this reinforces the conclusion that enabling environmentally significant organisational behaviour in Italy requires lowering structural and economic barriers rather than focusing on attitudinal change.

The results for Bosnia and Herzegovina reveal a strong and concentrated demand for enabling actions that compensate for structural and capacity-related limitations. A very large share of respondents rates most proposed support measures as extremely important, while only a small proportion considers them to be of low importance. This distribution indicates that ISO 21401 adoption is perceived as largely unattainable under current conditions without substantial external support.

The dominant needs correspond to interventions that directly reduce contextual constraints. Respondents place particular importance on actions that provide comprehensive external assistance, such as full staff support during implementation. These needs mirror earlier findings on barriers related to limited staffing, time scarcity, and administrative burden. By shifting responsibility for complex and resource intensive tasks outside the organisation, such enabling actions lower the feasibility threshold for environmentally significant organisational behaviour.

Financial related needs are also highly salient. Respondents assign strong importance to measures that reduce costs, provide financial clarity, or distribute the financial burden of certification over time. This reflects the central role of financial constraints in shaping adoption decisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and reinforces Stern's argument that behaviour is often constrained by material conditions rather than by motivation. Capacity building needs further strengthen this pattern. High importance is attached to guidance, training, and procedural support that help organisations understand the requirements, benefits, and steps involved in ISO 21401 adoption. From a behavioural perspective, these needs address personal and organisational capability deficits that prevent sustainability intentions from being translated into structured action. Actions perceived as less important are rare and tend to relate to more abstract or indirect forms of support. This suggests that respondents prioritise immediate, practical, and hands-on assistance over measures that do not directly reduce operational or financial pressure.

Overall, the Bosnian and Herzegovinian needs profile indicates that ISO 21401 adoption is contingent on substantial reductions in contextual and capability related constraints. Respondents do not signal resistance

Table 6.37 ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions: Bosnia and Hercegovina

Enabling action or support measure	(1)	(2)
External auditor provides a full staff support for the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	20.0	50.0
Benefits of ISO 21401 for your stakeholders (e.g., customers, suppliers, employees) are proved by credible evidence (e.g., reduced operational costs, improved quality of services).	0.0	70.0
Auditing costs of ISO 21401 would not exceed an average monthly wage of a middle management employee at your business/organisation.	10.0	50.0
ISO 21401 standard requirements are fully adjusted to the size and type of your business/organisation.	0.0	60.0
ISO 21401 standard renewal costs do not exceed half of the average monthly wage of a middle management employee in your business/organisation.	10.0	50.0
ISO 21401 auditing team fully adjust to the time availability of the staff at your business/organisation.	10.0	40.0
Information collected during auditing is fully anonymized and confidentiality statement of auditors is provided.	0.0	30.0
Requirements on sustaining sustainable supply chain take into consideration the market situation (e.g., sustainable suppliers are accounted for only if they exist).	0.0	40.0
Free consultation (in person and online) is provided to educate on how to initiate the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	0.0	60.0
Focus of auditing process on paper work/documentation is substantially reduced, to a minimum.	0.0	40.0
Governmental or other type of funding is available to support the implementation of the monitoring tools/processes.	10.0	50.0
Sustainability becomes a regulated mandatory requirement of any business organisation.	0.0	50.0
Key performance indicators for each criterion are adjusted to the size and type of the business organisation.	0.0	50.0
An online self-assessment tool is provided for your business/organisation to enter details on ISO 21401 compliance at your time and staff availability.	10.0	40.0
An online platform is provided where your business/organisation can monitor sustainability performance and benchmark the performance with other similar businesses/organisations (anonymity is ensured).	10.0	50.0

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) not at all important (0–1), extremely important (5–6); in percent. Needs and enabling conditions were measured as perceived importance on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not important at all and 6 – extremely important.

to sustainability standards; rather, they indicate that adoption becomes possible only when external support mechanisms compensate for lim-

ited internal resources and structural constraints. Within Stern's framework, this underscores the need for systemic and coordinated enabling interventions to facilitate environmentally significant organisational behaviour in this context.

The Spanish results indicate an intermediate and heterogeneous pattern of adoption needs, reflecting variation in organisational capacity and readiness across accommodation providers. A considerable share of respondents rates several enabling actions as extremely important, while a non-negligible proportion assign lower importance to the same measures. This distribution suggests that ISO 21401 adoption in Spain is viewed as feasible for some organisations but remains demanding for others.

The most salient needs in Spain relate to reducing administrative complexity and strengthening organisational capacity. Respondents attach high importance to support measures that simplify documentation requirements and provide hands-on guidance during implementation. These needs directly address contextual constraints associated with procedural burden and coordination demands, which were previously identified as prominent barriers in the Spanish context. Financial support related needs are present but less dominant than in some other countries. While a substantial share of respondents' value measures that clarify or reduce implementation costs, these needs do not uniformly dominate the response pattern. This suggests that cost functions as a constraint for part of the sector, but is not the principal limiting factor across all organisations. Capacity building and knowledge transfer also emerge as important needs. Respondents value actions that improve understanding of ISO 21401 requirements and translate them into practical steps. From a Stern based perspective, these needs address personal capability constraints that hinder environmentally significant organisational behaviour even when sustainability intentions are present. Actions rated as less important tend to be those that do not directly alleviate immediate operational pressures. This indicates that Spanish accommodation providers prioritise enabling measures that deliver tangible reductions in administrative effort and uncertainty, rather than more general or indirect forms of support.

Overall, the Spanish needs profile suggests that ISO 21401 adoption is shaped by a combination of contextual and capability related factors. Adoption is neither uniformly constrained nor uniformly enabled. Instead, respondents highlight interventions aimed at simplifying proce-

Table 6.38 ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions: Spain

Enabling action or support measure	(1)	(2)
External auditor provides a full staff support for the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	0.0	80.0
Benefits of ISO 21401 for your stakeholders (e.g., customers, suppliers, employees) are proved by credible evidence (e.g., reduced operational costs, improved quality of services).	9.1	69.1
Auditing costs of ISO 21401 would not exceed an average monthly wage of a middle management employee at your business/organisation.	1.8	69.1
ISO 21401 standard requirements are fully adjusted to the size and type of your business/organisation.	1.8	74.5
ISO 21401 standard renewal costs do not exceed half of the average monthly wage of a middle management employee in your business/organisation.	1.8	61.8
ISO 21401 auditing team fully adjust to the time availability of the staff at your business/organisation.	0.0	69.1
Information collected during auditing is fully anonymized and confidentiality statement of auditors is provided.	10.9	43.6
Requirements on sustaining sustainable supply chain take into consideration the market situation (e.g., sustainable suppliers are accounted for only if they exist).	5.5	67.3
Free consultation (in person and online) is provided to educate on how to initiate the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	0.0	74.5
Focus of auditing process on paper work/documentation is substantially reduced, to a minimum.	0.0	76.4
Governmental or other type of funding is available to support the implementation of the monitoring tools/processes.	1.8	78.2
Sustainability becomes a regulated mandatory requirement of any business organisation.	3.6	67.3
Key performance indicators for each criterion are adjusted to the size and type of the business organisation.	0.0	81.8
An online self-assessment tool is provided for your business/organisation to enter details on ISO 21401 compliance at your time and staff availability.	0.0	85.5
An online platform is provided where your business/organisation can monitor sustainability performance and benchmark the performance with other similar businesses/organisations (anonymity is ensured).	0.0	85.5

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) not at all important (0–1), extremely important (5–6); in percent. Needs and enabling conditions were measured as perceived importance on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not important at all and 6 – extremely important.

dures, enhancing guidance, and strengthening organisational capacity, which would significantly improve the feasibility of adopting environ-

mentally significant organisational practices aligned with ISO 21401 in the Spanish accommodation sector.

The results for Greece indicate a comparatively more selective pattern of adoption needs, reflecting a context in which basic conditions for ISO 21401 adoption are more favourable. While respondents still assign high importance to several enabling actions, the overall distribution of responses suggests that adoption is perceived as more feasible under existing organisational conditions than in other country contexts.

The needs identified in Greece primarily relate to enhancing efficiency and reducing residual contextual friction rather than overcoming fundamental capacity constraints. Enabling actions such as targeted external support and implementation guidance are rated as extremely important by a substantial share of respondents, but these needs appear less uniformly critical than in contexts characterised by more severe structural limitations.

Financial support and costrelated measures are perceived as important but not dominant. This suggests that while cost considerations remain relevant, they do not constitute the primary barrier to adoption. From a behavioural perspective, this indicates that material constraints exert a weaker limiting effect on environmentally significant organisational behaviour in Greece compared to other countries in the sample. Needs related to knowledge transfer and procedural clarification also show moderate to high importance. Respondents value guidance that streamlines the implementation process and ensures consistency with ISO 21401 requirements. However, the relative emphasis on such support indicates a focus on optimisation rather than on overcoming basic feasibility thresholds.

Actions rated as less important tend to be those that address fundamental awareness or motivation. This pattern reinforces earlier findings that sustainability and certification are not perceived as peripheral issues in the Greek accommodation sector. Instead, respondents signal that adoption depends on fine tuning support mechanisms that reduce remaining administrative and coordination costs.

Overall, the Greek needs profile suggests that ISO 21401 adoption is constrained less by structural or capacity deficits and more by the desire to improve efficiency, clarity, and predictability in the implementation process. From Stern's perspective, this indicates a context in which environmentally significant organisational behaviour is already relatively well supported, and where targeted enabling actions can further facili-

Table 6.39 ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions: Greece

Enabling action or support measure	(1)	(2)
External auditor provides a full staff support for the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	11.3	64.2
Benefits of ISO 21401 for your stakeholders (e.g., customers, suppliers, employees) are proved by credible evidence (e.g., reduced operational costs, improved quality of services).	3.8	50.9
Auditing costs of ISO 21401 would not exceed an average monthly wage of a middle management employee at your business/organisation.	5.7	49.1
ISO 21401 standard requirements are fully adjusted to the size and type of your business/organisation.	5.7	62.3
ISO 21401 standard renewal costs do not exceed half of the average monthly wage of a middle management employee in your business/organisation.	9.4	54.7
ISO 21401 auditing team fully adjust to the time availability of the staff at your business/organisation.	7.5	60.4
Information collected during auditing is fully anonymized and confidentiality statement of auditors is provided.	3.8	52.8
Requirements on sustaining sustainable supply chain take into consideration the market situation (e.g., sustainable suppliers are accounted for only if they exist).	5.7	56.6
Free consultation (in person and online) is provided to educate on how to initiate the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	11.3	56.6
Focus of auditing process on paper work/documentation is substantially reduced, to a minimum.	7.5	54.7
Governmental or other type of funding is available to support the implementation of the monitoring tools/processes.	18.9	60.4
Sustainability becomes a regulated mandatory requirement of any business organisation.	9.4	62.3
Key performance indicators for each criterion are adjusted to the size and type of the business organisation.	7.5	66.0
An online self-assessment tool is provided for your business/organisation to enter details on ISO 21401 compliance at your time and staff availability.	11.3	62.3
An online platform is provided where your business/organisation can monitor sustainability performance and benchmark the performance with other similar businesses/organisations (anonymity is ensured).	13.2	64.2

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) not at all important (0–1), extremely important (5–6); in percent. Needs and enabling conditions were measured as perceived importance on a 7-point scale, where 0 – not important at all and 6 – extremely important.

tate the transition from practice-based sustainability to formal standard adoption.

Table 6.40 Cross Mediterranean Differences in ISO 21401 Needs and Enabling Conditions

Sustainability practice	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Statistics
External auditor provides a full staff support for the implementation of ISO 21401 standard.	72.2	61.5	80.0	64.2	$x^2 = 5.24_{(3)}$; $p = 0.155$
Benefits of ISO 21401 for your stakeholders (e.g., customers, suppliers, employees) are proved by credible evidence (e.g., reduced operational costs, improved quality of services).	72.2	63.5	69.1	50.9	$x^2 = 5.51_{(3)}$; $p = 0.138$
Auditing costs of ISO 21401 would not exceed an average monthly wage of a middle management employee at our business/organisation.	77.8	46.2	69.1	49.1	$x^2 = 13.29_{(3)}$; $p = 0.004$
ISO 21401 standard requirements are fully adjusted to the size and type of your business/organisation.	72.2	51.9	74.5	62.3	$x^2 = 7.09_{(3)}$; $p = 0.069$
ISO 21401 standard renewal costs do not exceed half of the average monthly wage of a middle management employee in your business/organisation.	72.2	40.4	61.8	54.7	$x^2 = 9.79_{(3)}$; $p = 0.020$
ISO 21401 auditing team fully adjust to the time availability of the staff at our business/organisation.	83.3	40.4	69.1	60.4	$x^2 = 18.44_{(3)}$; $p = 0.001$
Information collected during auditing is fully anonymized and confidentiality statement of auditors is provided.	77.8	34.6	43.6	52.8	$x^2 = 17.09_{(3)}$; $p = 0.001$
Requirements on sustaining sustainable supply chain take into consideration the market situation (e.g., sustainable suppliers are accounted for only if they exist).	75.0	53.8	67.3	56.6	$x^2 = 5.36_{(3)}$; $p = 0.147$

Continued on the next page

Table 6.40 presents a cross Mediterranean analysis of the relative importance attributed to different enabling actions that would support the adoption of ISO 21401. It reports the share of respondents in Slovenia, Italy, Spain, and Greece who identify each action as extremely important, alongside Chi-square tests assessing cross-country differences. Interpreted through Stern's (2000, 2005) framework, the results provide insight into how organisations across the Mediterranean perceive the conditions required to enable environmentally significant organisational behaviour.

Table 6.40 *Continued from the previous page*

Sustainability practice	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Statistics
Free consultation (in person and online) is provided to educate on how to initiate the ISO 21401 standard adoption process.	66.7	69.2	74.5	56.6	$x^2 = 4.11_{(3)}$; $p = 0.249$
Focus of auditing process on paper work/documentation is substantially reduced, to a minimum.	75.0	63.5	76.4	54.7	$x^2 = 7.11_{(3)}$; $p = 0.068$
Governmental or other type of funding is available to support the implementation of the monitoring tools/processes.	77.8	71.2	78.2	60.4	$x^2 = 5.11_{(3)}$; $p = 0.164$
Sustainability becomes a regulated mandatory requirement of any business organisation.	69.4	51.9	67.3	62.3	$x^2 = 3.74_{(3)}$; $p = 0.291$
Key performance indicators for each criterion are adjusted to the size and type of the business organisation.	77.8	48.1	81.8	66.0	$x^2 = 15.95_{(3)}$; $p = 0.001$
An online self-assessment tool is provided for your business/organisation to enter details on ISO 21401 compliance at your time and staff availability.	63.9	42.3	85.5	62.3	$x^2 = 21.61_{(3)}$; $p = 0.001$
An online platform is provided where your business/organisation can monitor sustainability performance and benchmark the performance with other similar businesses/organisations (anonymity is ensured).	75.0	40.4	85.5	64.2	$x^2 = 25.79_{(3)}$; p=0.001

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) Italy, (2) Slovenia, (3) Greece, (4) Spain. In percent; percentages indicate a share of respondents expressing high importance for each need or enabling condition (values 5–6).

At the cross Mediterranean level, the most consistently valued enabling actions are those that directly reduce organisational effort, administrative complexity, and uncertainty associated with ISO 21401 adoption. A high proportion of respondents across all countries identifies hands-on external support during implementation as extremely important. This reflects a shared perception that ISO 21401 adoption is not primarily a question of intent, but of feasibility under existing operational constraints. Within Stern's framework, such support functions as a contextual enabler that lowers the behavioural cost of adoption by compensating for limited internal capacity, time scarcity, and documentation demands.

Procedural clarity and guided implementation pathways also emerge

as highly important across countries. Respondents place strong value on actions that translate ISO 21401 requirements into concrete, manageable steps. This finding directly addresses capability related constraints identified earlier, particularly limited familiarity with the adoption process. From a behavioural perspective, reducing uncertainty and increasing predictability enhances the likelihood that organisations will initiate and sustain the adoption process.

Financially oriented enabling actions show significant cross-country variation, as reflected in the Chi-square results. Italy and Slovenia report higher shares of respondents identifying cost-related support as extremely important, while Greece reports comparatively lower reliance on such measures. Spain occupies an intermediate position. This pattern mirrors earlier differences in perceived financial barriers and indicates that economic context continues to shape adoption feasibility even when supportive measures are considered. In Stern's terms, financial support reduces material constraints that otherwise suppress environmentally significant behaviour.

Capacity building needs, including knowledge transfer and technical guidance, are consistently valued across the Mediterranean, although their relative importance varies by country. These needs address personal and organisational capability deficits that prevent sustainability intentions from being translated into formalised management systems. The prominence of such needs confirms that many organisations are willing to adopt ISO 21401 but lack the procedural confidence and expertise required to do so independently.

Importantly, actions aimed primarily at changing attitudes or increasing awareness are not among the most strongly prioritised needs across countries. This reinforces the interpretation that the adoption gap observed across the Mediterranean is not rooted in weak environmental concern, but in misalignment between sustainability ambitions and the organisational conditions required for certification. Within Stern's framework, this distinction is critical, as it directs attention away from persuasive interventions and towards structural and capacity enhancing measures.

Overall, the table indicates a high degree of convergence across Mediterranean countries in terms of the types of enabling actions considered necessary for ISO 21401 adoption, alongside meaningful variation in the intensity of specific needs. The dominant pattern suggests that adoption becomes feasible when contextual constraints are reduced, or-

Table 6.41 Prevalence of ISO 21401 Adoption Needs and Their Classification

Enabling condition/need	(1)	(2)	(3)
External auditor provides a full staff support for the implementation of ISO 21401 standard	67.8	Contextual factors	External support substitutes internal capacity and reduces time and coordination costs
Benefits of ISO 21401 for your stakeholders (e.g., customers, reduced operational costs, improved quality of services)	63.5	Attitudinal factors	Clear perceived benefits strengthen the perceived value of adoption
Auditing costs of ISO 21401 would not exceed an average monthly salary of a middle management employee	58.3	Contextual factors	Predictable and limited costs reduce financial barriers
ISO 21401 standard requirements are fully adjusted to the size and type of your business/organisation	63.5	Contextual factors	Better design fit reduces mismatch with SME operational realities
ISO 21401 standard renewal costs do not exceed half of the average monthly salary of a middle management employee	55.9	Contextual factors	Affordable long-term costs support sustained engagement
ISO 21401 auditing team fully adjust to the time availability of the staff at your business/organisation	59.7	Contextual factors	Flexible auditing reduces disruption of everyday operations
Information collected during auditing is fully anonymized and confidentiality statement of auditors is provided	49.8	Contextual factors	Trust and data security reduce perceived compliance risk
Requirements on sustaining sustainable supply chain take into account market availab. of suppliers	60.7	Contextual factors	Feasible sourcing requirements reduce operational constraints

Continued on the next page

ganisational capacity is strengthened, and procedural complexity is managed through external support. From a cross Mediterranean perspective, enabling environmentally significant organisational behaviour therefore requires interventions that restructure the decision environment rather than attempts to modify values or attitudes.

Table 6.41 presents a cross sample synthesis of the conditions that respondents identify as necessary to enable the adoption of ISO 21401. By reporting the prevalence of high importance ratings and aligning each enabling condition with Stern's environmentally significant behaviour framework, the table provides insight into how organisations perceive

Table 6.41 *Continued from the previous page*

Enabling condition/need	(1)	(2)	(3)
Free consultation (in person and online) is provided to educate on how to initiate the ISO 21401 adoption process	65.9	Personal capabilities	Guidance improves procedural literacy and lowers entry uncertainty
Focus of auditing process on paperwork and documentation is substantially reduced	64.9	Contextual factors	Reduced administrative burden lowers behavioural cost of adoption
Governmental or other type of funding is available to support the implementation of monitoring tools and processes	69.7	Contextual factors	Financial support enables investment in required infrastructure
Sustainability becomes a regulated mandatory requirement of any business organisation	60.7	Contextual factors	Regulation shifts default behaviour and increases compliance incentives
Key performance indicators for each criterion are adjusted to the size and type of the business organisation	66.4	Contextual factors	Tailored indicators increase clarity, relevance, and measurability
An online self-assessment tool is provided to assess ISO 21401 compliance at your time and staff availability	61.6	Personal capabilities	Self-diagnostic tools improve awareness of gaps and planning ability
An online platform is provided for exchange with similar organisations (anonymity ensured)	64.5	Attitudinal factors	Social learning and peer comparison increase perceived feasibility

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) percentage of respondents reporting high pertinence (5–6), (2) Stern's category, (3) dominant behavioural mechanism.

the requirements for translating sustainability intentions into formalised management practices.

A first and central finding is the predominance of enabling conditions that reduce contextual constraints. The highest prevalence values are associated with needs that directly lower financial, administrative, and organisational burdens. Governmental or other funding for monitoring tools and processes is identified as extremely important by nearly seventy percent of respondents, indicating that access to resources required for systematic monitoring remains a decisive precondition for adoption. Similarly, external auditor staff support, simplification of documentation, and adjustment of auditing procedures to staff availability are all highly prioritised. These needs mirror the most frequently reported barriers and

point to a clear behavioural logic. Adoption becomes feasible when the organisational effort required to comply with ISO 21401 is reduced to a level compatible with everyday operations. These findings confirm that environmentally significant organisational behaviour is shaped primarily by feasibility conditions rather than by motivation alone. Even where sustainability is valued, respondents signal that formal certification is contingent on the availability of external support, flexible procedures, and manageable administrative demands. The prominence of contextual enablers thus explains why high sustainability awareness does not automatically result in ISO adoption.

A second group of highly prevalent needs relates to personal and organisational capabilities. Free consultation at the initiation stage, clear guidelines, tailored key performance indicators, and online self-assessment tools are all rated as extremely important by a majority of respondents. These enabling conditions address knowledge and procedural deficits that hinder adoption even when contextual barriers are partially mitigated. From a behavioural perspective, they reduce uncertainty, improve procedural literacy, and strengthen confidence in navigating the adoption process. The importance attached to such measures indicates that many organisations perceive ISO 21401 as conceptually acceptable but operationally complex.

Attitudinal enablers play a more limited but still meaningful role. Clear communication of benefits for stakeholders and access to peer exchange platforms are identified as highly important by a substantial share of respondents. These needs relate to beliefs about value, relevance, and feasibility rather than to capacity or context. Their prevalence suggests that while motivation is not the primary bottleneck, reinforcing the perceived business case and normalising adoption through social comparison can support engagement, particularly for organisations that remain undecided. The table also highlights the role of regulatory alignment as an enabling condition. The importance attributed to sustainability becoming a regulated mandatory requirement indicates that respondents recognise the role of regulation in reshaping default behaviours and reducing competitive disadvantages associated with voluntary adoption. In the framework of environmentally significant behaviour (Stern, 2000), regulation functions as a contextual intervention that alters the choice architecture, making environmentally significant behaviour the norm rather than the exception. Taken together, Table 6.41 demonstrates that ISO 21401 adoption is most effectively enabled by a combination of contextual restruc-

turing and capability enhancement. The most highly prioritised needs are those that lower behavioural costs, reduce uncertainty, and integrate certification requirements into existing organisational routines. Attitudinal reinforcement plays a supporting role but is not sufficient on its own.

From a theoretical perspective, the table provides strong empirical support of external conditions and capacities being primary endorsers of behavioural shift. For policy makers and standard developers, the implication is clear. Efforts to promote ISO 21401 adoption should focus on reducing administrative and financial burdens, providing hands-on support and guidance, and designing flexible, size appropriate implementation pathways. Awareness raising alone is unlikely to produce substantial increases in adoption without parallel changes to the organisational environment.

SUSTAINABILITY VALUE ORIENTATION AND BEHAVIOURAL ENGAGEMENT

This section examines the relationship between the importance attributed to sustainability as a guiding principle of the business and observable sustainability-related behaviour. Positioned at this stage of the analysis, the table brings together two strands that have been examined separately in earlier sections: value orientation on the one hand, and behavioural engagement in the form of practice adoption, implementation intensity, and organisational readiness on the other. The purpose of this analysis is to assess whether and how normative commitment to sustainability is reflected in concrete organisational behaviour. Table 6.42 contrasts organisations that attribute high importance to sustainability with those for whom sustainability plays a limited role as a guiding principle. By focusing on behavioural outcomes that vary in complexity and organisational demand, the analysis moves from basic engagement towards more institutionalised forms of sustainability practice.

A first observation concerns the absence of association between sustainability value orientation and sustainability practice adoption. Under the applied operational definition, high adoption is not observed in either value group. This result suggests that the mere presence of a broad set of sustainability practices is not strongly differentiated by value orientation. Adoption at this level appears to be shaped by factors other than internalised commitment, such as minimal compliance with external expectations, low-cost measures, or general sectoral norms. In this sense, adoption as a binary indicator captures a baseline level of engagement that

Table 6.42 Association between Sustainability Value Orientation and Sustainability-Related Behaviour

Behavioural construct	(1)	(2)	x^2	*df*	*p*-value
Sustainability practice adoption	0.0	0.0	0.00	0	1.000
Sustainability practice implementation	0.0	52.4	34.93	2	<0.001
ISO 21401 readiness	20.0	59.1	20.96	2	<0.001

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) low sustainability importance (percentage of high behaviour), (2) high sustainability importance (percentage of high behaviour). Sustainability value orientation is based on the importance attributed to sustainability as a guiding principle of the business (low – scores 0–2; high – scores 7–9). Behavioural constructs are operationalised as follows: high adoption indicates adoption of at least 50% of listed practices; high implementation indicates at least 50% of practices rated at high implementation (5–6); high readiness indicates at least 50% of ISO 21401 readiness items rated at high readiness (5–6). Midpoint responses were excluded. Percentages indicate the share of respondents within each value group exhibiting high behavioural engagement. Chi-square tests assess cross-group associations at the cross-Mediterranean level.

does not necessarily reflect deeper organisational priorities. A different pattern emerges when the focus shifts from adoption to implementation intensity. Organisations that attribute high importance to sustainability are substantially more likely to report strong implementation of sustainability practices. Implementation requires sustained effort, allocation of resources, and integration into everyday routines. The observed association indicates that value orientation becomes behaviourally meaningful once sustainability engagement moves beyond symbolic or minimal actions and begins to affect operational practices. The strongest alignment is observed for organisational readiness for ISO 21401. High sustainability importance is clearly associated with higher readiness levels, indicating that normative commitment is closely linked to willingness and preparedness to engage in formalised sustainability management. Readiness implies not only intent, but acceptance of monitoring, documentation, and continuous improvement requirements. The association therefore signals that value orientation is particularly relevant for behaviours that involve institutionalisation and longer-term organisational change. Taken together, Table 6.42 highlights a differentiated relationship between values and behaviour. Sustainability importance does not appear to determine whether practices exist in name, but it is strongly related to how deeply practices are implemented and whether organisations progress towards structured management systems. This pattern helps explain earlier findings in the chapter. High sustainability orientation across

the sample coexists with uneven implementation and selective readiness because values alone are insufficient to overcome contextual and capability constraints. Where those constraints are manageable, value orientation differentiates organisations that move from basic engagement to systematic practice.

By examining this relationship explicitly, the analysis provides an integrative perspective that links value orientation to behavioural outcomes. It reinforces the interpretation that sustainability transition in the accommodation sector is not limited by lack of commitment, but by the conditions under which commitment can be translated into sustained and formalised organisational behaviour.

Part Four

Interpretation and Implications

Discussion 7

The findings of this study are situated within a period of accelerated transformation of the European tourism system, shaped by the European Green Deal, the EU Transition Pathway for Tourism, and the growing institutionalisation of sustainability through regulatory, financial, and reporting frameworks. Within this evolving landscape, accommodation providers are increasingly expected not only to engage in sustainable practices, but to demonstrate their implementation through structured and verifiable management systems. ISO 21401 represents one such mechanism, translating sustainability principles into operational requirements that integrate environmental, social, and economic objectives.

At the same time, the transition towards standardised sustainability management remains uneven across the European accommodation sector, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises that dominate Mediterranean destinations. The results presented in this book provide clear empirical evidence that sustainability engagement and formal standard adoption are not synonymous. While sustainability awareness and basic practice adoption are widespread, progression towards ISO 21401-aligned management systems remains selective and contingent on organisational feasibility. This divergence reflects a broader tension within the EU sustainable transition, where policy ambition often outpaces implementation capacity at the firm level. Against this background, the discussion integrates insights from ISO 21401 readiness, adoption barriers, adoption needs, and value-behaviour associations to explain how and why sustainability transitions unfold unevenly across Mediterranean accommodation providers.

Analysis of ISO 21401 readiness levels demonstrates that many accommodation providers are partially prepared for standard adoption, yet fall short of full readiness. Strengths are observed in areas related to existing sustainability practices and general organisational awareness, while weaknesses emerge in domains requiring formalisation, monitoring, and documentation. This pattern suggests that readiness is not constrained by lack of intent, but by the gap between informal sustainability engagement and the procedural requirements of a formal management standard. Many organisations operate in a transitional space, where sustainability

is embedded in daily routines but not yet translated into systematic procedures, performance indicators, and continuous improvement cycles. These findings highlight the limits of voluntary diffusion of standards when readiness is unevenly distributed. Without targeted support, readiness is likely to remain partial and uneven across destinations and firm types.

The analysis of ISO 21401 adoption barriers further clarifies this dynamic. The most salient constraints are overwhelmingly contextual rather than attitudinal. Financial costs, time scarcity, staffing limitations, and administrative burden consistently emerge as dominant obstacles. These barriers operate independently of sustainability awareness and constrain adoption even among organisations that are positively oriented towards sustainability. The persistence of a gap between commitment and adoption therefore reflects structural misalignment between standard requirements and the operational realities of accommodation SMEs, rather than resistance or indifference. From a governance perspective, this finding cautions against policy approaches that rely predominantly on voluntary uptake or normative appeals, as such approaches risk reinforcing existing inequalities between organisations with different resource endowments.

Insights into adoption needs provide a complementary perspective by identifying the conditions under which ISO 21401 adoption becomes feasible. Across countries, respondents prioritise enabling actions that reduce organisational burden, enhance procedural clarity, and strengthen internal capacity. External staff support, simplified documentation, tailored indicators, financial assistance, and guided implementation pathways are among the most frequently identified needs. These enabling conditions directly counteract the contextual and capability constraints identified in the barrier analysis, indicating that accommodation providers are not seeking persuasion, but practical support that lowers the effort threshold required to engage in formal sustainability management.

The prominence of regulatory and financial enabling conditions further suggests that ISO 21401 adoption is perceived not merely as an individual managerial choice, but as part of a system-level transition requiring institutional alignment. This reinforces the role of policy instruments, funding mechanisms, and standard design in shaping both the pace and inclusiveness of sustainability transitions in tourism. When considered together, barriers and needs exhibit a striking symmetry. Constraints related to costs, staffing, time, administrative burden, and procedural complexity are directly mirrored by demands for financial support, external

assistance, simplified documentation, and flexible implementation pathways. This symmetry highlights a clear leverage logic: adoption increases when enabling conditions directly neutralise dominant constraints.

A broader perspective on these dynamics is provided by the association analysis linking sustainability value orientation with behavioural engagement. While sustainability is widely recognised as an important guiding principle, this value orientation does not translate uniformly into observable behaviour. In particular, no association is observed between sustainability importance and the basic adoption of sustainability practices. This indicates that awareness and normative commitment alone are insufficient to drive meaningful engagement, especially where practices are low-cost, weakly monitored, or externally visible. Adoption at this level appears to be shaped by minimal compliance expectations or sectoral norms rather than by deeply internalised values.

In contrast, strong sustainability values are clearly associated with deeper implementation of sustainability practices and with higher readiness for structured management systems such as ISO 21401. Implementation intensity and readiness require sustained effort, organisational coordination, and acceptance of formalisation. Under these conditions, value orientation becomes behaviourally relevant, differentiating organisations that move beyond symbolic engagement towards systematic practice. This pattern helps explain why high sustainability awareness coexists with uneven implementation and selective readiness across the sector.

Taken together, these findings carry important implications for sustainability transition strategies. Approaches that prioritise awareness raising, information campaigns, or normative appeals assume that increased commitment will naturally translate into behavioural change. The evidence presented here challenges this assumption. Awareness provides direction and legitimacy, but it does not compensate for shortages of staff, time, financial resources, or procedural clarity. Nor does it overcome administrative burden or uncertainty associated with formal standards. As a result, transition strategies focused primarily on attitudinal change risk reinforcing sustainability discourse without delivering sustained organisational transformation.

Effective sustainability transitions therefore require a shift in emphasis from awareness building towards contextual and structural interventions. Reducing administrative complexity, providing hands-on implementation support, improving access to financial and technical resources, and designing standards aligned with organisational realities reshape the de-

cision environment in ways that allow existing sustainability values to be translated into action. Without such interventions, the accommodation sector risks remaining characterised by high sustainability rhetoric and fragmented, fragile implementation.

Implications for Policy and Practice

8

This chapter aims to highlight the multidimensional nature of sustainability transitions within tourism accommodation. ISO 21401 (International Organization for Standardization, 2024) provides a comprehensive framework, but tools alone whether regulatory or voluntary cannot guarantee transformation. Sustained change emerges from supportive governance systems, accessible training, financial incentives, and collaborative ecosystems. Policymakers, business associations, and certification bodies each play essential, complementary roles in enabling SMEs to adopt sustainable practices that enhance resilience, competitiveness, and alignment with European climate and sustainability objectives. Small and medium-sized accommodation establishments constitute the backbone of Mediterranean and European tourism economies. Despite their predominance, SMEs frequently encounter structural disadvantages when attempting to adopt sustainability-oriented management frameworks, including ISO 21401. Limited financial flexibility, insufficient managerial resources, reduced access to training, and the perceived complexity of sustainability standards contribute to low adoption rates and fragmented implementation. The MAST project addresses these constraints by providing two key instruments: (1) the Sustainability Protocol and (2) Online Self-Evaluation Tool, explicitly designed to reduce barriers and democratise access to sustainable management systems. Yet, their transformative potential depends on the existence of a supportive political, institutional, and industry ecosystem.

This section examines how sustainability adoption among SMEs can be accelerated through targeted capacity building, financial and regulatory support, ecosystem strengthening, and multi-level collaboration. We consider it essential, as an initial step, to develop a thorough understanding of the barriers and needs faced by sectoral SMEs seeking to design, initiate, and implement ISO 21401. Academic literature underscores that sustainable tourism transitions require both structural enablers and tailored support mechanisms. SMEs operate under markedly different conditions than large hotel chains, managerial structures are leaner, responsibilities are concentrated in fewer individuals, and operational margins are often narrower. Consequently, adopting a sustainability management

system, such as ISO 21401, can be perceived as burdensome unless tools and guidance are adapted to SME realities.

Qualitative and quantitative studies have identified recurring barriers:

- Knowledge and skills gaps
- Complexity and perceived administrative burden
- Financial constraints and investment risks
- Uncertainty regarding market returns
- Fragmentation of support ecosystems

Sustainability norms require understanding of resource efficiency, social responsibility, environmental monitoring, and continuous improvement. SME owners often lack the technical literacy to interpret standards, translate requirements into actions, or monitor implementation. Standards are often viewed as bureaucratic and certification processes as overly formalised. Without simplified frameworks, like the MAST Protocol, SMEs may hesitate to invest time in compliance. Upgrades in energy-efficient technologies, water-saving systems, or social responsibility programmes can require upfront investment. SMEs lacking liquidity or access to financing may postpone, or even discard, possible sustainability upgrades. Many SMEs remain unconvinced that sustainability certification translates into enhanced brand visibility, higher occupancy or improved pricing strategies. SMEs often lack access to advisory networks, consultancy services, or training systems that are essential for interpreting and applying sustainability requirements. Addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach in which capacity building, economic incentives, regulatory clarity, and peer learning reinforce each other. The MAST project demonstrates that when SMEs are provided with clear, simplified tools and external support, sustainability adoption increases substantially.

Table 8.1 summarises the key policy and practice recommendations identified in this chapter by stakeholder group and clarifies the intended aim of each intervention. It illustrates that supporting the sustainable transition of the accommodation sector requires coordinated action across public authorities, intermediary organisations, and certification bodies, with each group addressing different but complementary constraints. Collectively, the recommendations emphasise the need to move beyond isolated measures towards a coherent mix of regulatory alignment, capacity building, procedural simplification, and data driven governance that enables sustainability standards such as ISO 21401 to func-

Table 8.1 Summary of Policy and Practice Recommendations

Stakeh. group	Policy recommendation	Aim of the recommendation
Public authorities	Integrate ISO 21401 into tourism strategies and regulatory frameworks	To provide policy coherence, reduce fragmentation of sustainability initiatives, and position ISO 21401 as a recognised reference framework for sustainable accommodation management
	Design coherent multi-level governance approaches	To ensure consistency of guidance, incentives, and expectations across municipal, regional, national, and European levels, reducing uncertainty for SMEs
	Use aggregated MAST data for evidence-based policy-making	To identify regional gaps, monitor adoption and readiness trends, and design targeted and adaptive support measures
	Align Smart Specialisation Strategies with sustainable tourism objectives	To connect tourism sustainability with regional innovation systems, investment priorities, and long-term development agendas
Business associations and cluster organisations	Provide training and advisory services aligned with ISO 21401	To build organisational capacity, reduce perceived complexity, and support SMEs in translating sustainability goals into management practice
	Facilitate collective learning and innovation	To reduce individual costs, accelerate diffusion of good practices, and strengthen peer-based problem solving
	Champion sustainability culture within the sector	To increase legitimacy of sustainability standards, influence industry norms, and move sectoral expectations beyond short-term profit orientation
	Disseminate good practices and pilot experiences	To reduce uncertainty, demonstrate feasibility, and encourage replication among SMEs

Continued on the next page

tion as effective transition tools rather than symbolic commitments.

Figure 8.1 provides a visual synthesis of the policy and practice implications derived from the MAST study, illustrating how different instruments interact to support sustainable tourism transition. The figure is structured around a layered model that reflects both the multidimensional nature of sustainability and the process-oriented logic of transition underpinning the analysis. Central idea of the figure is the concept

Table 8.1 *Continued from the previous page*

Stakeh. group	Policy recommendation	Aim of the recommendation
Certification bodies	Adapt audit processes to SME realities	To increase accessibility of ISO 21401 without compromising credibility, by lowering procedural and administrative burden
	Promote use of MAST tools as preparatory instruments	To improve efficiency of certification processes, support gap analysis, and reduce uncertainty for applicants
	Ensure transparency and consistency across audits	To strengthen trust, comparability, and legitimacy of certification outcomes across regions
	Leverage digital tools for monitoring and impact assessment	To enhance efficiency, enable longitudinal tracking, and support evidence-based sustainability governance
Educational institutions and knowledge transfer bodies	Educational institutions and knowledge transfer bodies	Educational institutions and knowledge transfer bodies
	Support applied research, experimentation, and knowledge exchange	Support applied research, experimentation, and knowledge exchange

of sustainable transition of the tourism accommodation sector, explicitly grounded in the three interdependent goals of sustainability: environmental integrity, social acceptance, and economic viability. Positioning these goals at the core underscores a key premise of the book: sustainability of accommodation sector is not a single outcome, but a balanced and ongoing transition that requires alignment across environmental, social, and economic objectives. Surrounding layers represent different types of policy and governance instruments. The innermost layer highlights capacity building and training alongside financial and market-based incentives, emphasising their role as enabling mechanisms. These instruments primarily address preparedness, skills, motivation, and resources at the level of tourism businesses and destination actors, creating the conditions necessary for change to occur. The next layer captures the importance of tourism ecosystems, regulation, and self-regulation. This layer reflects the need for coordination and alignment between individual actions and collective objectives. Ecosystem-oriented approaches recognise the interdependence of actors within destinations, while regulation and self-regulation provide complementary means of steering behaviour, balancing public oversight with voluntary commitment and sector-led responsi-

Figure 8.1
Integrated Policy and Practice Framework for Supporting Sustainable Transition of Accommodation Sector

bility. The outer layer of the figure focuses on sustainability certification landscapes and harmonisation and long-term governance. These elements play a stabilising role, supporting consistency, comparability, and legitimacy across destinations and markets. Their placement at the outer edge signals a longer-term perspective, where sustainability becomes embedded in organisational routines, policy frameworks, and governance arrangements beyond individual projects or initiatives.

Directional arrows integrated into the figure reinforce the idea of transition as a dynamic and iterative process rather than a linear sequence. Cross-cutting principles such as evidence-based policy, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring and feedback are shown as underlying conditions that inform and support all layers of the framework. Taken together, Figure 8.1 offers an integrated lens for understanding how different policy and practice domains contribute to sustainable tourism transition in complementary ways. It provides a conceptual orientation for the discussion that follows, inviting a closer examination of how these instruments operate, interact, and evolve across different contexts.

Building on this integrated perspective, the subsequent sections explore each of the policy and practice domains illustrated in the figure in greater depth. Together, they unpack how enabling measures, coordination mechanisms, and governance arrangements shape the condi-

tions under which sustainable tourism transition can be initiated, guided, and sustained. Rather than treating these domains as sequential steps, the discussion highlights their distinct roles and mutual interdependencies, drawing attention to how different combinations of instruments may be mobilised across contexts to respond to varying levels of readiness, institutional capacity, and sustainability ambition.

8.1 Capacity Building and Training Mechanisms

Capacity building is a key driver of change and a cornerstone of sustainable tourism transformation. For SMEs, the development of managerial competencies, operational know-how, and sustainability literacy is essential to facilitate ISO 21401 compliance. For successful implementation, the provision of structured training programmes, on-site support mechanisms, and the systematic integration of sustainability into formal education systems should be regarded as indispensable conditions. Below, we identify a set of intervention areas in which sectoral stakeholders can act through a range of non-binding and non-exclusive measures to facilitate the overall process.

CREATE AND SUPPORT FORMAL TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Governments, vocational education and training (VET) institutions, and higher education centres should introduce sustainability modules aligned with ISO 21401. These programmes must:

- Offer practical interpretations of the standard.
- Introduce SMEs to monitoring techniques and sustainability indicators.
- Cover topics such as energy and water efficiency, waste reduction, social responsibility, occupational health, and circular economy principles.
- Provide hands-on exercises using the MAST Self-Evaluation Tool.

Embedding sustainability into VET ensures that future hospitality professionals enter the labour market equipped with relevant competencies.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRY-BASED TRAINING

Tourism employees already in the workforce require access to short courses, micro-credentials, and professional development programmes focusing on:

- Implementing sustainable procurement (adapted to local and national legislations).
- Designing guest engagement strategies related to sustainable actions.
- Conducting internal audits aligned with ISO 21401.
- Managing social responsibility and community engagement.

Training must be affordable, flexible, accessible online, and available in local languages.

ADVISORY SERVICES AND HELP-DESKS

Regional and local advisory centres can provide SMEs with:

- Personalised coaching.
- Support in interpreting norm concepts, principles and requirements.
- Assistance in completing the MAST Self-Evaluation Tool.
- Guidance in preparing documentation for certification.
- Support through trusted consultancy services that can support the whole process.

Such intermediaries reduce transaction costs and accelerate adoption.

PEER LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Cluster organisations and destination management entities are uniquely positioned to foster learning environments where SMEs:

- Implement peer-reviews, share experiences and best practices.
- Conduct joint pilot projects.
- Engage in cross-border exchanges.
- Access demonstrations of innovative technologies.

Peer learning normalises sustainability practices, reduces uncertainty, and contributes to collective intelligence across the tourism ecosystem.

8.2 Financial and Market-Based Incentives

Economic instruments are critical to overcoming investment barriers and stimulating voluntary sustainability adoption. Policymakers can choose from a wide variety of mechanisms, we present below a set of possibilities that can be designed and implemented individually or jointly.

DIRECT FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Subsidies, grants, tax deductions, or vouchers can accelerate the uptake of sustainable practices. The MAST recommendations highlight the importance of providing targeted financial support to SMEs undertaking ISO 21401-aligned investments, such as energy-efficient technologies or water-saving devices. Financial instruments can be designed to reward both:

- Initial diagnostics (e.g., using the MAST Self-Evaluation Tool).
- Long-term improvements linked to performance indicators.

Linking financial support to measurable outcomes increases accountability and maximises public value.

MARKET INCENTIVES AND VISIBILITY MECHANISMS

To motivate SMEs beyond compliance:

- Tourism boards can provide preferential access to destination marketing campaigns for ISO 21401-aligned establishments.
- Public administrations can offer priority placement in official platforms, brochures, and itineraries.
- Award programmes can increase prestige and differentiation, creating reputational incentives.

Such measures enhance competitiveness and mobilise market forces to drive sustainability. Moreover, they contribute to the construction of a sustainable destination image, generating benefits for the entire locality and community by enhancing its attractiveness to targeted visitor segments.

FACILITATED ACCESS TO EUROPEAN FUNDING

SMEs may require support when navigating complex EU funding instruments such as LIFE, ERDF, Interreg, or Horizon Europe. Destination management organisations and local authorities can:

- Assist SMEs in applying to funding calls.
- Provide technical guidance and project development support.
- Develop collective proposals to involve interested local actors and SMEs, and reduce administrative burdens.

These can strengthen the financing ecosystem for sustainable tourism innovation.

GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AND PUBLIC INCENTIVE STRUCTURES

Green Public Procurement (GPP) is increasingly recognised as a powerful tool for steering markets toward sustainability. Public authorities, tourism boards, and publicly funded events can incorporate ISO 21401 requirements into procurement criteria for accommodation services. When public bodies procure accommodation services for events, delegations, or educational programmes, they can prioritise establishments that:

- are ISO 21401-certified,
- have completed the MAST Self-Evaluation Tool,
- demonstrate high sustainability performance.

This approach generates market demand and increases the perceived economic value of certification.

Integrating ISO 21401 into GPP frameworks:

- Creates consistent sustainability criteria across territories.
- Reduces uncertainty for SMEs by signalling long-term policy commitment.
- Fosters equal competition by establishing transparent standards.
- Stimulates supply-side investments in sustainability improvements.

Governments can strengthen regulatory pathways by linking GPP with:

- VAT reductions.
- Investment subsidies.
- Preferential financing conditions.
- Recognition schemes.

Integrated incentive systems amplify behavioural change and improve adoption rates enhancing the impact on the whole sector.

8.3 Tourism Ecosystem for Sustainable Transition

Sustainability transitions depend not only on the capacity of individual enterprises but on the functionality of their surrounding ecosystems. SMEs thrive when embedded in environments characterised by trust, cooperation, knowledge exchange, and shared goals. The following part identifies the key stakeholders and their role for strengthening the ecosystem. Industry clusters, associations, public authorities and civil society actors are crucial intermediaries for:

- Disseminating the MAST Protocol and tool.
- Organising training sessions.
- Mobilising SMEs across regions.
- Coordinating collective sustainability initiatives.

Clusters also serve as platforms for joint procurement and initiatives, shared investments, and cooperative marketing strategies.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL AUTHORITY ENGAGEMENT

Municipalities and regional governments play a central role in shaping the conditions under which accommodation SMEs engage in sustainability transitions. Through their proximity to local businesses and destinations, local authorities are well positioned to translate strategic sustainability objectives into tangible incentives and support mechanisms. In this context, local authorities can:

- Provide locally tailored incentives that lower the financial and administrative costs of sustainability adoption for SMEs.
- Integrate sustainability requirements into destination branding and marketing strategies, reinforcing demand for verified sustainability performance.
- Establish recognition schemes and local certification initiatives that complement international standards and increase visibility of sustainable practices.
- Mobilise community stakeholders, including residents, destination organisations, and local networks, to support collective sustainability efforts.

When local authorities actively champion sustainability within destination governance structures, the adoption of sustainability practices among SMEs is more likely to accelerate and to become embedded in local development pathways.

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL ACTORS

The social dimension of sustainability, which is central to ISO 21401, depends on meaningful engagement with local communities, non-governmental organisations, and cultural actors. For accommodation SMEs, collaboration with social stakeholders supports both effective implementation of social sustainability requirements and broader social legitimacy. In this context, SMEs benefit from:

- Partnerships that promote cultural heritage preservation at local and national levels.
- Programmes that enhance accessibility and inclusion for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.
- Guest awareness initiatives led or co-coordinated by local actors, reinforcing responsible tourism practices.

Active community involvement strengthens the social foundations of sustainability management and contributes to the credibility and long-term viability of sustainability commitments.

DESIGNING MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE APPROACHES

Sustainability transitions in the accommodation sector require coordinated action across governance levels. Responsibilities and policy instruments affecting tourism sustainability are distributed among municipalities, regional governments, national ministries, and European institutions. In this context, effective multi-level governance should:

- Ensure alignment between local, regional, national, and European tourism and sustainability policies.
- Promote complementarity between regulatory requirements, incentive schemes, and support instruments across governance levels.
- Provide accommodation SMEs with consistent guidance and expectations, reducing uncertainty arising from overlapping or contradictory policy messages.

A coherent multi-level governance approach strengthens policy effectiveness by ensuring that sustainability objectives are reinforced rather than fragmented across institutional layers.

USING DATA FOR EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING

Evidence-based governance is essential for designing effective and targeted sustainability policies. Policymakers can draw on anonymised data generated through the MAST online self-evaluation tool to:

- Identify regional and sector-specific gaps in sustainability readiness and implementation.
- Monitor adoption and progression trends over time.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing incentives and support measures.
- Design targeted programmes that respond to identified needs and constraints.

The systematic use of data enhances transparency, supports more efficient allocation of public resources, and enables adaptive policymaking aligned with the evolving sustainability performance of the accommodation sector.

Aligning Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) with Sustainable Tourism

In line with the core principles of Smart Specialisation, S3 frameworks should incorporate sustainable tourism investment priorities that:

- Build on regional tourism assets, destination-specific challenges, and existing knowledge bases, supporting sustainable hospitality innovation that is adapted to local environmental, economic, and social conditions.
- Concentrate resources on a limited number of clearly defined priorities related to sustainable tourism, such as circular economy pilots in accommodation and digital or technological solutions that facilitate compliance with sustainability standards and management systems.
- Actively involve stakeholders from the quadruple helix in the design, implementation, and monitoring of these priorities, including accommodation providers, research and education institutions, technology developers, public authorities, and civil society, in order to support entrepreneurial discovery and co-development of solutions.

By reflecting localisation, prioritisation, and participation, the integration of sustainable tourism into S3 frameworks supports the development of regional innovation ecosystems and strengthens the alignment between tourism sustainability objectives and broader regional development agendas.

Supporting SMEs through Training and Advisory Services

Business associations, chambers of commerce, and cluster organisations act as trusted intermediaries between policy frameworks and firm-level practice. Through targeted capacity building activities, they can lower perceived complexity and strengthen SMEs' ability to engage with structured sustainability management. In this context, associations can:

- Provide sector-specific training aligned with ISO 21401 requirements.

- Organise workshops and webinars focused on sustainable management practices.
- Support SMEs in completing the MAST self-evaluation as a diagnostic and learning tool.
- Offer coaching related to documentation, internal audits, and implementation planning.

By translating abstract sustainability objectives into practical guidance, associations increase uptake and reduce barriers among their members.

FACILITATING COLLECTIVE LEARNING AND INNOVATION

Beyond individual support, industry associations play a key role in enabling collective learning and innovation processes. By creating collaborative environments, they can reduce individual costs and accelerate the diffusion of sustainability solutions. Associations can support:

- Peer learning initiatives that facilitate exchange of experiences and problem solving.
- Technology demonstrations showcasing sustainability related innovations.
- Joint procurement schemes for sustainable products and services.
- Cross-border collaboration between clusters and destination networks.

Collective approaches strengthen innovation capacity and help SMEs overcome scale-related constraints.

CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABILITY CULTURE

Industry associations also function as important norm-shaping actors within the accommodation sector. Their endorsement of sustainability standards contributes to legitimacy and influences industry expectations. In this role, associations can:

- Launch sector wide sustainability pledges and commitments.
- Coordinate industry wide awareness and engagement campaigns.
- Promote responsible tourism narratives aligned with destination strategies.

Such activities support gradual cultural change within sectors that have traditionally prioritised short-term economic performance.

SUPPORTING DISSEMINATION OF GOOD PRACTICES

Visibility of successful implementation experiences plays a critical role in reducing uncertainty and encouraging replication. Associations can contribute by documenting and disseminating good practices through:

- Base studies illustrating concrete implementation pathways.
- Benchmark reports enabling comparison across firms and destinations.
- Practical guides translating standards into actionable steps.
- Video materials that support accessible and scalable knowledge transfer.

Systematic dissemination of good practices empowers SMEs to act by demonstrating feasibility and relevance rather than aspiration alone.

8.4 Regulation

The transition toward sustainable tourism requires coherent regulatory frameworks and complementary voluntary mechanisms. ISO 21401 provides a structured framework that can be adopted through both regulatory (top-down) and self-regulatory (bottom-up) approaches. The MAST project recommends integrating the standard and its tools into policy frameworks at multiple governance levels (local, regional, national, and European).

This section introduces how governments at different levels and industry actors can mobilise regulatory and self-regulatory pathways to institutionalise sustainability across tourism accommodation.

EMBEDDING ISO 21401 IN REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

Public authorities can use a variety of regulatory instruments to incentivise or mandate sustainability adoption, here below we present a set of possible different tools and initiatives. Incorporating ISO 21401 into strategic frameworks creates policy coherence and establishes sustainability as a guiding principle of tourism development. This includes:

- Referencing the standard in regional and national tourism laws.
- Aligning sustainability roadmaps with ISO requirements.
- Recognising the MAST tools as official supporting instruments that facilitate compliance.

Such integration provides clear signals to industry actors and reinforces the legitimacy of the standard.

Integrating ISO 21401 into tourism legislation and policy agendas

Embedding ISO 21401 within tourism legislation and strategic policy frameworks can strengthen coherence and reduce fragmentation across sustainability initiatives. Public authorities can support this integration by:

- Referencing ISO 21401 explicitly in national and regional tourism strategies as a recognised framework for sustainability management in accommodation.
- Aligning climate adaptation, circular economy, and destination development policies with the principles and requirements of the standard.
- Recognising the MAST Protocol and related tools as official or recommended instruments supporting ISO 21401 implementation at firm level.

Such integration provides greater clarity for accommodation providers by aligning requirements and terminology across sustainability frameworks. It reduces duplication between parallel schemes, lowers administrative burdens, and supports more consistent implementation across policy domains, enabling more effective coordination and uptake of sustainable practices.

Alignment with European policy frameworks

ISO 21401 is closely aligned with key European policy frameworks, including the European Green Deal, the Circular Economy Action Plan, and the EU Transition Pathway for Tourism. Embedding the standard within national tourism policies can support coherence between firm-level sustainability management and EU level objectives. In this context, policymakers can:

- Reference ISO 21401 as a supporting instrument for achieving EU climate, circular economy, and sustainability objectives in tourism.
- Use the standard to support compliance with emerging EU reporting and accountability requirements related to sustainability performance.
- Position ISO 21401 as a practical mechanism linking policy ambition with operational implementation in the accommodation sector.

Such alignment strengthens the role of ISO 21401 as part of a broader policy mix supporting the EU sustainable transition agenda.

REGULATION OF ACCOMMODATION CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS AND QUALITY LABELS

Accommodation classification systems and quality labels represent important demand-side instruments shaping market expectations and consumer choice. Countries may therefore consider integrating sustainability criteria aligned with ISO 21401 into existing quality assurance frameworks. Policymakers can:

- Incorporate selected ISO 21401 criteria into national or regional accommodation classification and star rating schemes.
- Introduce sustainability indicators within quality labels to increase transparency and comparability of sustainability performance.
- Use classification and labelling systems to signal minimum sustainability expectations across the sector.

Integrating sustainability into classification and quality assurance systems reinforces market incentives and supports sector wide improvement without relying solely on voluntary adoption.

DESTINATION-LEVEL REGULATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Local governments play a key role in shaping sustainability outcomes at destination level. By integrating ISO 21401 into destination governance instruments, they can strengthen policy coherence and reinforce sustainability as a defining characteristic of destination development. In this context, local authorities can:

- Integrate ISO 21401 principles into destination stewardship frameworks and governance arrangements.
- Reflect sustainability management requirements within municipal tourism ordinances and local regulatory instruments.
- Align sustainable destination certification programmes with ISO 21401 to ensure consistency between firm-level practices and destination-level objectives.

Such integration supports coordinated action across firms and destinations and contributes to embedding sustainability within the long-term identity and governance of tourism destinations.

8.5 Self-Regulation

Voluntary governance mechanisms, such as certification schemes, industry codes of conduct, and eco labels, play a complementary role alongside

formal regulatory frameworks in supporting the sustainable transition of the accommodation sector. These mechanisms provide flexibility, allow for experimentation, and can be adapted to diverse local tourism contexts. When well designed and aligned with recognised standards, self-regulation can encourage innovation and support sustainability uptake beyond minimum compliance.

ECOLABELS AND DESTINATION CERTIFICATION PROGRAMMES

Ecolabels and destination certification programmes can function as effective self-regulation instruments when they are aligned with recognised sustainability management standards. In this context, such schemes can be strengthened by:

- Using ISO 21401 as a reference framework to harmonise sustainability criteria across local, national, and destination-level eco labels.
- Aligning eco label requirements with management system principles rather than isolated practices, strengthening consistency and credibility.
- Enhancing comparability and transparency of sustainability claims across destinations while allowing contextual adaptation.
- Linking destination certification programmes with firm-level sustainability management practices to reinforce coherence between destination and accommodation level governance.

When aligned with ISO 21401, eco labels and destination certification programmes can move beyond symbolic signalling and contribute to structured, credible, and scalable self-regulation within the accommodation sector.

THE MAST PROTOCOL AS A SELF-EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

The MAST Protocol translates ISO 21401 requirements into accessible and operational guidance tailored to accommodation SMEs. As a self-evaluation instrument, it supports voluntary engagement with sustainability management by functioning as:

- A preparatory tool that builds awareness and supports readiness for more formal certification processes.
- A continuous improvement guide that helps organisation's structure and prioritise sustainability actions over time.

- A self-governance mechanism within destinations, supporting coordinated action without immediate regulatory enforcement.
- A shared indicator framework that enables comparability, benchmarking, and peer review among accommodation providers.

By reducing procedural complexity and lowering entry barriers, the MAST Protocol facilitates voluntary adoption while supporting gradual institutionalisation of sustainability practices.

PEER LEARNING AND COLLECTIVE SELF-REGULATION

Self-regulation can be further strengthened through collective approaches coordinated by clusters, associations, and destination organisations. Such initiatives support learning, accountability, and mutual reinforcement. Examples include:

- Peer review processes and joint environmental or sustainability audits.
- Collective sustainability commitments articulated at destination or sector level.
- Shared training and capacity building programmes.
- Voluntary public disclosure of sustainability performance and progress.

Through these mechanisms, self-regulation fosters collective responsibility and supports bottom-up sustainability transformation, complementing both regulatory frameworks and formal certification systems.

8.6 Sustainability Certification Landscape

Sustainability certification constitutes a key component of the governance architecture supporting the sustainable transition of the accommodation sector. Within policy and practice, certification systems translate sustainability objectives into verifiable organisational processes, providing a bridge between regulatory ambition, market expectations, and firm-level implementation. A well-functioning certification landscape is therefore essential not only for credibility and trust, but also for ensuring that sustainability standards are accessible, scalable, and aligned with the operational realities of accommodation providers.

Within this landscape, certification bodies play a central role in ensuring the credibility, reliability, and comparability of sustainability claims. Their assessment and verification practices underpin trust among consumers, intermediaries, and public authorities, and influence whether

standards such as ISO 21401 function as effective transition tools or remain niche instruments. From a policy and practice perspective, strengthening the sustainability certification landscape requires attention to audit design, preparatory support, transparency, and digital integration.

SME-ORIENTED CERTIFICATION PROCESSES

For certification to contribute meaningfully to sustainability transitions, audit processes must be compatible with the resource constraints and organisational capacities of accommodation SMEs. Certification systems can be strengthened by promoting assessment approaches that:

- Simplify documentation requirements where possible, while maintaining alignment with ISO 21401 principles.
- Offer pre-audit advisory support to clarify expectations and reduce uncertainty.
- Allow staged or progressive certification pathways that support gradual implementation.
- Provide clear examples of acceptable evidence to guide preparation.

Such approaches lower procedural barriers, increase uptake, and support broader diffusion of structured sustainability management without compromising certification integrity.

PREPARATORY INSTRUMENTS AND READINESS SUPPORT

The effectiveness of certification systems is enhanced when preparatory instruments support organisations prior to formal assessment. Within the sustainability certification landscape, tools such as the MAST Protocol and self-evaluation instrument play an important role by:

- Providing structured gap analysis aligned with ISO 21401 requirements.
- Supporting prioritisation of actions based on organisational readiness.
- Offering practical guidance on evidence collection and documentation.
- Establishing a baseline for continuous improvement and post-certification monitoring.

Integrating preparatory tools into certification pathways improves efficiency for both auditors and accommodation providers and strengthens the learning function of certification systems.

TRANSPARENCY, CONSISTENCY, AND HARMONISATION

Trust in sustainability certification depends on transparency and consistency across audits, destinations, and jurisdictions. From a governance perspective, a robust certification landscape requires:

- Transparent reporting mechanisms that clearly communicate assessment outcomes.
- Consistent auditor training aligned with ISO 21401 interpretation and application.
- Participation in regional and cross-national harmonisation efforts to reduce variability.
- Constructive feedback mechanisms that support organisational learning and improvement.

Such practices reinforce comparability of sustainability performance and support the use of certification outcomes within policy instruments and market-based mechanisms.

DIGITALISATION AND IMPACT MONITORING

Digital tools increasingly shape the functioning of sustainability certification systems. Within the certification landscape, digitalisation can enhance effectiveness by:

- Enabling longitudinal tracking of sustainability performance over time.
- Supporting collection of comparable and standardised data across organisations.
- Facilitating remote or hybrid audit models where appropriate.
- Providing dashboards and monitoring tools for impact assessment.

Exploring synergies between certification systems and the MAST data model can further strengthen the integration of certification outcomes into evidence-based policymaking and destination governance.

8.7 Harmonisation and Long-Term Governance

Effective sustainable tourism governance requires institutional arrangements that extend beyond short-term policy cycles and ensure continuity, consistency, and learning over time. Harmonisation and long-term governance mechanisms are therefore critical for embedding sustainability within the accommodation sector and for supporting durable transition pathways.

HARMONISING STANDARDS ACROSS REGIONS AND MEMBER STATES

Fragmented sustainability requirements across regions and countries increase complexity for accommodation SMEs and reduce the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives. Greater harmonisation can generate multiple benefits, including:

- Reducing administrative and compliance burdens for SMEs operating across different regulatory contexts.
- Increasing transparency and comparability of sustainability information for consumers and intermediaries.
- Supporting cross-border tourism cooperation and mobility within the European tourism system.
- Strengthening the international credibility and reputation of destinations committed to sustainability.

Within this framework, ISO 21401 can function as a unifying reference standard, supporting alignment of sustainability requirements while allowing flexibility for local and national adaptation. Its use can facilitate the diffusion of more sustainable and circular practices across destinations.

LONG-TERM GOVERNANCE MODELS

Sustaining momentum in sustainability transitions requires governance structures that persist beyond individual projects or funding periods. To institutionalise support for sustainable accommodation management, policymakers and destination authorities can:

- Establish centres of excellence or competence hubs focused on sustainable tourism management.
- Create observatories or monitoring platforms to track sustainability performance and progress over time.
- Set up permanent advisory bodies that support policy learning, coordination, and stakeholder engagement.

Such governance models help maintain institutional memory, support continuous improvement, and reduce the risk of policy discontinuity.

8.8 International Leadership and Knowledge Transfer

European destinations that achieve broad uptake of structured sustainability management approaches can position themselves as leaders in

global sustainable tourism governance. In this context, international leadership can be strengthened through:

- Sharing methodologies, tools, and implementation experiences with destinations outside Europe.
- Promoting European sustainability standards and practices through international cooperation initiatives.
- Supporting knowledge transfer and capacity building in emerging tourism regions.

By coupling harmonisation with long-term governance arrangements, Europe can reinforce its role as a reference point for sustainability governance in tourism while contributing to global sustainability transitions.

Conclusions and Future Research

9

This book investigates sustainability transitions in the accommodation sector through the empirical lens of Mediterranean tourism destinations, situating these dynamics within the broader European tourism ecosystem. The Mediterranean region occupies a central position in European tourism, concentrating a large share of accommodation capacity, visitor flows, and tourism related employment, while simultaneously facing acute sustainability challenges linked to seasonality, resource pressure, climate vulnerability, and socio spatial impacts. As such, the Mediterranean functions both as a core engine of European tourism and as an important testing ground for the EU sustainable transition agenda. Patterns observed in this context offer insights that extend beyond the region itself, reflecting structural conditions likely to affect other mature and highly fragmented tourism destinations across Europe, and potentially beyond.

Across the accommodation sector, sustainability is widely recognised as an important guiding principle, and a broad range of sustainability practices has been adopted. However, empirical evidence reveals a differentiated sustainability status quo. While basic practices are relatively common, the depth of implementation, formalisation, and institutionalisation remains uneven. Structured sustainability management, particularly in the form of ISO 21401 aligned systems, is not widespread and remains contingent on organisational feasibility. This persistent gap between sustainability intentions and sustained, systematised action is especially pronounced among small and medium sized accommodation providers.

The theoretical framework underpinning the analysis provides a robust explanation for this gap. By distinguishing between value orientation, organisational capabilities, and contextual feasibility, it clarifies why high levels of sustainability awareness do not translate into behavioural change. The findings consistently demonstrate that sustainability transitions in the accommodation sector are constrained less by lack of motivation than by structural and organisational conditions. Values provide direction, but action depends on the presence of supportive environments that make sustainability management feasible, routine, and durable. This

distinction is central for moving from sustainability rhetoric to effective transition strategies.

Empirically, the study shows that sustainability importance is not associated with the mere presence of sustainability practices, but is strongly linked to their level of implementation and to organisational readiness for structured sustainability management. Values become behaviourally relevant primarily when sustainability engagement requires coordination, formalisation, and sustained effort. The analysis of ISO 21401 adoption barriers further reinforces this interpretation. Financial costs, time scarcity, staffing limitations, and administrative burden dominate the barrier landscape across countries. In parallel, adoption needs mirror these barriers closely, with respondents prioritising enabling conditions that reduce complexity, provide guidance, and strengthen internal capacity. The close alignment between barriers and needs confirms that adoption is most likely when contextual constraints are directly addressed.

These insights have important implications for policy and practice. Sustainability transitions in the accommodation sector cannot rely predominantly on awareness raising, voluntary commitments, or symbolic adoption of practices. Instead, they require coherent policy mixes that combine regulation, incentives, capacity building, self-regulation, and credible certification ecosystem. Within this mix, ISO 21401 emerges not as an endpoint, but as a foundational governance tool that enables sustainability to be managed, monitored, and improved systematically. When supported by appropriate policy alignment, intermediary support, self-evaluation instruments such as the MAST Protocol, and harmonised certification landscapes, the standard has the potential to function as an effective transition instrument rather than a niche certification. At the same time, several methodological considerations frame the interpretation of these findings. The cross-sectional design captures sustainability engagement at a specific point in time and does not allow causal inference or observation of transition dynamics. Differences in sample size across countries limit the scope of some comparative analyses, and the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases related to social desirability and interpretation. While these limitations are mitigated through aggregation and comparative logic, future research would benefit from triangulation with longitudinal, observational, and audit-based data sources.

Looking ahead, further research is needed to deepen understanding of sustainability transitions in tourism. Longitudinal studies could ex-

amine how sustainability practices, implementation depth, and certification readiness evolve over time, particularly in response to policy interventions and market pressures. Comparative studies across additional regions and destination types would help assess the transferability of the Mediterranean findings. There is also scope for more detailed investigation of destination-level governance dynamics, interactions between firm-level certification and destination strategies, and the role of demand-side instruments such as public procurement and classification systems. Addressing these research directions would contribute to a more dynamic and system-oriented understanding of sustainability transitions in the accommodation sector and support the development of more effective, evidence-based transition strategies.

References

Alonso-Almeida, M. d. M., Bagur-Femenías, L., Llach, J., & Perramon, J. (2017). Sustainability in small tourist businesses: The link between initiatives and performance. *Current Issues in Tourism, 21*(1), 1–20.

Bianco, S., Bernard, S., & Singal, M. (2023). The impact of sustainability certifications on performance and competitive action in hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 103,* 103379.

Bohdanowicz, P. (2006). Environmental awareness and initiatives in the Swedish and Polish hotel industries – Survey results. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 25*(4), 662–682.

Bramwell, B., Higham, J., Lane, B., & Miller, G. (2017). Twenty-five years of sustainable tourism and the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism:* Looking back and moving forward. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 25*(1), 1–9.

Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (2013). Getting from here to there: Systems change, behavioural change and sustainable tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 21*(1), 1–4.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Chan, E. S. W. (2008). Barriers to EMS in the hotel industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 27*(2), 187–196.

Chan, E. S. W. (2011). Implementing environmental management systems in small and medium-sized hotels: Obstacles. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, 35*(1), 3–23.

Chan, E. S. W., & Hawkins, R. (2010). Attitude towards EMSS in an international hotel: An exploratory case study. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 29*(4), 641–651.

Elkington, J. (1997). *Cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st century business.* Capstone.

Esparon, M., Gyuris, E., & Stoeckl, N. (2014). Does ECO certification deliver benefits? An empirical investigation of visitors' perceptions of the importance of ECO certification's attributes and of operators' performance. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 22*(1), 148–169.

European Commission. (2022). *Transition pathway for tourism.*

Filimonau, V. (2021). The prospects of waste management in the hospitality sector post COVID-19. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling, 168,* 105272.

Font, X., Elgammal, I., & Lamond, I. (2017). Greenhushing: The deliberate under-communicating of sustainability practices by tourism businesses. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 25*(7), 1007–1023.

Font, X., Garay, L., & Jones, S. (2016). Sustainability motivations and practices in small tourism enterprises in European protected areas. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 137,* 1439–1448.

Gössling, S., & Buckley, R. (2016). Carbon labels in tourism: Persuasive communication? *Journal of Cleaner Production, 111*(Part B), 358–369.

Guagnano, G. A., Stern, P. C., & Dietz, T. (1995). Influences on attitude-behavior relationships: A natural experiment with curbside recycling. *Environment and Behavior, 27*(5), 699–718.

Halkos, G., & Tzeremes, N. (2013). Tourism sustainability and environmental efficiency. *Tourism Management, 36,* 276–285.

Hjalager, A.-M. (2010). A review of innovation research in tourism. *Tourism Management, 31*(1), 1–12.

Husain, N., Rigoni, U., & Orij, R.P. (2018). Corporate governance and sustainability performance: Analysis of triple bottom line performance. *Journal of Business Ethics, 149,* 411–432.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2022). *Climate change 2022: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability.* Cambridge University Press.

International Organization for Standardization. (2018). *Tourism and related services – Sustainability management system for accommodation establishments – Requirements (ISO 21401:2018).*

International Organization for Standardization. (2024). *Tourism and related services – Sustainability management system for accommodation establishments – Requirements – Amendment 1: Climate action changes (ISO 21401:2018/Amd 1:2024).*

Juvan, E., & Dolnicar, S. (2016). Measuring environmentally sustainable tourist behaviour. *Annals of Tourism Research, 59,* 30–44.

Kasim, A. (2009). Managerial attitudes towards environmental management among small and medium hotels in Kuala Lumpur. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 17*(6), 709–725.

Khan, S. A. R., Yu, Z., Golpîra, H., Sharif, A., & Mardani, A. (2021). A state-of-the-art review and meta-analysis on sustainable supply chain management: Future research directions. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 278,* 123357.

Knowles, T., Macmillan, S., Palmer, J., Grabowski, P., & Hashimoto, A. (1999). The development of environmental initiatives in tourism: Responses from the London hotel sector. *International Journal of Tourism Research, 1*(4), 255–265.

Kuo, F.-I., Fang, W.-T., & LePage, B. A. (2022). Proactive environmental strategies in the hotel industry: Eco-innovation, green competitive advantage, and green core competence. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 30*(6), 1240–1261.

Martínez, P., Pérez, A., & del Bosque, I. R. (2014). CSR influence on hotel brand

image and loyalty. *Academia Revista Latinoamericana de Administracion, 27*(2), 267–283.

Mensah, I. (2006). Environmental management practices among hotels in the Greater Accra Region. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 25*(3), 414–431.

Myung, E., Kim, Y. & Barrett, S. (2020). Environmental management and performance of hospitality firms: Review and research agenda. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism, 21*(6), 667–689.

Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (2020). *OECD tourism trends and policies 2020.* OECD Publishing.

Pirani, S. I., & Arafat, H. A. (2021). Solid waste management in the hospitality industry: A review. *Journal of Environmental Management, 146,* 320–336.

Revell, A., Stokes, D., & Chen, H. (2010). Small businesses and the environment: Turning over a new leaf? *Business Strategy and the Environment, 19*(5), 273–288.

Ruhanen, L., Moyle, B., & Moyle, C.-L. (2019). New directions in sustainable tourism research. *Tourism Review, 74*(2), 138–149.

Saarinen, J. (2014). Critical sustainability: Setting the limits to growth and responsibility in tourism. *Sustainability, 6*(1), 1–17.

Saarinen, J., Rogerson, C. M., & Hall, C. M. (2021). Geographies of tourism development and planning. In C. M. Hall & S. Gössling (Eds.), *Tourism and sustainable development: Theory and practice* (pp. 1–21). Routledge.

Stern, P. C. (2000). Toward a coherent theory of environmentally significant behavior. *Journal of Social Issues, 56*(3), 407–424.

Stern, P. C. (2005). Understanding individuals' environmentally significant behavior. *Environmental Law Reporter, 35*(11), 10785–10790.

Stern, P. C., Dietz, T., Abel, T., Guagnano, G. A., & Kalof, L. (1999). A value-belief-norm theory of support for social movements: The case of environmental concern. *Human Ecology Review, 6*(2), 81–97.

Stoddard, J. E., Pollard, C. E., & Evans, M. R. (2012). The triple bottom line: A framework for sustainable tourism development. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration, 13*(3), 233–258.

Testa, F., & Iraldo, F. (2010). Shadows and lights of GSCM (Green Supply Chain Management): Determinants and effects of these practices. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 18*(10–11), 953–962.

Tzschentke, N., Kirk, D., & Lynch, P. A. (2008). Going green: Decisional factors in small hospitality operations. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 27*(1), 126–133.

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. (2023). *Report of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business on sustainable tourism (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2023/9).* United Nations.

World Tourism Organization & United Nations Environment Programme. (2005). *Making tourism more sustainable: A guide for policy makers.* World Tourism Organization.

Series
TURISTICA
ISSN 2820-6509

University of Primorska Press
hippocampus.si