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# **Challenges of Sustainable Tourism Management in a Small Historical Town from the Perspective of Accommodation Managers**

## **Desafios da Gestão Sustentável do Turismo numa Pequena Cidade Histórica na Perspetiva dos Gestores de Alojamento**

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### **Abstract**

The tourism industry has made significant efforts to adopt more sustainable practices in order to minimise environmental impacts. Despite the general recognition of these initiatives, there is a lack of studies investigating the perceptions of tourism companies in relation to the application of Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) principles. This study therefore aims to understand the attitudes of accommodation managers towards implementing sustainable tourism development practices, as well as the challenges they face when incorporating these principles into their business models. Adopting a qualitative approach, the research used MAXQDA20 software to analyse the data. The results revealed that the majority of managers recognise that challenges arising from external factors have resulted in significant learning for the management of their accommodation. However, the research concludes that accommodation managers are not yet fully capable of making a positive contribution to STD, and there are difficulties in fully integrating sustainable principles into their business models. The uniqueness of this research lies in its original contribution to filling a gap in the existing literature, offering an unprecedented insight into the perceptions of managers and the challenges they face in implementing the principles of STD. This approach not only provides a more comprehensive understanding of the topic, but also offers important insights for future research, standing out as a defining milestone in the understanding and promotion of STD.

*Keywords:* Accommodation managers; Sustainable Tourism Development; Historical towns; Sustainable management.

*JEL Code:* Z32, Z31, R58, Q01

## Resumo

A indústria do turismo tem desenvolvido esforços significativos na adoção de práticas mais sustentáveis, visando a minimização dos impactos ambientais. Apesar do reconhecimento geral dessas iniciativas, observa-se uma ausência de estudos que investiguem as percepções das empresas turísticas em relação à aplicação dos princípios do Desenvolvimento Turístico Sustentável (DTS). Assim, este estudo propõe-se a compreender as atitudes dos gestores de alojamento em relação à implementação de práticas de DTS, assim como os desafios que enfrentam ao incorporar esses princípios nos seus modelos de negócios. Adotando uma abordagem qualitativa, a pesquisa utilizou o software MAXQDA20 para a análise dos dados. Os resultados revelaram que a maioria dos gestores reconhece que os desafios decorrentes de fatores externos resultaram em aprendizagens significativas para a gestão dos seus alojamentos. Contudo, a pesquisa conclui que os gestores de alojamentos ainda não estão plenamente capacitados para contribuir de maneira positiva para o DTS, evidenciando-se dificuldades em integrar completamente os princípios sustentáveis nos seus modelos de negócio. A singularidade desta investigação reside na sua contribuição original para preencher uma lacuna na literatura existente, oferecendo uma visão inédita sobre as percepções dos gestores e os desafios enfrentados na implementação dos princípios do DTS. Esta abordagem não proporciona apenas uma compreensão mais abrangente do tema, mas também oferece insights importantes para pesquisas futuras, destacando-se como um marco determinante na compreensão e promoção do DST.

*Palavras-chave:* Gestores de alojamento; Desenvolvimento turístico sustentável; Cidades históricas; Gestão sustentável.

*Código JEL:* Z32, Z31, R58, Q01

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has increasingly recognized the importance of adopting sustainable practices to mitigate environmental impacts and preserve cultural heritage. Efforts have been made by various stakeholders to promote Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) and integrate its principles into business operations. However, despite this recognition, there is a lack of in-depth studies exploring the perceptions of the tourism business sector regarding the application of STD principles.

The challenges of sustainable tourism management consist of finding a balance between the needs of visitors and the local community, safeguarding resources, and ensuring profitability. Accommodation managers must therefore carefully plan and manage the use of resources such as water and energy to ensure efficient utilization (Trišić et al., 2021). They should be aware of the impact their activities have on the environment and take measures to reduce that impact (Radwan, Jones & Minoli, 2012). According to the study Sosa (2023), they should also be sensitive to the needs of the local community and work with them to ensure that tourism does not have a negative impact on their way of life. Finally, accommodation managers must also be able to attract and retain tourists while generating profits. Accommodation is one of the most important factors in the tourism sector (Sharpley, 2000) and also one of the sectors most sensitive to the impacts of tourism (Ma, Tan & Zhang, 2022).

The main challenge for the accommodation sector in a historical town is to manage the impacts of tourism in a way that is sustainable and does not harm the historical character of the town (Yıldırım & Turan, 2012). Some ways in which accommodation managers can manage these tourism impacts include planning in collaboration with various stakeholders. Therefore, they should plan for tourism growth and ensure that there is sufficient accommodation to meet demand without

endangering the sustainability of resources, such as those offered in historical cities (UNWTO & UN Environment, 2019).

Consequently, they should help plan the impact that tourism will have on the town's infrastructure and environment. Regarding impacts, it is imperative to comprehensively identify and categorize the various types associated with sustainable tourism management. These impacts encompass a variety of dimensions, each with specific implications for the tourism sector. As for environmental impacts, they refer to changes in ecosystems, loss of biodiversity, and an increase in the carbon footprint resulting from tourism activities (Irfan et al., 2023). Economic impacts are associated with financial aspects such as revenue generation, job creation, and the growth of the tourism sector (Comerio & Strozzi, 2019). In the realm of political impacts, the effects of changes in government policies, regulations, and political stability, influenced by the tourism sector, stand out (Jaisinghani et al., 2023). Finally, demographic impacts refer to changes in population dynamics, migration patterns, and cultural alterations within the local community resulting from tourism activities (Bhat & Mishra, 2021).

On the other hand, accommodation managers in a historical town can contribute to a deeper understanding of visitors about the importance of preserving the historical character of the town. They can also help visitors enjoy their visit while respecting the heritage and way of life of the community. Accommodation managers can additionally contribute to the communication and marketing of the historical town as a heritage tourism destination. This will help attract visitors interested in the town's history and culture (Saarinen, 2020; Ismagilova, Safiullin & Gafurov, 2015).

The accommodation sector plays a fundamental role in tourism, and understanding how managers perceive and address these challenges can provide valuable insights to promote sustainability in the sector as a whole.

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to understand the perceptions and attitudes of accommodation managers in a small historical Portuguese town (the town of Lamego) in relation to STD principles. Specifically, this study aims to understand the perceptions of accommodation managers regarding: a) tourism supply and planning in the town; b) the tourism impacts; c) their STD practices; and d) the effect that risk factors may have on the implementation of sustainability principles in their accommodations.

To achieve these objectives, we adopted a qualitative approach, which allowed us to explore the perceptions and attitudes of accommodation managers towards STD principles in a deep and contextualized manner. Additionally, we used MAXQDA20 software for the analysis of the collected data, which provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the results.

Despite tourism sector efforts for sustainability, accommodation managers still struggle with implementing STD principles due to external factors like inadequate urban planning and internal barriers such as a lack of knowledge or resources. Recognizing these challenges is crucial for developing effective capacity-building strategies and supporting sustainable change in the industry. This study contributes to knowledge by analyzing perceptions and challenges faced by accommodation managers, guiding policies for sustainable development while preserving natural and cultural resources for future generations.

This work is structured as follows: an introduction to the topic for a better understanding of the study's reality; a brief literature review; a description of the methodology and procedures used; the presentation and discussion of the results; and finally, the conclusion and recommendations.

## **2. BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

### **2.1. The importance of accommodation managers for sustainable development in historic towns**

Small historic towns are a valuable and unique part of the tourism offer. They give visitors a sense of history and a unique cultural experience. However, many of these towns are in danger of being neglected and lack STD (Yang & Wall, 2022).

Cities that embrace STD can achieve many benefits (Gonia & Jezierska-Thöle, 2022). By preserving their unique character and history, they can attract more visitors and create a stronger sense of community (Harri & Potts, 2003), and can also generate much-needed revenue for local

businesses and residents (Mura & Kajzar, 2019). STD is the key to preserving the unique charm of historic small towns and ensuring their long-term viability (Wenting, He & Shuying, 2021).

The preservation of small towns is a key factor for STD (Wenting et al., 2021). These towns offer a unique and authentic experience for tourists, which helps create sustainable tourism. There are several reasons why small towns should be preserved, and these are also the reasons why STD is important in these towns (Antão-Geraldes & Sheppard, 2019).

Small towns provide a unique and authentic experience to tourists due to their historical significance and simpler way of life. They offer a refreshing change from the fast-paced environment of cities, which is attractive to many visitors (Rudan, 2010). In addition, the relaxed atmosphere of small towns is attractive to tourists and can contribute significantly to local economies (Harshbarger, 2012). Moreover, the presence of historic sites and architecture is a crucial factor in attracting tourists to small towns (Yabancı, 2022). Therefore, preserving small towns and their historic landmarks can have a positive impact on the local economy and provide visitors with an enjoyable and unique experience (Mu & Aimar, 2022). Another reason to preserve small towns is that they are often the heart of a region. They are often the place where the culture and traditions of a region are strong. By preserving these towns, we are preserving the culture and traditions of the region, this is important, because it helps to create a sense of identity for the region (Lysgård, 2019).

STD is important in small towns because it helps to preserve their unique character. Sustainable tourism is based on the idea of using tourism to benefit the local community (Gu, Li, Wang & Ma, 2023). This means that the money that is generated by tourism is used to benefit the local people and helps to preserve the character of the town because it ensures that the money is used to benefit the local community (Manzoor et al., 2019). Preserving small towns is important for STD because it helps to create a sense of identity for a region; it also helps to preserve the culture and traditions of a region. Sustainable tourism is important because it helps to create a sustainable tourism industry (Gu et al., 2023).

To promote STD, it is necessary to consider sustainability principles that allow historic towns to take advantage of tourism opportunities while still being in balance with urban policies, the economy, and society as a whole (Teixeira & Oliveira, 2010). The heritage, historical, and cultural aspects of these cities can and should be utilized to promote STD (Yabancı, 2022).

The need for tourism planning is evident to achieve STD. The close connection between these two concepts points to the importance of planning for tourism (Marujo & Carvalho, 2010). The goal, as the authors state, is to meet the needs of tourists (economic, social, and aesthetic) without damaging the resources that attract tourists. The tourism planning process reflects the rational use of land and resources, and it is becoming increasingly important to manage the negative impacts of tourism (García-Delgado, Martínez-Puche, & Lois-González, 2020).

Many negative impacts of tourism can be minimized by using planning and management tools for tourism activity (Butler, 1998). These tools are essential for the sustainability of historic and heritage destinations (Lysgård, 2019). The involvement/participation of all tourism actors (public and private entities, visitors, population, etc.) in the several stages of the planning process is also essential (Muminovi' et al., 2020).

The accommodation sector is an important stakeholder in the tourism industry (Madanaguli et al., 2023). Accommodation managers are responsible for the provision of quality accommodation and services to tourists, as well development and promotion of sustainable tourism practices (Trišić, et al. 2021).

In recent years, there has been an increase in awareness among accommodation managers about the importance of sustainable management (Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2014). However, compared to other sectors, the accommodation industry has lagged in implementing sustainable practices (Melissen et al., 2016).

One of the key factors driving accommodation managers to prioritize sustainable management is the growing demand from guests (Calisto et al., 2021). Today's travelers are increasingly concerned about the impact of their travels on the environment and local communities (Berezan et al., 2013; Barber & Deale, 2014). They are looking for accommodation options that align with their values and demonstrate a commitment to sustainability. As a result, accommodation managers have realized that adopting sustainable practices can attract environmentally conscious guests and enhance their brand reputation (Calisto et al., 2021; Kasimu, Zaiton, & Hassan, 2012).

Another factor influencing accommodation managers to prioritize sustainability is the increasing number of sustainability-related regulations and certifications in the hospitality industry (Balaji et al., 2019). Many governments and organizations have introduced guidelines and certifications that encourage or even require accommodation providers to implement sustainable practices. For example, The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015); *Guia de Boas Práticas para uma Economia Circular no Alojamento Turístico* (Turismo de Portugal, 2020), + *Sustainable Tourism Plan 20-23* (Turismo de Portugal, 2021) or certifications such as LEED<sup>1</sup> (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and Green Key<sup>2</sup> provide guidelines and recognition of environmentally friendly practices in accommodation.

Accommodation managers have recognized the economic benefits of sustainable management practices, implementing energy efficiency measures, reducing waste, and conserving water, which not only contribute to environmental conservation but also result in cost savings (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015). Sustainable practices can help accommodation managers reduce their operating expenses, improve their resource management, and increase their bottom line (Fraj, Matute & Melero, 2015). In addition, the desire to preserve local culture and support local communities has also led accommodation managers to prioritize sustainable management (Pérez & Del Bosque, 2014), to foster community engagement and contribute to the local economy.

Accommodation managers have also begun to adopt sustainable management practices to mitigate the potential risks and impacts of climate change (Calisto et al., 2021). Extreme weather events and changing environmental conditions can disrupt operations, damage property, and affect guest experiences. By adopting sustainable practices, accommodation managers aim to build resilience and adapt to changing climate conditions (Toubes, Araújo-Vila, & Fraiz-Brea, 2021).

The provision of quality accommodation and services is essential for the development of sustainable tourism. Accommodation managers must ensure that they meet the needs of their guests, while also protecting the environment and promoting cultural heritage (Gil-Soto et al., 2019). They must also be aware of the social and economic impacts of tourism and work to minimize any negative impacts (Nepal, Irsyad & Nepal, 2021)

The development and promotion of sustainable tourism practices are also essential for the development of sustainable tourism. Accommodation managers must be proactive in their efforts to promote sustainable tourism (Lian, Watters & Lemański, 2022). They must educate their guests about the importance of sustainable tourism and how they can help to protect the environment and cultural heritage (Turismo de Portugal, 2020). They must also work with local communities and businesses to promote sustainable tourism practices. By working together, accommodation managers can help to make tourism more sustainable and benefit the environment, cultural heritage, and local communities.

## 2.2. Small historical towns - Geographical context of Lamego

Bearing in mind the objectives of this study, we chose to select only accommodation in the historic centre of Lamego. The Municipality of Lamego is situated in the Portuguese Northern Region (NUTS II) and in the Douro Sub-Region (NUTS III), covering a total area of 165.42 km<sup>2</sup>. The town of Lamego, the municipal seat, is located on the left bank of the Douro River, belonging to the Viseu district. Over the past three decades, the locality has experienced a reduction of approximately 20% in its population. Currently, Lamego has around 24,313 inhabitants, with 12,073 residing in the central urban core (PORDATA, 2022).

The Municipality of Lamego is identified as a Low-Density Territory, facing challenges inherent to this condition, such as low per capita income, an aging population, and low levels of education. Traditional economic sectors include viticulture, fruit growing, agriculture, and agro-industry. Situated in the Douro Valley, the town boasts a rich historical heritage, featuring numerous Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque monuments that attract visitors from around the world.

In recent years, tourist activity has experienced exponential growth, driven by the fact that a part of the municipality is included in the Douro, recognized as a World Heritage Site. Between 2012 and 2019, the number of stays increased significantly, rising from 180,536 in 2012 to 501,573 in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usgbc.org/leed>

<sup>2</sup> <https://greenkey.abae.pt/>

2019 (PORDATA, 2022). In Portugal, this region has emerged as one of the prominent tourist destinations (Sousa & Manfredo, 2021).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The methodology employed in this study aims to bring greater coherence to the significance derived from interviews, providing a deeper understanding of the explored theme. To achieve this goal, we have chosen to utilize Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the central method, a qualitative approach that falls within the realm of Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA). IPA, as a QDA practice, focuses on the understanding of individual and subjective human experiences (Tomkins, 2017).

#### **3.1. Method**

IPA, as the core method of this research, is founded on the premise that individuals ascribe meanings to their experiences to make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This method directs attention towards comprehending the individual's perception of the studied phenomenon, as it is realized by the individual (Jeog & Othman, 2016; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

##### ***3.1.1. Analysis***

The analysis conducted through IPA aims to highlight the individual experience in the face of the studied phenomenon. This process allows for a profound understanding of how people experience and attribute meanings to a particular phenomenon within the context of the world around them.

##### ***3.1.2. Technique***

The specific technique employed in applying IPA aligns with the understanding that individuals construct and interpret their personal and social experiences. In this context, IPA enables researchers to capture the subjective experience of several stakeholders, including tourists and other relevant players in STD context (Hutagalung et al., 2022; Casais & Ferreira, 2023).

##### ***3.1.3. Relevance of IPA in STD Studies***

The application of IPA in STD studies proves essential as it facilitates an in-depth understanding of the complexities and nuances of the human experience regarding tourism development in a particular region. IPA considers the individual perspectives of those affected by tourism and explores the attitudes, beliefs, and motivations that underlie their decisions. Moreover, IPA allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of tourism development, delving into the psychological and emotional dimensions of tourism development on local communities. By investigating local perceptions and the meanings associated with tourism, researchers can gain a holistic and profound insight into the effects of tourism development in a specific region (Frauman & Banks, 2011). Thus, IPA emerges as a valuable methodology for studies related to STD, providing a comprehensive understanding of the subjective experiences and perceptions of those impacted by tourism development.

#### **3.2. Participants**

This study counted the participation of 15 owners and/or managers of accommodation units located in the historic centre of Lamego (Table 1). The sample was selected by convenience, considering as selection criteria the fact that the respondents work in the tourism sector and have some knowledge about the application of sustainable management principles in this sector.

**Table 1: Characterisation of the participants**

Respondents	Manager (M)/ Owner (O)	Gender	Age intervals	Education	Accommodation Typology/ Opening year	N° Rooms (R)/ Beds (B)
P1	Owner	M	36-51	High School	Camping site (2014)	15 N° of campers
P2	Owner	M	52-65	Higher Education	House LA (2017)	3(R); 5(B)
P3	Owner	F	36-51	Higher Education	House LA (2018)	3(R); 5(B)
P4	Owner	F	>67	High School	Housing tourism TE (2018)	5(R); 5(B)
P5	Manager	M	36-51	Higher Education	Hotel**** (2021)	14(R);47(B)
P6	Owner	F	20-35	Higher Education	Hostel LA (2021)	5(R); 5(B)
P7	Owner	M	>67	High School	Hotel** (1983)	6(R); 17(B)
P8	Owner	M	36-51	Higher Education	Apartment LA (2017)	5(R); 9(B)
P9	Owner	M	>67	High School	Hostel LA (2018)	7(R);14(B)
P10	Owner	M	52-65	Higher Education	House LA (2020)	3 (R); 4(B)
P11	Owner	M	36-51	Higher Education	Apartment LA (2018)	7(R); 8(B)
P12	Owner	F	52-66	Higher Education	House LA (2022)	3(R); 5(B)
P13	Owner	M	36-51	Higher Education	Country House (2018)	2(R); 2(B)
P14	Owner	M	36-51	Higher Education	Accommodation establishments LA (1986)	20 (R); 23(B)
P15	Owner	M	36-51	Higher Education	House LA (2020)	3(R); 6(B)

Subtitle: LA: local accommodation; TE: touristic enterprises

Source: elaborated by the authors

### 3.3. Data collection instrument and its analysis

Interviews were conducted through a semi-structured interview script, constructed based on the literature review about the application of sustainability principles in accommodation management. In developing the interview script, we particularly kept in mind the following studies (Faria et al., 2021; Santos, 2018; Moniz, Amado et al., 2010; Europa Nostra, 2020). The interviews conducted were supported by audio recording, and research questions were formulated, based on the question typology of IPA method (Smith et al., 2009). The participants were questioned to obtain their perception of their own experience as owners of tourism establishments.

Data were collected between February and May 2022, and the conditions were the same for all participants: the interview script was administered in person by appointment (Table 3). The collected reports were deemed valid for analysis.



**Table 3: Additional data about each interview**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Duration M:S</b>	<b>Transcript in number of words</b>
P1	In person at accommodation	04/04/22	50:09	2777
P2	In person at accommodation	13/05/22	54:03	2784
P3	In person at accommodation	21/03/22	46:09	2556
P4	In person at accommodation	01/03/22	20:46	1402
P5	In person at accommodation	20/05/22	17:37	1221
P6	In person at accommodation	27/04/22	23:34	1523
P7	In person at accommodation	11/04/22	35:00	1724
P8	In person at accommodation	25/02/22	19:46	1305
P9	In person at accommodation	16/05/22	45:00	1908
P10	In person at accommodation	04/03/22	40:40	2317
P11	In person at accommodation	31/05/22	47:00	2410
P12	In person at accommodation	28/02/22	32:00	1729
P13	In person at accommodation	18/04/22	19:56	1461
P14	In person at accommodation	30/03/22	20:32	1343
P15	In person at accommodation	05/03/22	18:32	1263

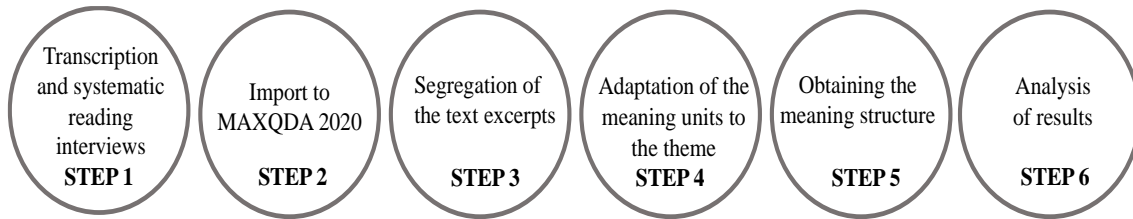
Source: elaborated by the authors

The content analysis of the interviews was conducted in accordance with the core principles of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method, as outlined by Smith et al. (2009). IPA, as a qualitative research approach, is guided by three fundamental principles. Firstly, IPA places a strong emphasis on the exploration of individual experiences. It seeks to delve deeply into the unique perspectives of each participant, aiming to understand how individuals interpret and make sense of their lived experiences. Secondly, the method is rooted in the acknowledgment of the subjective nature of understanding. IPA recognizes that individuals construct their own realities through subjective interpretation, and, therefore, the analysis focuses on uncovering the subjective meanings attributed by participants to their experiences. Thirdly, IPA involves a contextual and detailed analysis of participants' narratives. By examining the nuances of participants' perspectives, motivations, and beliefs, the method aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. By adhering to these principles, the content analysis applied in this study aligns with the foundational tenets of IPA, ensuring a rigorous and nuanced exploration of participants' experiences in relation to the researched phenomenon.

The MAXQDA20 software was used to transcribe and organize the participants' accounts, which allowed for a more efficient reinterpretation of the interviews' content, emphasizing the emerging themes and units of meaning. A circular approach of conjecture and validation was adopted, following the hermeneutic principle (Giorgi & Sousa, 2010), to ensure the consistency of the generating meaning structures and the maximum verisimilitude of the interpretations. Subsequently, a new content analysis of the interviews was performed to obtain greater congruence between the proposals of emerging themes and meaning units. The MAXQDA20 software was used to encode the most relevant passages of the interviews (meaning units) according to the themes under analysis and convert them into expressions of relevant characters (emerging themes). Based on the occurrences and relationships between the themes established by the analysis software, the results were interpreted to establish hierarchies and assumptions between the codifications. The following diagram highlights the phases of analysis and treatment of the collected data.



**Figure 1. Description of the seven-step data analytical process**



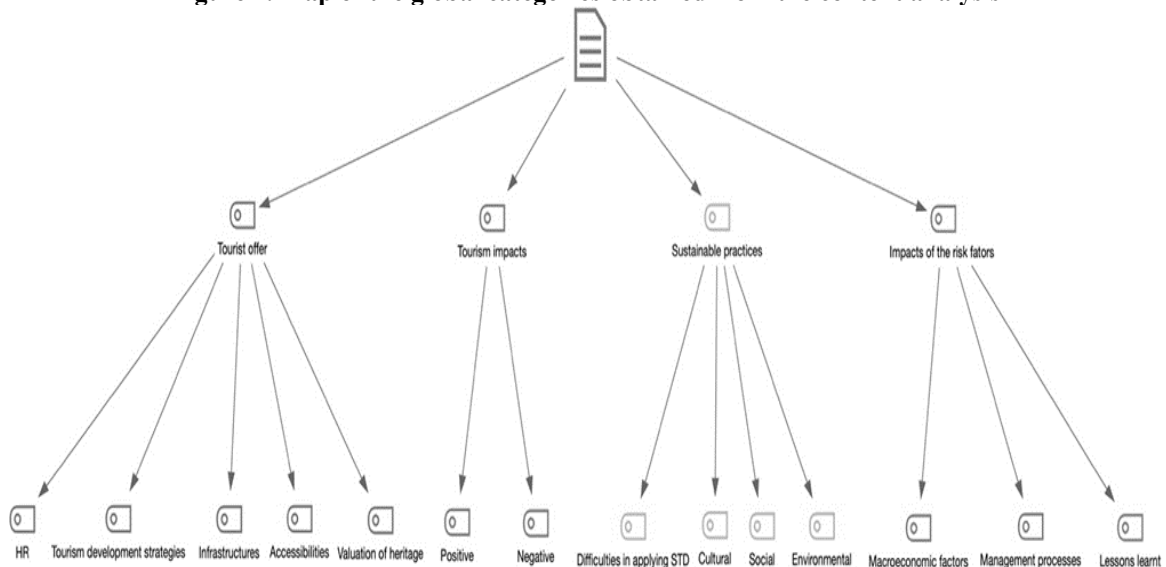
source: adapted from Smith et al., 2009

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Structure of meaning units and emerging themes

The analysis of the interviews' content facilitated the identification of four initial themes, referred to as 'starting themes,' and the emergence of 14 subsequent sub-themes, denoted as 'arrival themes,' all interconnected with sustainable management in tourism (Figure 2). The evolution of these themes throughout the empirical study can be traced back to the systematic review of interviews conducted during the research process. All the coded content derived from the participants' narratives was considered valid for treatment (Appendix 1).

**Figure 2. Map of the global categories obtained from the content analysis**



source: elaborated by the authors

The initial themes served as a foundational framework, representing the primary concepts gleaned from the initial stages of content analysis. As the study progressed, the iterative process of data immersion and constant comparison allowed for the organic emergence of new sub-themes, refining and expanding our understanding of sustainable management in tourism. These emergent sub-themes, collectively forming the 'arrival themes,' represented nuanced aspects and dimensions that surfaced during the systematic review of interviews.

Regarding the identification and creation of relationships between themes, the analysis benefited significantly from the utilization of the MaxQDA software. This tool employs advanced algorithms to automatically correlate and connect content, facilitating the identification of associations and patterns within the data (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). The software played a crucial role in unveiling the intricate web of relationships among themes, contributing to a more comprehensive and systematic interpretation of the content.

This dynamic process underscores the iterative nature of the study, where themes evolved and deepened over time through ongoing analysis and engagement with the interview data. The MaxQDA software, with its sophisticated correlational algorithms, not only facilitated the

identification of emergent themes but also provided valuable insights into the complex interplay and connections between these themes. This comprehensive approach ensures that our understanding of sustainable management in tourism is not static but evolves organically through the interplay of analysis, emerging themes, and systematic review of interview content. It emphasizes the synergy between manual coding efforts, guided by the initial themes, and the advanced capabilities of MaxQDA in revealing nuanced relationships and patterns within the data. Together, these methodological elements contribute to a robust and holistic exploration of the multifaceted dimensions inherent in sustainable tourism management.

Table 4 summarises the content of the meaning units assigned in the content analysis of the interviews, helping to organize the analyzed content to facilitate the interpretation of the results (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). After the detailed and systematic analysis of the data collected, it is confirmed that there is a clear approach by the participants to the main themes that are associated with sustainable management, according to the literature consulted.

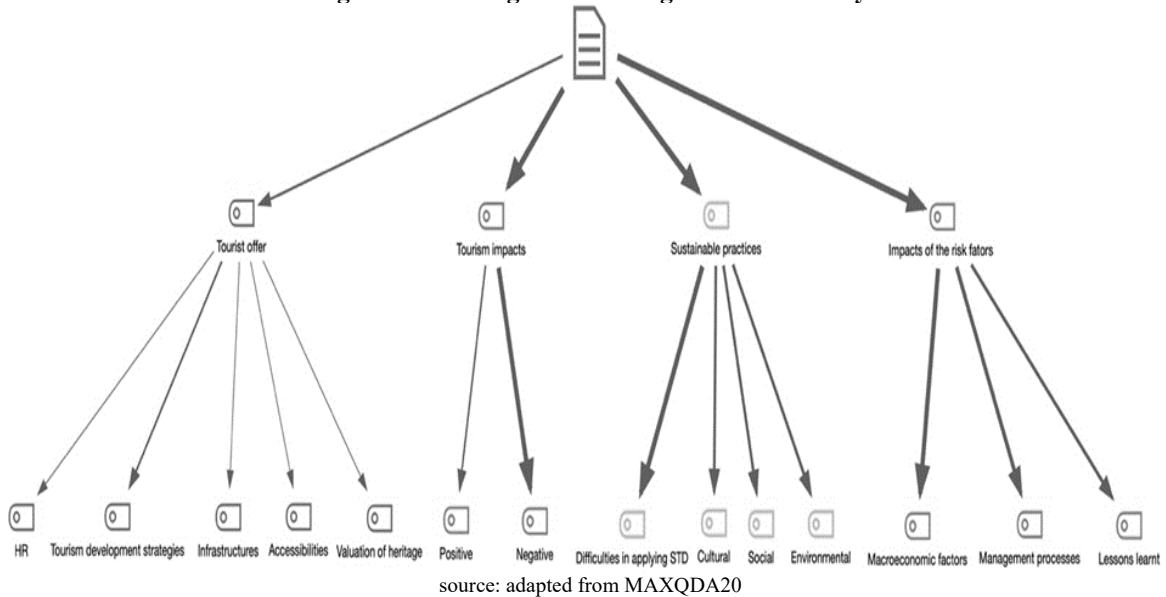
**Table 4: Structure of the units of meaning**

Themes	Subthemes	Units of meaning
Tourist offer	Valuation of Heritage	<i>(...) There is little cultural offer and there is a need to promote more activities to increase the average stay and keep tourists longer in the town (...)</i>
	Infrastructures	<i>(..) The older buildings, which are completely outdated and do not correspond at all to current accommodation standards, are still not keeping up with the evolution of the markets (...)</i>
	Accessibilities	<i>In historical centers, it is always very complicated to have accessibility. In my neighborhoods, I can't guarantee accessibility either, but it's not impossible.</i>
	Human Resources	<i>We have practically no tour guides (...) there are many tourists in the town and there are no human resources to sustain the demand from tourists.</i>
	Tourism development strategies	<i>(...)In Portugal we need to develop group work, I think we are very individualistic and envious and everyone works only for themselves. If everyone worked together for the town or the region, it would be much easier, more practical, and more effective to develop tourism and improve it. Associations should be created.</i>
Tourism impacts	Positive	<i>(...)There is inequality in the region and many people with financial difficulties and, in my opinion, tourism can help to reduce these problems because the presence of tourists not only helps financially those who are hosting them but also the various services available in the town, from shops to restaurants.</i>
	Negative	<i>There is the problem of massification that is starting to be felt in the Douro and the seasonality (...)</i>
Sustainable practices	Environmental	<i>(...) The water is heated through solar panels. We have a chemical and separate wastewater discharge platform.</i>
	Cultural	<i>Local accommodation has the advantage that we have direct contact with the client, which allows us to promote the local (...)</i>
	Social	<i>(...) there is no discrimination, all people are welcome and treated equally, because everyone deserves respect and we have nothing to do with their sexual orientations, beliefs, etc.</i>
	Difficulties in applying STD	<i>(...) there should be incentives from the State so that people feel more motivated to recover and to invest (...)</i>
The impact of the risk factors	Management processes	<i>(...) there was control over human resources and fixed costs (...)</i>
	Macroeconomic factors	<i>(...) The pandemic and bureaucracy are the main obstacles to reaching new goals in this sector.</i>
	Lessons learned	<i>The best learning all this has brought is that people have to be restrained, and organized and always try to be the best, quality over quantity.</i>

Source: elaborated by the authors

After a detailed analysis of our results, it was possible to identify which themes prove to be the most contribute to the understanding of the topic under study. Figure 3 shows which of the themes identified in Figure 2 are the most relevant. As we can see from Figure 3, the bold arrows suggest the most representative themes of the study. According to this, the themes of tourism impacts, sustainable practices, impact of the risk factors are the ones that most contribute to explaining the STD. The tourism supply dimension is not particularly important. For the tourism impacts dimension, the negative impacts stand out compared to the positive ones. In the sustainable practices dimension, the difficulty in applying STD principles stands out and the impact of the risk factors dimension, macroeconomic factors, and management processes are highlighted.

Figure 3: Most significant categories in the study



From Figure 4 we can observe this contribution in greater detail.

Figure 4: Occurrence of emerging themes by participants

Code System	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	SUM
▼ Tourist offer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	63
Tourism development strategies	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	29
HR	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
Accessibilities	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	8
Infrastructures	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	20
Valuation of heritage	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	8
▼ Tourism impacts	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	65
Positive	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	29
Negative	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	48
▼ Sustainable practices	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	124
Difficulties in applying STD	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	29
Social	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	38
Cultural	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	27
Environmental	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	36
▼ Impacts of the risk factors	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	89
Macroeconomic factors	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	50
Lessons learnt	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	17
Management processes	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	40
Σ SUM	79	91	69	40	32	43	32	31	48	50	53	42	43	40	33	726

source: adapted from MAXQDA20

Overall, participants perceive the impacts of risk factors negatively, which reveals a tendency not to accept change as an opportunity to improve their activity or services. On the other hand, when respondents refer to sustainable practices, they reveal to be little active in this field. Although their ideas are often aligned with sustainable practices, their behavior is not so evident in this respect, as can be confirmed by the following statements "The motivation is to grow and offer better conditions

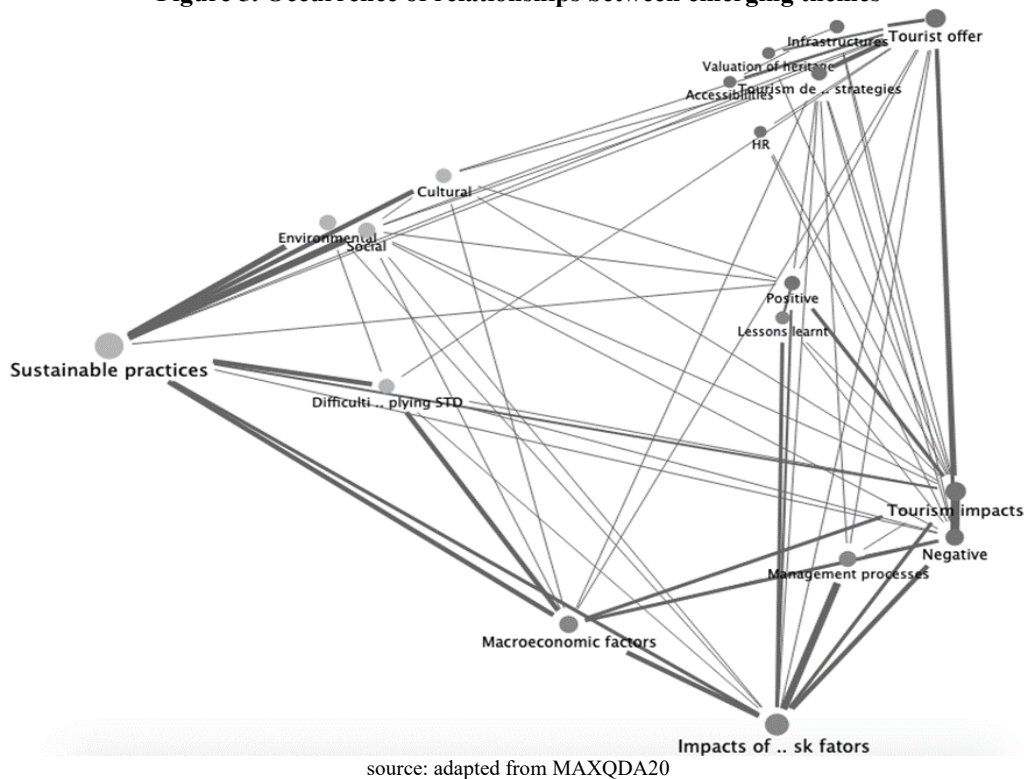
and sustainability has a very direct relationship with demand and supply. Logically, these motivations are limited by economic power" (P10).

This result is in line with the study of Melissen et al. (2016). Most adopt the practices that are legally imposed, avoiding as much as possible other sustainable procedures, as suggested by Melissen (2013), due to the investment that this implies, which leads us to infer that, management practices condition the application of STD principles, as also referred to Nair et al. (2012) and Kamalulariffin (2013). In this sense, participants refer difficulties in application: "I have general concerns, but I do not have a defined sustainability policy, also because the structure of the building, a very old building, with several floors where energy losses are constant, implies a very large investment" (P14). On the other hand, managers understand that they are still trying to recover from the crisis caused by the pandemic, that is, in structural terms, they were forced to reduce staff and rethink their business model: "Implemented self-check-in as a contagion preventive measure. I left many platforms I worked with due to the associated costs and, at the moment, I only work with Booking and Airbnb" (P2). The support lines pointed out by the State are also inefficient, at least for some participants. In their view "we need more support from the state, faster, less bureaucracy" (P6). Bureaucracies are a disincentive to seeking help to try to subsist and recover the normal functioning of their enterprises, thus feeling discouraged to adopt new practices, including STD practices.

#### 4.2. Correlations between emerging terms

From the MAXQDA20 software, it is possible to graphically understand how the emerging themes relate to each other, the proximity between themes, and the evidence of their connections, which helps us to interpret them (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). This process allows us to deepen our inferences to better explain how managers' perceptions of STD practices are formed. Specifically, Figure 5 serves as a pivotal output in our analysis, providing a unique visual representation that goes beyond the individual themes identified earlier.

Figure 5. Occurrence of relationships between emerging themes



Unlike previous outputs, this figure illuminates the intricate web of relationships among themes, showcasing the proximity and intensity of connections. By presenting a comprehensive overview of theme relationships, the figure offers a valuable perspective on the complex interplay and

associations within the qualitative data. This visual insight enhances our interpretative capabilities, revealing patterns and nuances that might not be immediately apparent in a textual analysis. Importantly, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the multidimensional nature of managers' perceptions in the context of STD, offering a distinct layer of insight that enriches the overall qualitative analysis.

Based on the results presented in Figure 5, we can see that the sustainable practices adopted by managers in the tourism sector are largely focused on environmental and social issues: “We must all realize that we can help to have a planet that is more careful, more preserved and that allows us to reduce carbon emissions, save energy, therefore, promote everything that has to do with the sustainability of the planet” (P1). However, the implementation of these practices may be hampered by changes in the macroeconomic scenario, such as the pandemic of COVID-19. Furthermore, managers tend to perceive the impacts of risk as predominantly negative:

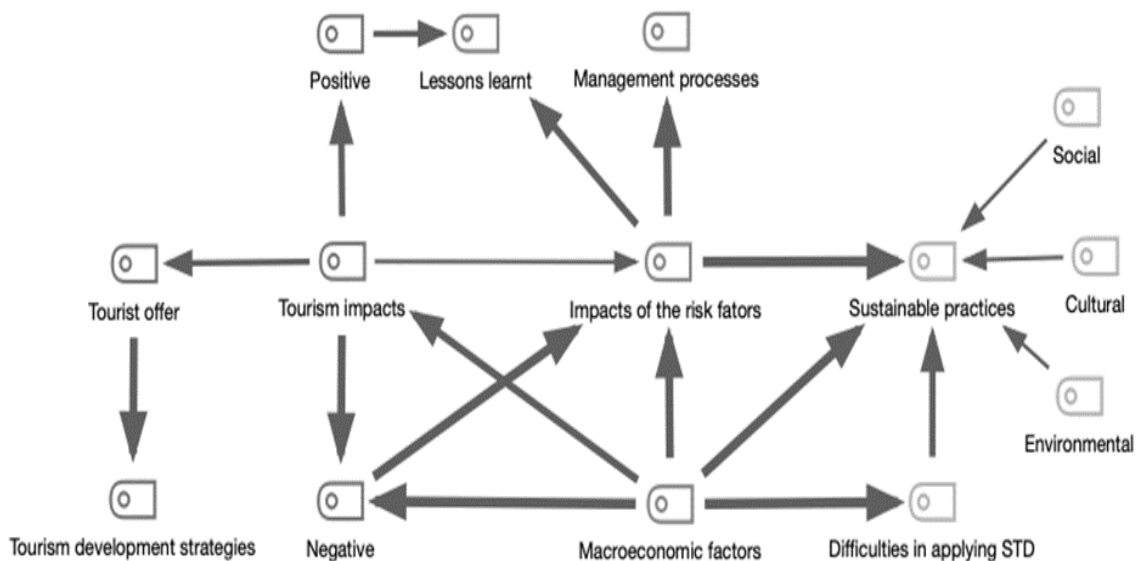
“Constraints include the pandemic, low average stay rate and guests, and seasonality. Seasonality is a big constraint because in a year there are 3 or 4 months of demand and the rest is almost non-existent, for this reason during the winter I rent the houses to students and do not work as local accommodation often leading to changes in management processes, such as cost containment” (P2). Nevertheless, when these impacts are perceived as positive, managers tend to draw lessons and improve their businesses from this experience: “(...) we are much better prepared, we already have many tools and it will not cost us so much to adapt, which could also help the economy to keep going and not have to stop completely” (P1). Entrepreneurs also see the tourism supply as a problem, with many limitations in the infrastructure and dynamization of the supply by public entities. Furthermore, participants refer that there are no strategies to deal with macroeconomic changes in the tourism sector.

Based on these results, we realize that the tourism sector needs to develop more effective strategies to deal with macroeconomic changes, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, managers must be encouraged to adopt sustainable practices that address not only environmental but also social and economic issues. It is also essential that managers perceive tourism impacts as an opportunity to learn and improve their businesses, rather than just focusing on losses and cost containment. Finally, public and private entities must work together to develop and boost the tourism offer to increase the sector's competitiveness and improve tourists' experience.

### 4.3. Most significant relationships between emerging themes

Delving a little deeper into the relationships identified by MAXQDA20, we can see the most significant relationships in this study and what their meaning is (Figure 6). This exercise helps us understand the effects between determinants (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019).

Figure 6: Direct and indirect effects between emerging themes



source: adapted from MAXQDA20

In Figure 6, we can verify that the adoption of sustainable practices by managers is influenced, positively and/or negatively, by individual perceptions of macroeconomic factors (in accordance with the findings of Mucharreira et al., 2019; Mucharreira & Antunes, 2015) and by those of the associated risks.

From the interviews we observed that the sustainable practices adopted by managers are mainly environmental, focusing on water, energy, and waste management, similar to the results found in other studies (e.g. Calisto et al., 2021; Akhtar & Najar, 2020) and social. However, as reported in other studies (e.g. Pryce, 2001; Langgat, 2019), there is difficulty in applying the STD, mainly due to situations caused by the constant changes in the macroeconomic scenario, as we have already mentioned. Moreover, a negativist reading of the impacts may restrict the managers' intention to adopt sustainable practices, thus shaping the tourism offer. This perception also influences the development of strategies in the tourism sector, since participants indicate that strategies are not very evident and that this leads to the loss of a large part of the tourism offer, especially of the most endemic companies.

Learning from past experiences is influenced by how managers experience these events. Managers who can see events as new business opportunities may perceive the importance of adaptation, while those who cannot adapt to change recognize that their business has been more affected. When impacts on tourism are seen as positive, it means that managers have learned from the event and managed to improve their business in some way. It is essential that managers are open to learning from past experiences, recognizing business opportunities, and adapting to change to ensure the resilience and success of their business.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The main objective of this study was to analyse the perceptions of accommodation managers in a small historical Portuguese town (the town of Lamego) in relation to STD principles. Four specific objectives were defined, which related to understanding the perceptions of accommodation managers regarding the tourism supply and planning in the town, the tourism impacts, their STD practices, and the effect that risk factors may have on the implementation of sustainability principles in their accommodations. Next, we present the conclusions that respond to each specific objective defined.

Based on the results presented, concerning the tourism offer, the heritage managers were generally satisfied, the weaknesses pointed out are the lack of tourism development strategies by the local authorities, highlighting, for example, the lack of preparation of joint projects. The same result was obtained in a study conducted in 2016 on the perception of another group of stakeholders, where in the conclusions the authors state the following: "This study's allowed for the understanding that residents have a negative perspective on the role that has been developed by local authorities in the management" (Vieira et al., 2016: 131). This dimension was not the one that obtained more contributions from the participants; however, their perceptions about the planning in what concerns the offer demonstrate that the principles of the STD are not being applied in the destination development.

In terms of tourism impacts, most participants consider that they are mostly positive; however, in this study, the negative impacts gain greater relevance, since they restrict the application of the STD principles. Among the negative impacts, seasonality is the one that most contributes, in the perception of the managers, to the difficulties in applying the STD.

Considering sustainable practices, we can ascertain that the adoption of sustainable practices by managers in the tourism sector is influenced by several factors. They are mainly environmental and social. However, consistent with the results of other studies (Pryce, 2001; Langgat, 2019) there is a difficulty in applying STD, mainly due to situations caused by the constant changes in the macroeconomic scenario, such as the recent situation caused by the pandemic of COVID-19 or the war in Ukraine.

The results also indicate that, from the managers' point of view, the planning carried out by the public and private entities regarding the tourism offer has weaknesses, mainly limitations regarding the infrastructure and dynamization of the tourism sector by the public entities. In this sense, managers perceive a lack of strategies to deal with the various changes observed by the tourism sector. Negative relations on what happens in tourism indirectly determine the adoption of sustainable practices.

Thus, we reiterate that it is indeed fundamental to invest in training managers to better understand the importance of adopting sustainable practices and perceiving the impacts of tourism, in addition to developing more effective and evident strategies in the tourism sector. Managers also need to be open to learning from past experiences to ensure resilience and success in the face of the unpredictability of the tourism business in the future. Knowledge of the impacts of the tourism sector has been shaping the tourism offer, particularly concerning strategy development, but more effort and cooperation are needed between managers and public entities to address the challenges of the tourism sector and ensure its sustainability.

In terms of the impacts of risk factors, they played a relevant role in this study, especially when, for many of the participants, the negative assessment of risk (for example, COVID-19) proved to be a way of learning and changing management models, which often translated into more sustainable practices. In this context, macroeconomic factors are of particular importance for the application of STD principles. This study clearly demonstrates that the approach and responses to management challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic were notably different, especially among different types of accommodations, with a focus on hotels and housing establishments. In the case of tourist establishments, the closure of units resulted in significant financial difficulties. However, concerning local accommodation, the adaptation was more positive and, in some cases, quite creative, as evidenced by specific examples. Some units hosted technical teams involved in the restoration of historic buildings, accommodated COVID-19 patients, welcomed families who, due to pandemic concerns, preferred local accommodations, and even rented spaces to students. Regarding lessons learned, there was a notable emphasis on heightened hygiene measures, a practice that continues to this day. There was also a need to adapt to the Portuguese market, contributing to a better understanding of different audiences. On the other hand, the majority expresses the understanding that, in the future, having a reserve fund is crucial to address similar situations that may arise due to external factors. Finally, a significant number of respondents chose to implement automatic check-in systems, proving to be not only an effective protective measure but also economically advantageous.

### **5.1. Theoretical and practical implications**

In theoretical terms, our results contribute to a better understanding of the sustainable practices adopted by managers in the hospitality sector, as well as the factors that influence the adoption of these same practices. In addition, this study highlights the importance of managers' perceptions regarding the impacts of risk factors, especially the macroeconomic impacts and their effects on the adoption of sustainable practices, as well as the influence of positive and negative perceptions on the adoption of these practices, thus contributing to the scientific clarification on the behavioral intention of hospitality towards the need for more sustainable behaviors.

From a practical point of view, our results can have significant implications for managers in the tourism sector. This study highlights the need to develop crisis management and adaptation strategies to changes in the macroeconomic environment to minimize negative impacts on tourism and promote the adoption of sustainable practices.

The results of this study can contribute to the implementation of more effective policies and strategies in the tourism sector, promoting the adoption of sustainable practices and the improvement of the tourism supply. Implementing enhancements in the application of sustainability principles is crucial, considering that their application goes beyond benefits directed solely at customers or businesses. It also encompasses the interests of society, considering the environmental constraints that exert a substantial influence on the tourist experience and loyalty. Facilitating the establishment of partnerships with the community, public sector, and private initiative is essential for improving offerings based on STD. Accommodation managers should be mindful of the current trend among tourists advocating for sustainability, turning this aspect into an opportunity to differentiate their offerings. By demonstrating commitment to incorporating these principles into accommodation management, they can showcase their dedication to sustainability.

This study indicates that tourism supply is a problem, with limitations regarding infrastructures and supply stimulation by public entities, highlighting the need for improvements in these aspects. As far as accommodation managers are concerned, the concerns about the offer include the rise in property prices, which affects the expansion of the business, concerns about massification and the



lack of genuine products. In our opinion, these limitations could be resolved by creating groups representing the various stakeholders in order to improve the city's tourism offer.

With regard to aspects linked to the management of the accommodation itself, the managers' responses lead us to make consider it crucial to suggest some simple measures that do not require a significant investment on the part of accommodation managers, always keeping in mind the principles of sustainability. Regarding water management, we propose the reduction of potable water needs through the implementation of more efficient equipment, the collection and reuse of rainwater, and the promotion of conscientious consumption among guests and staff. Additionally, we suggest installing sensor faucets and dual-flush toilets, as well as low-flow faucets and showers. In terms of energy efficiency, we emphasize the use of low-consumption bulbs and double-glazed windows to decrease consumption and enhance thermal and acoustic comfort. We also recommend adopting practices such as renewable energy production, reducing energy consumption, installing more efficient equipment, and replacing inefficient appliances. Painting interior surfaces with light colors to optimize natural lighting is another measure to consider. Other beneficial actions may include installing presence sensors to control lighting and insulating ventilation networks and pipelines. It would also be relevant to implement composting of organic waste, maximize permeable outdoor spaces, and use native vegetation. Reducing the use of disposable plastic packaging and adopting other sustainable practices are equally important.

## 5.2. Limitations and future research lines

It should be noted that this study presents some limitations that need to be considered. Firstly, the results may not be generalizable to all managers in the tourism sector. Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interview script may have limited the participants' responses, which may have influenced the results. It is crucial to acknowledge that, although the outputs generated by MAXQDA play a significant role in qualitative analysis, they have inherent limitations that must be considered. The validity of the outputs is intrinsically linked to the quality and accuracy of the initial data, which may introduce limitations if the original coding or categorization fails to fully capture the richness and complexity of participants' responses. Additionally, it is important to emphasize that any visualization, no matter how sophisticated, is a simplified and interpretative representation of the underlying reality. Therefore, the interpretation of results should be done with consideration for the potential bias in the selection and interpretation of data. These limitations underscore the ongoing need for critical reflection and care in interpreting outputs generated by the software, ensuring a rigorous and transparent approach to qualitative analysis. Nevertheless, this study has provided important information on the sustainable practices adopted by managers in the hospitality sector and how these practices are related to the macroeconomic situation. Thus, it is suggested that future research explore the topic with a larger number of participants and use different methods to gain a more complete understanding of the challenges faced by managers in adopting sustainable practices.

It is recommended that future research should address specific issues, such as managers' adaptation strategies to macroeconomic changes, and investigate the relationship between sustainable practices and the financial performance of tourism sector firms. It would also be interesting to study tourists' perspectives on the adoption of sustainable practices by tourism sector companies and how this affects their travel decisions.

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## APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix 1: Percentage of encoded code

	Frequency v	Percentage	Percentage (valid)
Sustainable practices	124	17,1	17,1
Impacts of the risk factors	89	12,3	12,3
Tourism impacts	65	9,0	9,0
Tourist offer	63	8,7	8,7
Impacts of the risk factors \Macroeconomic factors	50	6,9	6,9
Tourism impacts\Negative	48	6,6	6,6
Impacts of the risk factors \Management processes	40	5,5	5,5
Sustainable practices\Social	38	5,2	5,2
Sustainable practices\Environmental	36	5,0	5,0
Tourist offer\Tourism development strategies	29	4,0	4,0
Sustainable practices\Difficulties in applying STD	29	4,0	4,0
Tourism impacts\Positive	29	4,0	4,0
Sustainable practices\Cultural	27	3,7	3,7
Tourist offer\Infrastructures	20	2,8	2,8
Impacts of the risk factors \Lessons learnt	17	2,3	2,3
Tourist offer\Accessibilities	8	1,1	1,1
Tourist offer\Valuation of heritage	8	1,1	1,1
Tourist offer\HR	6	0,8	0,8
TOTAL (valid)	726	100,0	100,0
Missing	0	0,0	
TOTAL	726	100,0	

## Appendix 2: Interview script

## SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (TOURIST ENTERPRISE OR LOCAL ACCOMMODATION)

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1. Does your accommodation adopt sustainable management practices? If yes, can you tell me about your main motivations for adopting these practices?
  - a. What are the main constraints?



### Environmental

1. Does your accommodation have a formal sustainable management policy?
2. Does the accommodation have goals regarding the reduction of natural resource consumption? If yes, can you elaborate on them?
3. Do you employ practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Which ones?
4. Do you have an organizational policy that promotes the use of renewable energy? How?
5. Is the architecture of your property integrated into the urban landscape?
6. Does the accommodation have environmental sustainability certification?

### Social

1. Does your employment policy favor the local community and provide an equal structure, regardless of beliefs, genders, ethnicities, and sexual orientations?
2. Do you often support local projects? (e.g., in partnership with NGOs or the municipality on the preservation and restoration of natural and material heritage; collaboration on research with the academic community; involvement in projects with the local community).
3. Do you believe that the opinion of the local community is considered regarding organizational expansion and growth processes that affect their quality of life?

### Cultural

1. Do you usually value, preserve, and promote cultural issues and the identity of this tourist destination?
2. In your activity, do you seek to respect the beliefs and traditions of visitors? Do you consult the local community whenever you offer products and services based on their culture, considering authenticity-related issues?
3. Do you provide customers with information about local culture and heritage, adequately explaining issues related to representativity, symbolism, and behaviors?

## IV. IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON SPACE MANAGEMENT.

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1. How is your company being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? What measures are being taken to contain its effects? What consequences do you expect as a result of this pandemic (short and long term)?
2. What measures are being implemented in your organization to overcome the crisis (in terms of daily work reorganization, use of virtual tools, economic plans, creation of digital content, and alternative program delivery, etc.)?
3. In your opinion, what can local accommodation learn from this crisis?
4. Besides the COVID-19 pandemic, what other external factors (such as economic crises, war, climate change, seasonality, etc.) do you consider have affected your organization? In what ways?