

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER THESIS

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ENTREPRENEURIAL
OPPORTUNITY IN GREEN SOLUTIONS FOR HOSPITALITY AND
SERVICE TRAINING**

Ljubljana, 2025

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GEIT - Global Eco-Tourism Network

EPA - Environmental Protection Agency

HEI - Hospitality Education Institutions

GTBS - Green Tourism Business Scheme

UNWTO - The World Tourism Organization

BMC - Business Model Canvas

HPI - Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry

OJT - On-the-Job Training

OFJT - Off-the-Job Training

CCT - Cross-Cultural Training

RevPAR - Revenue per Available Room

ESG - Environmental, Social, and Governance

ISO 14001 – International Organization for Standardization, Environmental Management System

GZS - Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia

TGZS - Tourism and Hospitality Chamber of Slovenia

1 INTRODUCTION

The hospitality sector plays a crucial role in the Slovenian economy, significantly impacting gross domestic product (GDP), employment levels, and international tourism revenue. In 2022, direct tourism GDP accounted for 5.0% of Slovenia's total GDP, reflecting recovery after COVID-19 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2025a). Despite its economic significance, the industry encounters ongoing challenges, including elevated employee turnover rates, variations in service quality, rising operational expenses, and the imperative for sustainable business practices.

Additionally, the workforce within the hospitality sector faces substantial challenges regarding retention and training. As of 2023, the tourism industry in Slovenia employed approximately 70,000 individuals; however, it continues to experience chronic staff turnover attributed to factors such as low wages, seasonal job fluctuations, and insufficient opportunities for professional development (Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, 2022). The existing education system currently fulfils merely 10–20% of the annual workforce requirements, resulting in a considerable skills gap (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2025). Without targeted training programs focused on service excellence, cross-cultural communication, and sustainability best practices, organizations risk experiencing diminished customer satisfaction and competitiveness.

One of the most pressing challenges facing the hospitality industry is high employee turnover, a global issue linked to demanding working conditions, inadequate compensation, and the prevalence of seasonal employment (Baum, 2018; Robinson et al., 2019). In Slovenia, company evidence shows high turnover in hospitality; for example, Sava Turizem reported 255 employee departures and 231 new hires in 2023 and explicitly described turnover as high. (Sava Turizem d. d., 2024)

In addition, the consistency of service quality poses a recurring challenge, as frequent staff turnover contributes to variations in customer experience and necessitates ongoing investment in training (Kusluvan et al., 2010). Given that service quality is a critical factor influencing customer satisfaction and overall business performance, hospitality enterprises must adopt effective human resource management strategies to address these inconsistencies (Ladhari, 2009).

Rising operational costs present another significant concern, driven by increasing wages, inflationary pressures, and the need for investments in digitalization and sustainability (Jones, et al., 2016). Many hospitality businesses struggle to maintain cost efficiency while upholding high service standards, particularly in the context of post-pandemic recovery initiatives (Sigala, 2020).

In recent years, there has been a global shift towards eco-friendly tourism, with consumers increasingly prioritizing sustainable accommodations and services. The Slovenian Tourism

Strategy for 2022–2028 places a strong emphasis on sustainability and innovation, aiming to reduce the sector's carbon footprint per overnight stay by 33% and increase tourism revenue to EUR 3.9 billion (Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, 2022). Moreover, the demand for sustainable business practices is intensifying as travelers seek eco-conscious travel and lodging options (Font et al., 2021). Consequently, hotels and restaurants face mounting pressure to adopt green initiatives such as waste reduction, energy efficiency improvements, and the sourcing of sustainable products (Mihalič et al., 2012a). While these initiatives promote environmental responsibility, they concurrently introduce financial and operational challenges as businesses navigate new regulations and consumer preferences (Hall, et al., 2016).

With the availability of hospitality consulting services, business owners in this sector can optimize their operations and establish sustainable business models that contribute to combating climate change, aligning with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (Hassanien et al., 2019).

By aligning with Slovenia's national strategy for sustainable tourism, this research aims to foster the development of a more competitive, environmentally conscious, and service-oriented hospitality industry, thereby ensuring long-term viability in an increasingly dynamic global market. This master's thesis will explore the viability of a hospitality consulting firm named "Flextelligent," which will focus on reducing waste, optimizing resource utilization, promoting sustainability practices, enhancing service training, lowering employee turnover rates, refining communication skills, and fostering cross-cultural awareness in the hospitality industry.

The goals of the master's thesis are:

- to identify the reasons for high worker turnover in the hospitality business in Slovenia;
- to research the sustainability trends in the hospitality industry and how Slovenian companies adapt to these trends;
- to investigate the demand for education in the service, food, and beverage sectors.

The research questions that formed the basis of my master's thesis are the following:

- What are the sustainability trends in the hospitality industry?
- How are Slovenian companies in the hospitality industry adapting to sustainability trends in this industry?
- Is the entrepreneurial opportunity of the consulting company "Flextelligent", which would provide eco-innovation and service staff training in the hospitality industry, desirable, feasible and viable?
- What are the reasons for high worker turnover in the hospitality business in Slovenia?
- What is the demand for education in service, food and beverage sectors?

The theoretical part of the master's thesis was developed using methods of description, compilation, and comparison of secondary data from domestic and international academic sources and industry reports. The empirical part was conducted using qualitative methods. Primary data were collected through fifteen semi-structured interviews with professionals from the Slovenian hospitality sector. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using deductive thematic analysis. Secondary data supported the theoretical framework and helped guide the coding structure. The thesis is structured into six chapters, beginning with the introduction and followed by chapters on business opportunity development, methodological design, empirical findings, discussion, and conclusion.

2 DEVELOPING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IN HOSPITALITY CONSULTANCY

2.1 Definition of Green Hospitality Business

According to research by Isaak, (2002), the early signs of green entrepreneurship can be traced back to the 1960s when the developed and Western world first recognized the negative impacts of industrialization. This recognition led to the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), whose primary goal was identifying the root causes of environmental degradation. While the concept of green entrepreneurship gained some attention during this time, it was in the 1990s that it genuinely gained mass recognition and popularity due to its focus on environmental sustainability. Coined by Berle in 1991, the concept of green entrepreneurship continues to evolve, with a need for greater clarity around the key concepts that distinguish green entrepreneurs from non-green entrepreneurs.

Specialized literature widely recognizes the positive impact of entrepreneurship, with applications in various fields, such as green and social entrepreneurship. Economic development, climate change, environmental health, and tourism are all interrelated topics. Recently, there has been an increased awareness of the impact of economic sectors, mainly tourism, on the environment. Future generations require adopting sustainable practices in the green hospitality industry, leading to a growing need to find and implement practical solutions, such as legislation and new technologies. Scientists and world leaders prioritize addressing climate change, global warming, and other environmental concerns, such as access to clean water, overcrowding, and non-biodegradable waste disposal. Governments are taking urgent measures to adopt new regulations to protect the environment, which is becoming increasingly necessary. These regulations will impact energy-intensive sectors, those releasing harmful or poisonous substances, and other areas of economic activity, including tourism. We expect authorities worldwide to make environmental legislation more stringent and enforce it strictly (Nita, 2019).

As consumers become increasingly aware of the environmental impact of hospitality operations, there has been a surge in demand for eco-friendly services. In response, many organizations have adopted sustainability objectives, implemented ecological management, and innovated green services to meet societal expectations and gain a competitive advantage (Lin & Chen, 2018).

At an organizational level, having a green entrepreneurial orientation is a helpful resource for employees. This resource helps develop eco-friendly services, which adds to the organization's resource pool. By doing so, the organization can contribute towards promoting environmentally friendly practices. To achieve a sustainable competitive edge, companies must create and expand their resource pool to adapt to dynamic environments through the organization's dynamic capabilities. These capabilities refer to an organization's ability to integrate resources and processes, identify threats and opportunities, and modify its resource base to address issues and make market-driven decisions promptly. (Luu, 2022).

The tourism industry has rapidly adopted global environmental management systems and practices, thanks to the efforts of the Global Eco-Tourism Network (GEiT). These practices offer a range of advantages for tourism professionals, such as improving operational efficiency and remaining competitive during economic challenges. In addition, they encourage employees to reduce resource consumption and enhance the company's reputation and image by promoting eco-friendly concepts. Furthermore, participating in green practices can help businesses acquire new abilities and skills, which can be crucial for long-term success. However, it is essential to note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to pursuing a green strategy, and it is vital to assess the economic, ecological, and ethical suitability of these practices before implementing them. When implementing green practices, it is crucial to consider their suitability within the specific context. One should carefully select the best-fitting green practices for implementation in the given context. This way, tourism professionals can make informed decisions that will benefit their business, the environment, and the community (Alonso-Almeida & Álvarez-Gil, 2018).

2.2 Motives for Starting a Business in the Green Hospitality Industry

There are several pressing environmental challenges facing humanity today. These include issues such as global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer, air pollution on a worldwide scale, and the over-consumption of non-renewable resources. The exponential growth of the global population puts greater demands on our dwindling resource base, causing these problems. Many businesses are taking steps to "green" their practices in response to a variety of factors, including consumer pressure, the benefits of improved efficiency, regulatory compliance, and reduced insurance costs. Some forward-thinking companies leverage environmental concerns to improve operations, boost their corporate image, create new products and opportunities, and gain a competitive advantage (Chang & Wong, 2006).

The article by Tzschentke, et al. (2004) delves into the reasons behind adopting environmental practices in the hospitality and tourism industry. The study, which used participative, semi-structured interviews, aimed to understand the factors involved. These interviews covered various aspects of the process, such as why businesses go green, what motivates them to participate, what benefits and drawbacks they perceive, and how stakeholders respond. The authors chose businesses from the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS), a significant environmental accreditation scheme explicitly tailored to hospitality and tourism businesses, as the sampling frame. This scheme includes many smaller-sized and independently owned operations, making it a crucial part of the research. The sample consisted of 30 owner-managers of lodging operations in Scotland, obtained by identifying independently owned serviced accommodation establishments from the GTBS members' list. The establishments visited were primarily small hotels, followed by guesthouses, bed and breakfast operations, hotels, and a restaurant with rooms. Scotland's regions were represented comprehensively in the sample, ensuring geographical spread. The study results suggest that businesses adopt environmental practices to increase operational efficiency and reduce costs. It is important to note that this adoption was not an overnight change but a gradual process in most cases, often aided by replacement or upgrading needs. This gradual approach highlights the practicality and feasibility of adopting environmental measures. Several factors identified as catalysts have led to higher running costs. Recognition was another factor influencing the decision, as businesses with an environmental record saw the award as acknowledging their commitment. In contrast, those without prior involvement saw it as an opportunity to contribute. The last but most crucial decisional factor was that respondents fundamentally agreed with the scheme's principles, as most shared a concern for the environment and had been environmentally active before joining the scheme.

The emergence of green entrepreneurship can be traced to the heightened awareness of environmental issues that began to take shape in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, both governmental entities and the corporate sector started to recognize the long-term repercussions of industrialization on the environment. The establishment of significant environmental regulations, such as the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act in the United States, laid the groundwork for corporate accountability and the adoption of sustainable business practices (Hall et al., 2016).

In response to these escalating concerns, the hospitality and tourism sectors began to integrate environmentally friendly initiatives, although this transition occurred more gradually compared to other industries. According to Font et al. (2021), numerous businesses initiated sustainability measures but were often reticent to publicize these efforts due to apprehensions regarding consumer skepticism, a phenomenon referred to as "greenhushing." Notwithstanding this cautious approach, the emphasis on sustainability within tourism has increasingly gained momentum, with a growing number of entrepreneurs striving to reconcile economic viability with environmental responsibility.

The notion of ecopreneurship, characterized as environmentally responsible entrepreneurship, gained broader recognition in the 1990s. Gössling et al. (2011) contend that sustainable business models within the tourism sector can confer competitive advantages by appealing to environmentally aware consumers while simultaneously lowering operational costs through improved energy efficiency and effective waste management strategies.

In order to move forward and become more environmentally responsible, the hotel industry needs to address several barriers: a lack of communication, resolving legislative issues, adapting to business culture, and ensuring cohesive information. We must overcome all obstacles. First, there is a need for better communication and best practices to be shared. Environmentally mature organizations must collaborate with small and medium-sized organizations to advance the agenda and demonstrate practical, how-to examples of good practice. Second, there needs to be a top-down approach to legislation towards environmental measures. Canada is unique in the context of environmental commitment in the hotel industry. Hotel managers and operators should adopt a new mindset towards sustainable business practices. They should understand that implementing practical, easy, and cost-effective measures can reduce environmental impacts while providing a return on investment in many forms. Third, due to the complex and fragmented nature of the accommodation industry, characterized by diverse ownership structures, sizes, clientele, locations, and stakeholder influences, a strategy of information sharing that identifies best practices and benefits to the Canadian hotel industry is necessary to bridge the gap between attitude and action. This gap can only be closed through collective action, which can be encouraged by sharing best practices and cost-benefit analyses. When considering environmental practices, the hotel industry is still supply-driven rather than demand-led. Great things are achieved by working collectively and sharing best practices of the benefits of ecological commitment. The hotel industry must move towards action, not only to preserve and protect but also to ensure the future viability and growth of this industry (Graci & Dodds, 2008).

2.3 The Importance of Hospitality Education

Hospitality education plays a vital role in preparing individuals for quality jobs within the rapidly developing hospitality industry. It enables students to acquire fundamental knowledge and hands-on skills necessary for adapting to evolving industry needs.

The Slovenian hospitality sector exhibits significant deficiencies in the qualifications and capabilities of its workforce. As of recent assessments, the employee demographics indicate that 11% possess only primary education, while 73% have attained secondary education, and 16% hold higher or university-level degrees. Notably, the accommodation segment exhibits

a higher proportion of university-educated employees, at 27%. Furthermore, the workforce is predominantly female, comprising 57.9% of total employees, with an average age of 41, reflecting an upward trend from 39 years in 2015. In response to workforce shortages in the domestic labor market, employers are increasingly employing secondary school and university students alongside foreign workers. However, this approach is undertaken without a strategic investment in enhancing their competencies and skills, which is essential for fulfilling the professional requirements within the tourism and hospitality sector. (Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, 2022).

A core feature of hospitality education is that it should be flexible and innovative in addressing student requirements. With the rapid change in technology and the diversity of consumer tastes, education courses need constant adaptation. Adeyinka-Ojo et al. (2020) state that the incorporation of digital skills with employability skills within hospitality courses is critical for preparing graduates properly for success in the modern era of the digital world.

Furthermore, the quality of hospitality education is determined by the relationship between governmental regulations and the pedagogical practices utilized by educational institutions. Based on O'Mahony (2015), while regulatory bodies are responsible for setting education standards, education bodies must align these standards with practice-led education to line up with industry requirements. Achieving this balance helps ensure that the graduates are well-grounded with theoretical knowledge coupled with the capability to practice the knowledge within the workplace.

An attempt has been made in the article by Morrison and O'Gorman (2008) to capture the essence of hospitality studies. A preliminary definition proposes that hospitality is warmly welcoming guests or strangers from diverse backgrounds and cultures into one's home space, providing them with food and temporary lodging in a kind and generous manner, socially, charitably, or commercially. This pluralistic and critical analysis can yield significant intellectual gains, as demonstrated by drawing on the historical means of inquiry, such as St. Benedict's Rule from the sixth century. St. Benedict codified the provision of hospitality within the monastic guesthouse and emphasized the importance of warmly receiving unexpected guests and travelers.

Hospitality education is a field that combines business management and social behavioral science. This education aims to prepare students for the industry through hands-on learning that gives them practical knowledge. The faculty should strike a balance between theory and practice, encouraging students to engage in both abstract thinking and practical application. Universities have many stakeholders, and faculty is vital to their success. However, only some studies have examined faculty intentions in higher education institutions, especially in hospitality management education. Behavioral intentions are essential because they relate to faculty retention, which affects the quality of service provided by the institution. Faculty

satisfaction is crucial to ensure superior service quality and satisfy other stakeholders, such as students and industry recruiters. Administrators of higher education institutions must adopt a customer-centric strategy to attract and retain quality faculty (Ghosh et al., 2023).

The partnership between learning institutions and industry bodies is a basic model that undervalues hospitality education. Griffin (2021) emphasizes the significance of relationships between industry players and teaching institutions in the development of curricula that reflect the latest trends and industry needs. This collaboration makes it possible to develop integrated programs that are responsive to the interests of students and the needs of the market.

Additionally, hospitality education plays a key role in advancing both the professional and personal development of students through experiential learning. Internships and practical training enable students to practice theoretical concepts in actual contexts, thereby sharpening their critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities. This experiential approach not only improves the learning experience but also boosts the employability of graduates.

Hospitality education enables individuals to learn about the work they are going to perform. It began with St. Benedict's Rule of the sixth century. The rule centered upon good management, the treatment of the guest with dignity, and good service, the valuable principles that are vital in hospitality courses now (Morrison & O'Gorman, 2008). The early principles are the foundations of hospitality courses, enabling students to develop good work ethics and practical skills. With the incorporation of flexibility, good management, business partnerships, and practice learning, schools ensure that the graduates are well-equipped with the skills and knowledge they require to impact the workplace effectively.

2.4 Business Education in Service Training

Entrepreneurship is more than a trend; it is a transformative catalyst for strategic initiatives within universities, particularly in nurturing leadership that fosters global innovation. The concept of "entrepreatality", which stands for entrepreneurship education in the hospitality industry (Olsen & Mykletun, 2012), exemplifies this transformative potential, especially within entrepreneurship education in the hospitality industry. It underscores the strategic allocation of resources, a key role of entrepretality, to augment customer service value. Entrepreatality is a fusion of "entrepreneurship" and "hospitality", not just a theoretical concept but a practical tool for creating value through enhanced service offerings. This emphasis on strategic resource allocation distinguishes it from traditional views in hospitality education.

Furthermore, the foundational principles of situated learning and hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry are delved into in the book by Lave and Wenger (1991), which emphasizes the cultural and contextual dimensions of learning, often achieved through cognitive apprenticeships that allow learners to acquire knowledge through mentorship in applicable practice environments. This model aligns seamlessly with hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry (HPI); hermeneutics comes from the Greek verb “hermeneutic”, meaning to clarify, while phenomenology derives from the Greek term for “that which appears” or “phenomenon”. The model integrates interpretive and experiential methodologies to deepen our understanding of learning processes. In HPI, the notion of “truth in experience” posits that our individual experiences influence our comprehension of the world, evolving as we encounter new insights. This idea holds particular significance within entrepreneurship, where experiential learning is frequently a major driver of innovation and success.

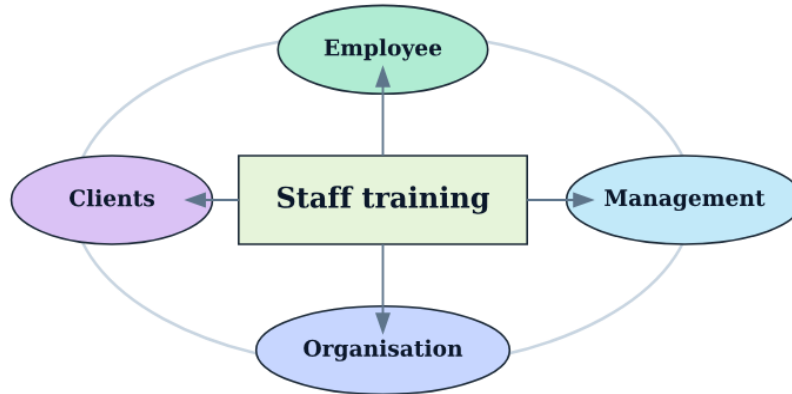
According to an article by O'Halloran (2024), entrepreneurial skills in the hospitality industry are also employed. The hospitality sector presents significant opportunities for “intrapreneurs”, employees who drive organizational change. Intrapreneurship empowers individuals to leverage their entrepreneurial skills, supported by their employer’s resources, to foster innovation and enhance products and services. A notable example of this is Hilton Hotels and Resorts, which has implemented the “LightStay” program, developed by employees to evaluate the environmental impact of its hotels and track sustainability efforts. Likewise, industry leaders such as Aramark have launched programs centered on intrapreneurship to cultivate innovative ideas that challenge conventional practices, underscoring the critical role of entrepreneurial skills in effecting change within established organizations.

In recent years, Slovenia has made notable strides in integrating practical training into its hospitality education system. Institutions like the “School Hotel Astoria” in Bled, “Restaurant Kult 316” in Ljubljana, and “Restaurant Sedem” in Maribor are excellent examples of combining theoretical instruction with real-world experience (source: [https://www. Efvet.org](https://www.Efvet.org)).

The benefits of staff training extend not only to employees but also to management, the organization, and clients (Figure 1). Through training, employees are introduced to their role in the business, contributing to increased job satisfaction, recognition, future self-development, and the achievement of professional and personal goals. During the training, management plays a crucial role in identifying employees' future development skills, knowledge, and potential for job promotion and recruitment. This emphasis on their role can make them feel empowered and responsible. The results of staff training include improved profitability and better economic performance of the organization, which is essential and provides the client with high service quality, leading to better customer satisfaction. However, these benefits depend on the training program's planning, preparation,

organization, implementation, and engagement of trainees (Nestoroska & Petrovska, 2014, p.443).

Figure 1: Staff Training Benefit Circle



Source: Adapted from Nestoroska & Petrovska (2014, p.443)

2.5 Hospitality Optimization

The concept of “hospitality” derives from Latin hospes (host/guest) via French into Middle English, and it frames the relationship between hosts and guests (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). “Optimization” comes from Latin optimus (“best”); the noun is attested in English from the mid-19th century to denote making something as efficient or effective as possible (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). In contemporary service work, hospitality as a relational practice between host and guest underpins performance in commercial settings (Lashley, 2015).

The hospitality industry is characterized by a high level of dynamism and service orientation, driven by a continuous demand for operational efficiency improvements, customer satisfaction, and financial performance, which in turn drives continuous improvement. Hospitality optimization involves leveraging strategic management techniques, sophisticated technological tools, and fact-based decision-making in a quest to maximize service delivery and reduce expenses (Jones et al., 2020). With increased competition and changing consumer behavior, companies in this field are forced to develop new approaches in an attempt to maintain a competitive edge (Kasavana, 2016).

Many factors drive hospitality optimization, with technology integration specifically including artificial intelligence (AI), big data analysis, the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, and augmented reality (AR) leading the field. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants enhance customer service capabilities, while big data enables personalized experiences and predictive forecasting (Tussyadiah, 2021). Cloud computing allows efficient information management and aids real-time analysis processes, enhancing

operational efficiency (Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2017). In addition, AR technology enables immersive reservation experiences, allowing guests to tour accommodations and amenities beforehand, creating high interactivity and uncertainty in bookings (Guttentag, 2019).

The implementation of sustainability programs is critical for long-term success in the hospitality industry. Adoption of environmentally friendly architectural forms, use of renewable sources of energy, and installation of efficient waste management programs allow companies to minimize their footprint in a manner that reduces expenses (Jones et al., 2020). In addition, a preference for sustainable tourism is growing, with vacationers increasingly valuing environmentally friendly accommodations and responsible tourism (Gössling & Peeters, 2015). Adoption of sustainable operations not only strengthens a positive brand image but also helps in complying with regulatory requirements and attaining long-term financial success (Han et al., 2019). By infusing operations with sustainability, hospitality companies can create value for both customers and stakeholders, enhancing resilience in a competitive environment.

The optimization of human resources forms a critical pillar in improving productivity and service standards in the hospitality industry. Employee training programs and continuous development not only contribute towards enhancing skills and adaptability but also towards developing a service environment with a culture of excellence and accountability (Baum, 2006). In his book *Excellence Wins*, Schulze (2019) identifies that investing in training and developing employees through a strong service culture yields exceptional experiences for guests and high performance for the organization. By investing in the development of workers, companies instill purpose and devotion, and in return, this transforms into high-service delivery and high customer satisfaction. In addition, creating a work environment with collaboration, innovation, and service orientation reduces turnover and raises workers' motivation and dedication (Dhar, 2015). Other studies confirm that companies with a strong service orientation have high job fulfilment and long-term employee retention, and in consequence, contribute to long-term business success (Kim et al., 2019).

Innovation in the guest experience forms a critical pillar in its own right. Deploying personalized service, digital concierge, and contactless check-in and check-out processes maximize both operational efficiency and customer fulfilment (Morosan & DeFranco, 2019). In addition, supply chain optimizations through such actions as automated stocking and vendor relations management minimize operational costs and maximize service homogeneity (Ivanov & Webster, 2019).

Performance measurement frameworks have an important role in evaluating hospitality companies' effectiveness. Cruz (2007) highlights that traditional budget frameworks, by rolling operational budgets into a single corporate entity, often lack responsiveness, receive infrequent updates, and build departmental silos, thereby having a detrimental impact on managerial responsiveness. In an attempt to counteract such impediments, companies

increasingly use flexible, information-intensive approaches. Rolling forecasts enable continuous financial planning, while balanced scorecards integrate financial and non-financial performance factors to align financial and strategic objectives. Benchmarking with external sources helps in offering critical information regarding standards in an industry, and continuous improvement and competitive positioning follow naturally in its wake. Implementing such techniques strengthens financial controls, promotes adaptability, and maximizes operational efficiency.

For long-term maximization, hospitality companies must implement an overall strategy that integrates technology, human assets, financial management, and innovation. As part of their objectives, hospitality professionals need to explore a variety of techniques and methodologies used to enhance efficiency, profitability, and guests' experiences in hospitality companies.

2.6 Eco-innovations and Service Training as Drivers of Performance in Hospitality

Eco-innovations and training within the service sector are essential strategies for enhancing operational efficiency, particularly regarding sustainability in the hospitality industry. Advances in ecological practices, such as implementing green technology (e.g., energy-efficient solutions and water-saving devices) and environmental processes (e.g., minimizing and reprocessing waste), are crucial for staying competitive. Comprehensive employee training is not just a necessity, but a key factor in maintaining our edge in the industry, keeping us all motivated and engaged.

This development is especially noteworthy in Slovenia, where a nationally coordinated approach to sustainable tourism built around the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism has earned international recognition. Slovenia was declared the world's first "Green Country" at the Global Green Destinations Day in Ljubljana in 2016 (Slovenia Tourist Board, 2016). The approach, implemented through the Green Scheme, was further recognized when the Slovenian Tourist Board won National Geographic's World Legacy Award for Destination Leadership at ITB Berlin 2017 (National Geographic Society, 2017; Slovenian Tourist Board, 2019).

The hospitality sector is concentrating on eco-innovations that enhance sustainability and its function. A comprehensive review by Sharma et al. (2020) between 1998 and 2018 revealed that the industry has made significant strides towards sustainable operations. The key findings of the research, which include the sector's focus on energy efficiency, reducing waste, and developing sustainable buildings, are indicated in Figure 2. This figure illustrates the various research areas concerning eco-innovation in the hospitality sector.

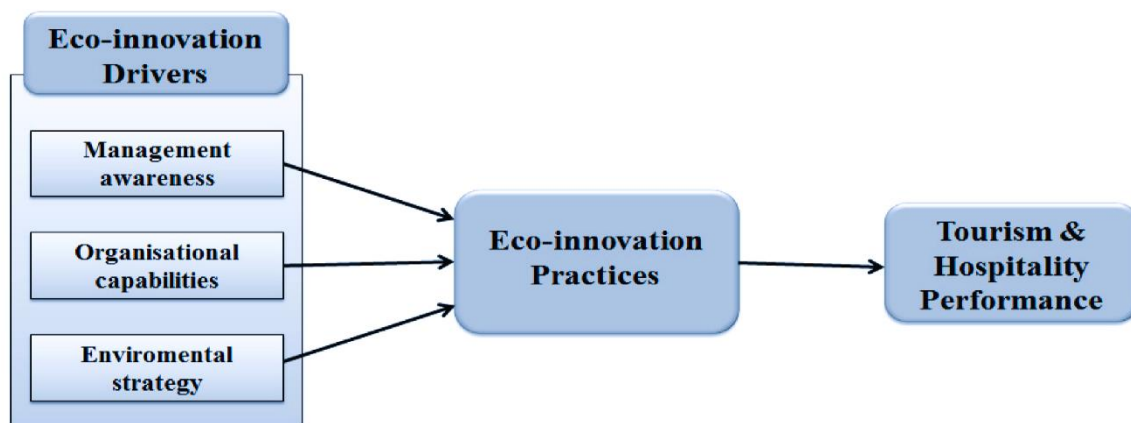
Figure 2: Research Domains under Eco-innovative Practices



Source: Sharma et al. (2020).

In a recent study, Ahmed et al. (2023) analyzed the drivers of eco-innovation and their influence on the performance of businesses in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Figure 3 highlights the significant impact of management consciousness and organizational abilities, coupled with the implementation of environmental practices, on the implementation of eco-innovative practices. The study also revealed that the successful implementation of the practices serves as a mediating factor between the identified drivers and general organizational performance, thus promoting improved efficiency and competitiveness.

Figure 3: The Conceptual Framework of Tourism/Hospitality Eco-innovation



Source: Ahmed et al. (2023).

According to Mihalič and Knežević Cvelbar (2016), the use of eco-innovations, including efficient use of energy, sophisticated techniques for dealing with waste, and renewable sources, not only reduce harmful impacts on the environment but can drive demand for ecological accommodations. This significant contribution can and must be a driving force for hospitality professionals to continue embracing such innovations. Staff training in the

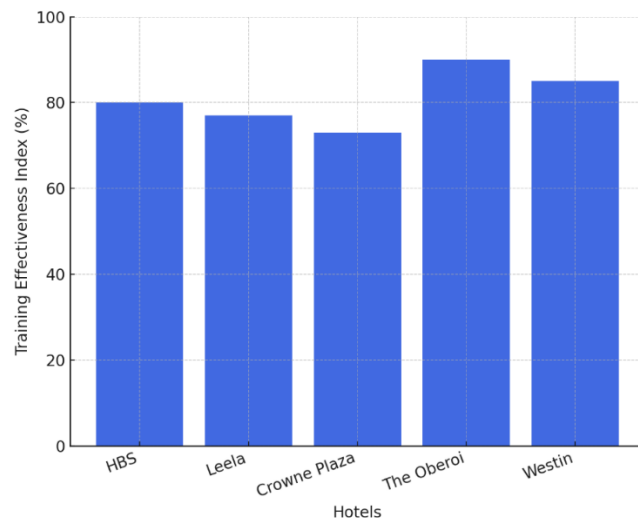
effective use and management of such innovations cannot be overemphasized. Potočník et al. (2020) emphasize that training in ecological awareness empowers workers with skills for efficient and effective operations in an entity. For instance, workers trained in proper disposal of residues, water conservation, and the use of energy-saving techniques will most likely apply such actions consistently. In addition, trained workers who can present and defend such ecological programs can effectively convey an entity's social and ecological objectives and, in turn, enhance guests' experiences and promote customer loyalty.

Service training plays a crucial role in driving outstanding performance in the hospitality industry. Horst Schulze, co-founder of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, believes that exceptional customer experiences are a result of an intense commitment to training, empowerment, and good leadership. The success of the Ritz-Carlton is closely tied to its unwavering commitment to service excellence, summarized in its guiding principle: "Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen." This principle suggests that the quest for service perfection demands diligent attention, care, and an absolute commitment to guest satisfaction. At its core is the idea of empowerment. Employees are trained to empower them to take initiative in their interactions with guests, thus enabling them to address and solve problems as they occur. This aspect is instrumental in driving guest satisfaction and building a sense of purpose and confidence among employees. Schulze also highlights the importance of ongoing training in driving continuous improvement. The pursuit of perfection is seen as a long-term journey; it requires consistent reinforcement, constructive and actionable feedback, and the ability to adapt to changing customer expectations. Adopting a mindset that values ongoing training enables organizations to maintain service delivery while driving innovation. Ongoing training fosters a proactive attitude and instils a culture of service excellence among employees. A continuous focus on training should prompt individuals to stay up-to-date and responsive to the changing needs of their clientele (Schulze, 2019).

Empirical research provides ample proof that systematic training programs play an essential role in improving organizational effectiveness and service standards in the hotel sector. Suhag (2017) revealed that results of research conducted in five-star hotels prove that systematic training is strongly correlated with improved workers' performance. Research has established that training programs have undergone extensive growth in recently established hotels, where emphasis is put on building competencies and strengthening capabilities.

Figure 4 in Suhag's (2017) work illustrates that on-the-job training significantly enhances workers' performance and service provision quality by enabling experience-based knowledge gain in genuine work environments.

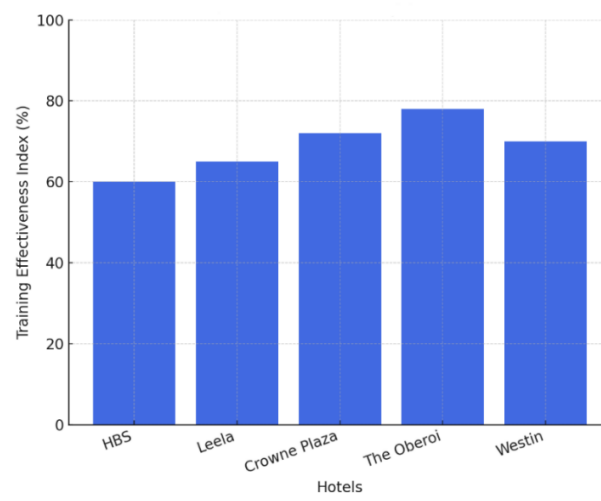
Figure 4: On-the-Job Training (OJT)



Source: Adapted from Suhag (2017).

Consistent with this viewpoint, Figure 5 reveals that off-job training is an essential part of building workers' confidence, motivational status, and problem-solving capacity. This training provides individuals with opportunities to develop skills in a structured learning environment, particularly in areas where job-related requirements are not explicitly defined.

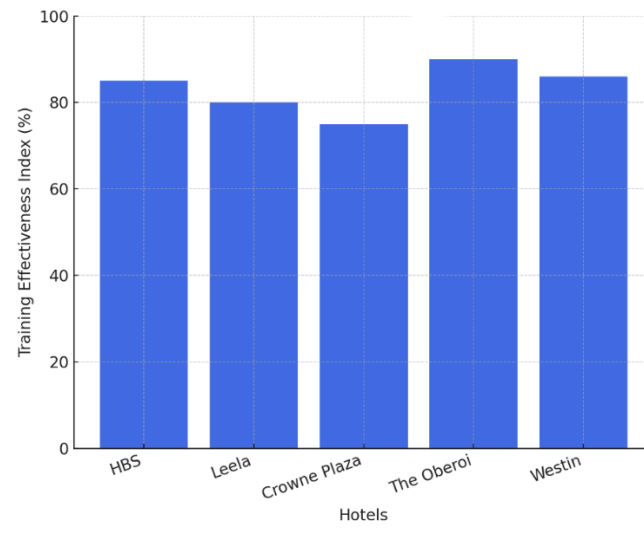
Figure 5: Off-the-Job Training (OFJT)



Source: Adapted from Suhag (2017).

Moreover, Figure 6 displays results regarding Cultural Competence Training, which has been regarded as an essential part in improving communication effectiveness among employees and international guests. Empirical tests have shown that cultural agility training plays a crucial role in enhancing guest satisfaction and fostering better teamwork among colleagues, underscoring the importance of budgeting for such programs in the hotel sector.

Figure 6: Cross-Cultural Training (CCT)



Source: Adapted from Suhag (2017).

Conversely, inadequate training programs lead to decreased employee engagement, decreased service standards, and increased potential for process inefficiencies. Additionally, the lack of continuous training programs and channels to acquire additional competencies has negative implications for service standards in the long run through increased employee turnover rates and decreased customer satisfaction.

According to Poulston (2008), a strong correlation between lack of training and common workplace maladies in hospitality environments was confirmed. In its report, lack of training is often translated into service faults, such as wrong orders, slow reaction, or poor resolution of guests' grievances, and negatively impacted guests' satisfaction levels. Such a scenario could result in reduced morale among workers and increased turnover. In contrast, effective training programs were seen to mitigate such concerns by imparting workers with competencies and information for effective performance in work.

Chang and Busser (2020) examined the concept 'thrive at work' among hospitality workers specifically, defining it as a state of workplace vibrancy and professional development opportunity. They emphasized ongoing development in creating such a state. According to them, workers who perceive many avenues for development and progression report increased job satisfaction and high levels of commitment. In addition, such a thriving state not only raises individual performance but also positively impacts overall performance at an organizational level. This underscores the importance of ongoing development in the hospitality sector, inspiring professionals to invest in their workers' growth and well-being.

An independent study conducted by Costen and Salazar (2011) evaluated the impact of well-designed training programs for hospitality workers regarding job satisfaction, commitment, and intention to leave jobs. These training programs included technical and interpersonal

skills, delivered through a range of approaches, such as individual and group training, to cover various participant learning styles. An essential finding of this study showed that such programs increased workers' job satisfaction and level of commitment, in addition to reducing their intention to leave jobs.

2.7 Business Potential of Sustainable Practices in Hospitality Consultancy

The shift towards sustainability has created numerous business opportunities in the hospitality sector, particularly in green consulting services. As environmental concerns increasingly shape consumer behavior and regulatory structures, companies are seeking specialized guidance on the integration of sustainable practices, reducing carbon footprints, and improving operational efficiency (Gössling & Hall, 2019). The hospitality sector gradually recognized the importance of implementing sustainable initiatives to mitigate adverse environmental impacts and meet the growing demand for environmentally friendly services. In addition to environmental benefits, sustainability initiatives also contribute to improving corporate reputation and operational performance.

Research conducted by Molina-Azorín et al. (2015) revealed that the integration of environmentally friendly practices positively influences hotels' performance. A crucial aspect of this transformation is to obtain green certifications and adhere to regulatory standards, which boost the demand for specialized consulting services. Many hospitality companies aspire to protect ecological labels such as Earth Check, Green Key, and ISO 14001, which require strict application processes and compliance assessments. Consultants play an essential role in navigating these complexities, ensuring that companies not only meet regulatory requirements but also leverage sustainability credentials for a competitive advantage. Empirical evidence suggests that high-quality sustainability certifications can lead to increased revenue, as indicated by the available room (REVPAR), and enhanced consumer confidence in green accommodations.

Consumer preferences further emphasize the need for hospitality companies to adopt sustainability measures. Studies indicate that more than 80% of guests prefer hotels displaying well-known green initiatives (Jiang & Wayne, 2020). Hotels that actively invest in sustainability not only comply with developing government regulations but also secure long-term economic benefits. For example, energy-efficient systems and conservation strategies have decreased power consumption by 20–30%, which significantly reduces utility expenses (Robinot & Gianneloni, 2010). These financial savings strengthen business incentives to integrate sustainability in hospitality operations.

Another central area where green consultancy services are essential is sustainable supply chain management. Hospitality businesses are rapidly incorporating moral sources, carbon emission reduction strategies, and fair trade principles to align with the environment, society, and governance (Sigala, 2014). ESG-focused companies are more attractive to investors,

forcing hospitality firms to adopt comprehensive sustainability strategies. Advisory services specializing in Green Supply Chain Management help businesses develop a structure that meets investor expectations, thereby increasing investor confidence. However, luxury hotels often face unique challenges in balancing sustainability with high-end service expectations. Research suggests that an innovative approach can align guest satisfaction with sustainability initiatives, allowing luxury brands to maintain the quality of service while reducing environmental impact (Robinot & Giannoloni, 2010).

Consumer behavior also plays an essential role in running sustainability efforts in the hospitality sector. Environmentally conscious guests are more inclined to select accommodations that prioritize sustainability. Han et al. (2011) found that guests' choices are affected by their environmental concerns and the perceived effectiveness of the hotel's green initiatives. This growing awareness has promoted the demand for sustainable benchmarks in tourism and hospitality, expecting more transparency regarding the environmental performance of businesses. Consumers help make decisions by promoting standardized sustainability metrics and industry-wide sustainability benchmarks (Font et al., 2012).

Environmental certification is an essential factor in strengthening sustainability commitments within the hospitality industry. Certificates such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and ISO 14001 provide an average of the environmental responsibility of the hotel. Studies highlight that certified hotels benefit from increased consumer trust, brand differentiation, and financial performance improvement (Jones et al., 2016). As the industry develops, the demand for green consultancy services is likely to expand, which will offer attractive opportunities for entrepreneurs in sustainability-centered advisory roles.

In summary, the increasing emphasis on sustainability in the hospitality industry has created a strong market for green consultancy services. From securing environmental certificates to optimizing energy efficiency and implementing ESG-related supply chains, consultants play an essential role in guiding businesses toward sustainable operations. As consumer demand and regulatory pressure increase, the role of green consultants will be more vital in shaping the hospitality sector.

3 BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS AND THE HOSPITALITY BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 Business Model Canvas and Opportunities in Slovenian Tourism Business

The Business Model Canvas is a strategic tool for entrepreneurs in the development, analysis, and refinement of a business idea. It provides a structured framework that breaks

down all key business components into nine blocks: customer segments, value propositions, channels, customer relationships, revenue streams, key resources, key activities, key partnerships, and cost structure (Osterwals & Pigneur's, 2010).

Within the Slovenian tourism business, the Business Model Canvas (BMC) serves as a dynamic instrument for identifying and capitalizing on opportunities in hospitality linked to eco-innovations and educational services. Analysis of indicators of development presented in the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology. (2022, p. 7) reveals many key objectives that indicate potential areas of development and future growth:

1. Increasing the total value added in the core tourism sector as a whole to EUR 1.3 billion per year (+43% compared to 2019), the value added per employee in the accommodation (hospitality) sector to almost EUR 60,000 (+64%) and in all tourism-related industries to an average of EUR 40,000 (+34%);
2. Increasing inflows from tourism travel exports to EUR 3.9 billion (+39%), in comparison to the year 2019;
3. Decreasing the GINI index value for measuring seasonality in Slovenian tourism from 0.27 in 2019 to 0.23 (–15%), i.e. below the EU average of 0.24 in 2019;
4. Increasing the average length of stay of tourists to 3 nights (+20%, taking into account touring guests staying in Slovenia in different destinations during the same visit);
5. Increasing the satisfaction of guests with Slovenia's range of tourism products and services;
6. Increasing the satisfaction of the Slovenian population with the development of tourism in tourist destinations;
7. Increasing the industry's inflow and employee satisfaction in the tourism industry through an increase in average wages throughout the industry (+35%);
8. Increasing the share of tourism and tourism-related industries in Slovenia's GDP (+ 1% percentage point)
9. Increasing the number of employees in tourism (+8 to10%);
10. Reducing the carbon footprint of Slovenian tourism per overnight stay from 39.9 to 30.3 kgCO₂eq/night (–33%);

11. Increasing the quality of public services, amenities, and the performance of tourist destinations;
12. Increasing the quality of management and public management structures of Slovenian tourism at all levels, to increase efficiency, the amount of tourist tax collected, funding for destination management, and inflows from tourism to the local and state budgets;
13. Improving performance indicators and the quality of management at the business level by increasing occupancy rates (+11% and 4% points respectively), and growing revenues and value-added per actual overnight stays (+64%).

The focus on efficiency, guest satisfaction, cost reduction, and revenue maximization through sustainable strategies will develop a compelling business case for hospitality entrepreneurs as the attention to green solutions continues to grow. All the integrations of eco-innovations and service training into business models will be in line with the Slovenian tourism strategy, underlining environmental responsibility and operational optimization.

3.2 Building Blocks of the Business Model Canvas

The Business Model Canvas (BMC), developed by Osterwalder and Pigneur in 2010, is a tool that enables companies to visualize, analyze, and plan their organizational model. It consists of nine key buildings that provide a structured strategy for understanding how a company produces, delivers, and captures value. In what follows, I provide a summary of the 9 building blocks of the Business proposed by Osterwalder & Pigneur's (2010).

Customer Segments

Contains the various categories of persons and other industry objectives for assistance. Companies must recognize their target clients based on their requirements, behavior, and characteristics. Understanding the preceding fragments entitles companies to manufacture their products and assist in generating specific demand, ultimately generating client satisfaction and loyalty.

Value Proposition

Describes the unique value that an enterprise brings to its consumers. Explaining how, in comparison with rivals, the industry solves customer problems or meets customer needs better. Article novelty, superior support, cost reduction, ease of use, or natural resilience may be included in this category. The value proposition should distinguish the company from its rivals and provide a compelling reason for customers to choose the company's product.

Channels

Indicate how a company delivers its value proposition to its customer segments. Such channels may include both direct and indirect channels (such as retail sales, enterprise websites, and online channels) and indirect channels (such as distributors, alliances, and retail partnerships). To ensure a seamless transition from understanding to purchase and subsequent purchase, establishments must optimize these channels for performance and customer satisfaction.

Customer Relationships

Define how a company interacts with its customers to build loyalty and long-term engagement. This can range from personal assistance and dedicated account management to automated services and self-service portals. Establishing strong customer relationships ensures retention, enhances brand reputation, and drives repeat business.

Revenue Streams

Outline how a business generates income from its customer segments. This includes direct sales, subscription models, licensing fees, advertising revenue, or commission-based earnings. A well-defined revenue model ensures the sustainability and profitability of the business while allowing flexibility to adapt to market changes.

Key Resources

These are the essential assets required for a business to operate effectively. These resources can be physical (equipment, facilities), intellectual (brand, patents, proprietary knowledge), human (skilled employees, partnerships), or financial (investment capital, funding). Identifying and leveraging key resources strategically enables a company to maintain a competitive advantage.

Key Activities

These are the core operations that a business must perform to deliver its value proposition. These activities can include production, service delivery, research and development, marketing, or customer support. Aligning key activities with business objectives ensures operational efficiency and value creation.

Key Partnerships

Collaborate with external organizations to optimize operations, reduce risk, or access additional resources. Partnerships may include strategic alliances, supplier agreements, joint

ventures, or collaborations with regulatory bodies. Establishing strong partnerships allows businesses to expand their capabilities and improve service offerings.

Cost Structure

Represents the significant expenses involved in running a business. These can be categorized into fixed costs (rent, salaries, infrastructure) and variable costs (raw materials, marketing expenses, commission payments). Businesses must balance cost efficiency with value creation to maintain profitability while delivering high-quality products and services.

3.3 Lean Start-Up and Business Opportunities

The Lean Start-Up methodology, introduced by Eric Ries in 2011, provides a structured way to create new businesses and products while minimizing risk. It focuses on rapid prototyping, iterative learning, and validating customer needs, making it particularly useful in fast-paced industries like hospitality. Unlike traditional business models that often depend on extensive planning and significant initial investments, the Lean Start-Up approach emphasizes experimentation and flexibility.

A key aspect of the Lean Start-Up is the Build-Measure-Learn cycle. This ongoing process encourages entrepreneurs to develop a Minimum Viable Product (MVP), gather real-world feedback from customers, and adjust their product or business model based on that information. By utilizing validated learning, businesses can avoid expensive mistakes and make informed decisions that reflect market demand.

The Lean methodology also highlights the importance of being willing to pivot when necessary. If an initial idea does not meet customer expectations, businesses should be prepared to make strategic adjustments, whether that means changing pricing, altering features, or targeting a different market segment. This flexibility improves a start-up's ability to adapt to changing consumer preferences and industry trends, thereby boosting its chances of success.

Integrating Lean Start-Up principles into entrepreneurial projects encourages innovation, cost-effectiveness, and long-term viability. By testing ideas early and making quick adjustments, businesses can lower their failure rates and enhance their potential for successful scaling in competitive markets. In summary, the Lean Start-Up methodology fosters rapid experimentation, validated learning, and iterative development to reduce risks and improve efficiency, ensuring that businesses align their offerings with real market needs, especially in rapidly changing sectors like hospitality.

4 DEVELOPMENT OF BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IN HOSPITALITY CONSULTING

This section presents the development of the identified business opportunity through an empirical investigation. It begins by stating the research purpose, objectives, and the core industry problem being addressed. It then describes the research methods used, including primary data collection via interviews and secondary data review. It also specifies the scope and delimitations of the study, focusing on Slovenian hotels and restaurants in the midscale and upscale segments. Finally, it applies the Business Model Canvas framework to synthesize the findings into a comprehensive business model for the proposed hospitality consulting venture.

4.1 Research Methods

To explore the objectives outlined and guide the development of the business model, a qualitative research design was adopted. The study incorporated primary data collection through semi-structured interviews with industry stakeholders, and secondary data collection through a literature review and analysis of industry reports. This combined approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of both the practical, real-world challenges faced by hospitality businesses and the broader context and best practices documented in existing studies. The primary research provided direct insights into the perceptions, needs, and difficulties encountered by hospitality practitioners in Slovenia. Conversely, the secondary research provided background data and theoretical frameworks that supported the consulting opportunity. Combining primary and secondary sources enabled triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings.

4.1.1 Description of Primary Resource Collection Methods

The master's thesis explores the viewpoints of leading stakeholders in Slovenia's hospitality industry through fourteen structured interviews with fifteen industry experts (Table 1). I interviewed Interviewees 4 and 5 (INT4 and INT5) jointly in a single session due to their collaborative operational context and interdependent roles. I used purposive sampling to select hotel managers, hostel managers, sustainability coordinators, reservation managers, commercial directors, assistant sales directors, restaurant owners, and other experienced practitioners. This method ensured that both frontline service providers and organizations responsible for sustainability certification shared their insights.

Table 1: Details of the Interviews Conducted

Interviewee		Assigned code	Gender	Age	Occupation
Interviewee 1		(INT1)	F	48	Commercial Director
Interviewee 2		(INT2)	F	33	Sales Executive
Interviewee 3		(INT3)	F	37	Marketing Manager
Interviewee 4 and 5		(INT4 and INT5)	F and M	47 and 50	Expert Associate & National Coordinator
Interviewee 6		(INT6)	M	36	Hotel Director
Interviewee 7		(INT7)	M	33	Sales and Revenue Manager
Interviewee 8		(INT8)	M	44	Hotel Director
Interviewee 9		(INT9)	M	33	Sales Consultant
Interviewee 10		(INT10)	F	37	Sales Consultant
Interviewee 11		(INT11)	M	44	Reservations Manager
Interviewee 12		(INT12)	M	44	Restaurant's Owner
Interviewee 13		(INT13)	M	41	Director of Sales & Marketing
Interviewee 14		(INT14)	M	45	Hotel Executive Director
Interviewee 15		(INT15)	F	28	Assistant Director of Sales & Marketing

Source: own work.

A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 2) was designed and utilized to fulfil the study's objectives. I analyzed the interview data using a deductive thematic analysis (Appendix 5). I selected this method because the research questions and the theoretical framework predefined the main thematic categories. The analysis sought evidence, perspectives, and variation within those predefined areas rather than the discovery of entirely new themes.

In the first phase, I familiarized myself with the material. I transcribed all recorded interviews verbatim and read the transcripts several times. At this stage, I highlighted significant statements and passages that aligned with the predefined themes.

In the second phase, I assigned a code to each meaningful segment across all questionnaire items and coded the data accordingly. To ensure clarity, I prepared a code legend that defines each code (Appendix 3). This table served as a quick reference and supported consistent interpretation.

In the third phase, I entered the codes into a matrix (Appendix 4). Using the code legend, I coded every interviewee from INT1 to INT15 for each question from Q1 to Q19 in the questionnaire (Appendix 2). The matrix presents the patterns that emerged across respondents and includes, for each question, the dominant code and its percentage across all interviewees.

In the fourth phase, I used the coded matrix to create clear summaries for each question from Q1 to Q19. I identified the main ideas, counted how often they appeared, and expressed these as percentages. I wrote concise descriptions that reflected the views of most interviewees and included less common opinions when they added value. I checked each summary against the transcripts and the code legend to ensure accuracy. I then presented the results (Appendix 5), showing the key patterns and the most frequent codes.

4.2.2 Description of Methods for Collecting Secondary Resources

The theoretical framework of the thesis was developed through the collection and analysis of secondary data using established academic research methods. I conducted a systematic review of relevant academic literature, including scientific articles, books, and empirical studies focusing on sustainability, staff training, and business development within the hospitality sector. Preference was given to recent publications to ensure the inclusion of up-to-date insights, while foundational works were used to reinforce the conceptual background.

In addition to academic sources, strategic documents, industry reports, and official publications from national and international institutions were analyzed. These documents provided valuable insights into current policy directions, institutional strategies, and sector-

specific challenges in the context of sustainable tourism and workforce development, both in Slovenia and the wider European framework.

To broaden the analytical scope, selected international case studies and comparative examples were included, offering perspectives on best practices and innovative approaches applied in other countries. This comparative dimension enabled a critical evaluation of how the Slovenian hospitality industry aligns with global trends. All collected materials were examined using qualitative content analysis, which allowed the extraction of key concepts and relevant findings that contributed to the development of the proposed business model and the interpretation of empirical interview results.

4.3 Business Model Canvas for the Hospitality Consulting Firm

Drawing on the research findings, this section applies the Business Model Canvas to the proposed consulting firm Flextelligent. The Business Model Canvas is a strategic framework comprising nine interrelated building blocks that describe how an organization intends to operate and succeed. Below, each sub-section corresponds to one of nine building blocks proposed by Osterwalder & Pigneur's (2010).

4.3.1 Customer Segments

Flextelligent will address several essential groups within the Slovenian hospitality sector:

- Small hospitality businesses include independent hotels, guesthouses, hostels, family-run restaurants, and cafes with fewer than fifty employees. These businesses often lack dedicated staff for sustainability or regular training. More than 85% of accommodation providers in Slovenia belong to this group, according to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2025b). Many managers find that obtaining eco-certifications, such as the Green Key or Slovenia Green certificate, is challenging due to the complexity of the bureaucratic process. INT1 described: “When we first obtained the Green Key certificate, we realized how much preparation and work is required; the process is by no means simple”. Flextelligent will assist these businesses by evaluating their resource utilization, enhancing waste management, and offering practical training to staff.
- Servers, bartenders, and other frontline service staff are also a significant group for professional development. Many of these employees do not receive regular formal training, despite being central to the guest experience. INT2 stated: “In many cases, it would help to have an external trainer with a particular reputation, as it brings the respect and attention needed”. Flextelligent will organize practical seminars and workshops to help servers and service staff strengthen their communication, customer care, and hospitality skills, ensuring they meet industry expectations.

- Mid-size and upscale properties, including boutique hotels and hotel chains, often face challenges in sustainability due to the demanding certification process and the need for external advice. Flextelligent, with its tailored sustainability plans and advanced training, will provide relief by helping these properties meet the highest standards in their operations. This support will not only enhance their sustainability but also alleviate the stress of managing larger projects.
- Industry organizations, such as regional tourism boards, destination management organizations, and hospitality associations, aim to enhance the overall performance of the sector. For example, the Slovenia Tourist Board's Green Accommodation program resulted in a 20% increase in certified providers after holding group workshops for multiple businesses (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2021). INT3 stated: "I see a very good connection with institutions like the Slovenian Tourist Board and Turizem Ljubljana, a consultancy can be the bridge between strategic goals and reality on the ground". Flextelligent will cooperate with these organizations to design and deliver educational sessions that share best practices and raise the quality of hospitality services across Slovenia.

4.3.2 Unique Value Offered

The research identifies several key areas where Flextelligent can provide unique and substantial value to hospitality businesses in Slovenia. These conclusions, drawn from the needs and priorities expressed by directors, managers, and owners during the interviews, underscore the relevance and expertise of Flextelligent in addressing the industry's challenges.

Sustainability as a Core Principle

The interviews reveal that many hospitality professionals face significant challenges in implementing sustainable practices. Participants frequently mention difficulties with eco-certification procedures, improvements in resource efficiency, and effective waste management. Small and medium-sized businesses, in particular, struggle due to limited time, personnel, and technical expertise. As per INT1: "At our first Green Key certificate the process is by no means simple". This feedback suggests a growing demand for structured consulting services, including sustainability audits, customized action plans, and on-site support, to help businesses achieve their environmental objectives.

Professionalism and Service Etiquette

Maintaining consistent, high-quality service emerges as a significant concern among participants. INT10 notes: "Coaching with real-life examples proves more effective than classroom lectures". Training programs may include role-play exercises, customized workshops, and targeted mentorship. These programs support staff in managing complaints, anticipating guest needs, and delivering service with proper etiquette and courtesy. INT2 stated: "External training by someone respected from outside the organization would be excellent and effective". The findings suggest a strong potential for hands-on training initiatives that enhance professional conduct across various hospitality roles.

The Importance of Culture in Hospitality

This research underscores the importance of cultural awareness in maintaining excellence in hospitality. INT12, a business owner with extensive experience in managing multiple restaurants, emphasizes that company culture has a fundamental influence on guest satisfaction and employee engagement. He emphasizes that employees internalize service values rather than merely following them superficially. As per INT2: "Greater consistency, fewer mistakes and higher guest satisfaction would also lead to higher staff satisfaction". This insight supports the development of educational seminars focused on guest culture, team values, and intercultural competence. INT3 noted: "When the company climate, relationships and culture are right, employees feel it and this is reflected in their interaction with guests and their performance". Training could enhance service quality, strengthen staff cohesion, and promote a unified organizational culture.

Gastronomic Excellence and Wine Education

Several interviewees identify expertise in wine and food pairing as a competitive advantage. They observe that guests increasingly expect carefully curated wine selections and knowledgeable service. According to INT6, offering high-quality wines at a favorable price-to-quality ratio enhances guest satisfaction and improves the hotel's reputation. These observations suggest demand for specialized seminars in wine education, food and wine pairing, and menu optimization. INT3 stated: "We invest in people, for example, sommelier courses, coffee trainings, competitions, interest is heard and supported". Such offerings could help hospitality businesses elevate their gastronomic profile.

The Central Role of Communication

Effective communication consistently emerges as a critical success factor. INT2 added: "I think communication is crucial". Many interviewees describe communication skills as essential for resolving guest issues, fostering teamwork, and ensuring excellent service. All 15 participants identify communication as one of the most critical competencies for

hospitality professionals. INT1 highlighted: “In tourism, effective communication skills are essential”. These findings indicate that future training modules should prioritize specific skills such as verbal and nonverbal communication, active listening, and emotional intelligence to improve guest interactions and internal collaboration.

Bridging the Skills Gap in the Industry

The research identifies a gap between formal education and the practical skills required in hospitality settings. INT4, INT6, and INT7 observe that academic programs provide foundational knowledge but often fail to prepare graduates for real-world demands. A Hotel Director (INT6) notes that onboarding programs and hands-on training have a significant impact on employee performance and retention. INT2 recognized: “Mentorship plays a key role, especially for new employees and those just entering the labor market”. Following, INT3 added: “Internal trainings, support from the hotel chain, and knowledge transfer from senior to junior colleagues are enabled”. Consequently, Flextelligent could develop mentorship programs, onboarding frameworks, and job simulations to assist new employees in transitioning effectively into the workforce and to raise industry-wide standards.

4.3.3 Sales Channels

Reaching potential clients in the Slovenian hospitality sector requires a multi-channel approach combining digital presence, personal relationships, and strategic partnerships. INT1 outlined: “We found that consultancy through a recommendation from another hotel is the most direct way to connect. Advertising alone is not enough, people want a recommendation or a concrete case study”. Flextelligent will work on the most effective channels to engage decision-makers such as hotel managers, restaurant owners, and tourism stakeholders, while building credibility through recognized industry networks. INT2 indicated: “I would not go for a state ‘recommendation’; better if it comes from a respected institution, for example, the University of Ljubljana, School of Economics and Business”.

Direct Networking and Industry Events

Personal contact and word-of-mouth recommendations remain essential in Slovenia’s hospitality community. Interviewees emphasized that successful businesses often grow through positive guest recommendations and professional referrals. INT 7 emphasized: “I would rather collaborate with a company that has been recommended by colleagues in my industry”. Flextelligent will actively participate in prominent local and regional events, including the annual Slovenian Tourism Conference organized by the Slovenian Tourist Board, and the Green Destination Congress, which focuses on sustainable tourism innovation. These events are not just gatherings, but unique opportunities to meet potential clients face-to-face, fostering a sense of connection and demonstrating Flextelligent’s

expertise through presentations, case studies, or mini-training sessions. Partnerships with local chambers of commerce, such as the GZS, will further expand access to business networks and connections, strengthening our ties with the local community.

Digital Advertising and Online Platforms

Given the growing importance of digital visibility, Flextelligent will maintain an enhanced website featuring detailed service descriptions, client testimonials, and case studies relevant to Slovenian hospitality businesses. Search engine optimization will target terms like “sustainability consulting Slovenia” and “hospitality training Ljubljana” ensuring our presence in the digital space. The firm will also use LinkedIn to connect with hotel executives and HR professionals. By joining relevant groups such as the Slovenian Hotel Managers Association or Sustainable Tourism Slovenia forums, we can tap into a wealth of industry knowledge, share our expertise, and build valuable connections. Facebook groups dedicated to Slovenian tourism and hospitality, like Tourism Professionals Slovenia, provide platforms for sharing expertise and engaging with practitioners. Content marketing, such as blogs or LinkedIn articles, demonstrates thought leadership. At the same time, targeted advertising campaigns on Google and LinkedIn reach decision-makers searching for consulting and training solutions, showcasing the power of digital marketing in reaching our audience.

Referrals and Word-of-Mouth

In Slovenia’s hospitality sector, word-of-mouth recommendations ensure significant influence. Industry leaders often emphasize that peer referrals frequently outweigh formal advertising in decision-making. Flextelligent will encourage satisfied clients to become advocates by requesting testimonials and permission to share success stories. Initial pilot projects or discounted workshops with influential businesses such as boutique hotels in Ljubljana or prominent restaurants in Maribor will serve as proof points. Positive outcomes from these engagements will generate further referrals, creating a multiplying effect. For instance, success stories such as reduced energy consumption or improved guest satisfaction at participating establishments are documented and communicated widely to build trust and attract new clients.

Partnership Channels

Strategic partnerships ensure a vital indirect sales channel. Collaborating with the Slovenian Tourist Board will enable Flextelligent to be featured in their sustainability and training programs, reaching a broad network of tourism operators. The firm could also partner with certification bodies, such as Green Key Slovenia or Slovenia Green, which frequently advise hotels and restaurants on meeting sustainability criteria. These organizations may refer businesses in need of expert assistance to Flextelligent, highlighting the strength of our

partnerships in expanding our reach. Engagements with educational institutions such as the Faculty of Tourism Studies (Turistica at the University of Primorska or Alma Mater Europaea) could include guest lectures or training sessions, introducing future hospitality managers to Flextelligent's services and building brand recognition early in their careers.

Traditional Media and Public Relations

Despite digital trends, traditional media continue to be influential in Slovenia. Flextelligent will distribute press releases and success stories to respected publications such as *Turizem in Gostinstvo* (Tourism and Hospitality Journal) and *Finance*, a leading Slovenian business newspaper. Features on groundbreaking projects, such as helping a client achieve Slovenia's first carbon-neutral certification or significantly improving service standards, will capture the attention of hospitality professionals and business leaders. Industry newsletters and local radio tourism programs can further extend reach. Favorable media coverage will reinforce Flextelligent's reputation as a trusted expert and generate inbound client inquiries.

4.3.4 Customer Relations

Flextelligent's approach to customer relationships centers on building long-term partnerships rather than one-off transactions. The nature of the service consulting and training inherently involves close collaboration with clients, and the aim is to become a trusted advisor to each hospitality business served. INT2 acknowledged: "I would prefer someone who truly guides and provides a framework, so you think for yourself, not someone who does everything along the path of least resistance". Key aspects of the customer relationship strategy include the following.

Personalized and Collaborative Engagement

From the first point of contact, the firm will adopt a personalized approach, seeking to understand the unique circumstances and goals of the client. Each client (be it a small family-run inn or a large city hotel) will receive a tailored proposal addressing their specific needs. For instance, a restaurant might need more help with staff service training and cost control, whereas a hotel might focus on obtaining a sustainability certificate and reducing energy use. During service delivery, the consultant will work on-site with client teams, effectively acting as an extension of their organization. This hands-on, side-by-side work fosters a sense of collaboration and trust. INT6 & INT8 highlighted that a consultant must not just hand over a plan, but also teach people how to carry out these processes in everyday operations. Thus, the consultant will engage with employees at all levels, from upper management to front-line staff, to coach them and win buy-in for changes. By involving employees in the process (through workshops, brainstorming sessions, and continuous feedback), the

relationship becomes one of co-creation rather than top-down instruction, increasing the likelihood that improvements will stick and the client will feel ownership of the outcomes.

Emphasis on Trust and Transparency

Hospitality businesses entrust consultants with sensitive aspects of their operations (like financial efficiency or staff performance issues), so maintaining confidentiality and integrity is important. Flextelligent will adhere to a professional code of ethics, ensuring clients data and information are handled carefully. Regular progress updates and clear communication will be provided so the client always knows what is being done. Setting realistic expectations at the outset is also essential for a healthy relationship. The consultant will jointly set achievable targets with the client and be transparent about the time and effort required to meet them. This approach addresses a concern some managers have: that a consultant might promise quick fixes or try to do everything themselves without integrating into the company. As per INT8: “It is crucial that, through consulting, the company's vision is instilled in practice among all employees, not just that the consultant delivers a report and disappears”. By aligning the consulting work with the client's vision and values (for example, if a hotel prides itself on friendly service or eco-friendliness, the consultant will reinforce those themes in all training content), the relationship is built on a foundation of shared goals.

Ongoing Support and Follow-up

Rather than concluding the relationship at the end of an initial project, Flextelligent will offer clients continued support options. This could take the form of follow-up check-ins at set intervals (for instance, three and six months after the main project) to monitor sustained progress, troubleshoot any setbacks, and advise on the next steps. For instance, if the firm helped a restaurant introduce a new waste reduction system and conduct staff training, a follow-up visit might review waste logs and retrain any new staff to ensure the practices remain in place. Such follow-ups demonstrate commitment to the client's success and provide additional value. Additionally, the firm may offer an ongoing newsletter or resource updates to former clients, sharing the latest best practices in hospitality sustainability and service management. This keeps the relationship warm and positions the firm as a continual resource. When clients see that the consultant is invested in their long-term success (not just a quick engagement), they are more likely to turn into repeat customers and recommend the service to others.

Adaptability to Client Feedback

The customer relationship will be managed with a high degree of responsiveness. The firm Flextelligent will solicit feedback from clients during and after projects, for example via informal conversations or a short satisfaction survey at project close. If a client expresses any dissatisfaction or new needs, the firm will act quickly to address them. Because

hospitality is a fast-paced environment, being reachable and responsive is key; if a hotel manager calls with an urgent question about an implementation (for instance, a sudden issue with a new procedure), the consultant will strive to be available and provide guidance promptly. This reliable support builds client confidence in the relationship.

Relationship Depth vs. Breadth

In its early stages, the firm will likely work with a limited number of clients at a time, which allows it to devote considerable attention to each. The intention is to cultivate deep relationships where the consultant is seen almost as an advisor on call. This could evolve into a retainer model for some clients, where Flextelligent provides periodic training updates or sustainability audits every year. For example, a hotel could retain the firm to deliver annual staff refresh training and update its sustainability action plan regularly. By embedding itself into clients' ongoing improvement cycles, the firm secures a steady partnership, and the client gains a reliable external "department" for innovation and training. This depth of engagement reflects the insight that hospitality success comes from continuous effort rather than one-time fixes, and it matches what INT10 described: "Lasting success requires persisting on the market long enough to build a reputation and a loyal base". An advice that applies to the consulting firm as well as to its clients.

4.3.5 Key Activities

Flextelligent will deliver measurable value by following a structured, hands-on consulting approach inspired by best practices from leading international firms. The activities encompass assessment, customized solution design, implementation support, and ongoing monitoring to ensure lasting improvements.

Consultative Assessments and Audits

Flextelligent will begin each client engagement with a comprehensive on-site assessment that combines sustainability and service quality audits. INT3 indicated: "It is always helpful to run a basic diagnosis first. Then an external person analyses the current state and then prepares a multi-phase improvement plan, ideally with support for certification that saves internal resources". This thorough approach, inspired by the best practices of Greenview (2025), will evaluate resource usage, waste management, procurement, and operational workflows. Benchmarking client performance against industry standards and eco-certification criteria will ensure a comprehensive understanding of the current state. Service quality audits will include direct observation and analysis of guest feedback to identify opportunities for improvement. This evidence-based approach will uncover quick wins and deeper inefficiencies, establishing a clear baseline for action.

Customized Solution Design

Following the assessment, Flextelligent develops bespoke action plans that integrate environmental and service improvements. Drawing on The Bench (2025), in our group's model, we design sustainability strategies in conjunction with practical training modules. For instance, we might install water-saving technologies in conjunction with staff conservation training or deliver communication workshops that incorporate role-play and real guest scenarios. Our consultants create user-friendly materials, including checklists and visual guides, to simplify adoption. Training focuses on experiential learning methods consistent with best practices in hospitality (Jones et al., 2016), ensuring the practicality of our solutions.

Implementation Support

Flextelligent actively supports implementation by working alongside client teams, reflecting the hands-on approach recommended by Actabl. (2025). Our approach includes physical setup assistance, in-service coaching, and real-time feedback to ensure the effective adoption and implementation of our solutions. We mentor staff individually and embed tracking tools to empower clients to sustain progress independently. This participatory approach addresses resistance and fosters ownership of new processes, demonstrating our commitment to success.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In line with the World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (2025) principles, Flextelligent will continuously monitor key performance indicators such as energy consumption, waste reduction, guest satisfaction, and staff retention. Data collection will involve utility tracking, mystery guest evaluations, and post-training assessments. Consultants will regularly analyze results and adjust strategies as needed to meet the objectives. Transparent reporting will build client trust and produce marketing case studies that demonstrate a return on investment (Mensah, 2006).

4.3.6 Key Resources

To deliver effective consulting and support, Flextelligent relies on five core resource categories: expertise and human capital, intellectual property and tools, professional relationships, digital infrastructure, and financial capital.

Expertise and Human Capital

The most excellent resource is the specialized knowledge and experience of Flextelligent's consultants. Includes expertise in hospitality operations, sustainability practices, and staff training. A deep understanding of frameworks such as Green Key or the Slovenian Green Scheme, combined with skills in curriculum design and adult education, allows Flextelligent to guide clients through both certification and workforce development. As the firm expands, adding specialists in culinary sustainability or cross-cultural training will broaden this resource base. During the startup phase, the founder's multidisciplinary expertise is crucial for delivering the full range of services.

Intellectual Property and Tools

Flextelligent will develop proprietary checklists, templates, training modules, and process guides to streamline its work. This toolkit grows with each project and includes resources such as a customized "Hospitality Green Assessment", service quality workshops, and a database of best practices. Digital tools, such as spreadsheet models for carbon calculations or training apps, support efficient service delivery and facilitate continuous improvement. These assets enable consultants to provide proven solutions and adapt rapidly to client needs.

Relationships and Network

A strong professional network is vital for delivering value and staying current with industry trends. Relationships with suppliers, sustainability experts, and organizations like the Slovenian Tourist Board, local chambers of commerce, and Green Key Slovenia, help Flextelligent offer referrals and tap into broader knowledge resources. Reputation and goodwill within the hospitality sector also enhance trust and credibility, supporting both service delivery and business growth.

Digital Infrastructure

Robust digital tools support daily operations and client engagement. A professional website acts as a marketing platform and resource hub. Learning management systems, presentation materials, and interactive e-learning tools enable practical virtual and in-person training. Reliable office equipment and specialized audit tools, such as energy meters, support fieldwork and project delivery.

Financial Resources

Sufficient financial capital is necessary to sustain early operations, fund travel, marketing, and professional development. Initial funding may come from personal savings, seed investment, or early revenue, supporting the consultant while building a client base. Long-

term financial stability allows for reinvestment in staff, technology, and knowledge development, ensuring the firm's ability to scale and deliver quality over time.

4.3.7 Key Partnerships

Partnerships in strategic terms will strengthen Flextelligent's ability to deliver effective consulting solutions, broaden its reach, and enhance its credibility within the Slovenian hospitality sector. These partnerships are not just essential for supporting service delivery, expanding influence, and increasing access to resources, but also for fostering mutually beneficial relationships that will ensure the success of all parties involved.

Tourism and Hospitality Institutions

Flextelligent will prioritize cooperation with organizations such as the Slovenian Tourist Board, the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport of Republic of Slovenia. These institutions actively promote sustainable practices and service quality through national programs and funding schemes. Flextelligent will establish regular communication channels and review meetings to ensure the partnerships are effectively managed and maintained over time. By participating in initiatives that advance Slovenia's Green Scheme of Tourism or service quality improvements, Flextelligent will position itself as a preferred consulting partner for sector-wide enhancement. Aligning with national tourism strategies will allow the firm to contribute directly to achieving measurable goals while reinforcing trust among stakeholders.

Sustainability Certification Organizations

Flextelligent plans to collaborate with certification providers such as Green Key Slovenia, Travelife, and Slovenia Green, managed by DOVES-FEE Slovenia. These organizations uphold sustainability standards for accommodation providers, restaurants, and attractions. By acting as an accredited partner or expert adviser, Flextelligent will support businesses in fulfilling certification requirements through customized audits, staff training, and operational restructuring. The firm may also contribute case studies and content to events hosted by these certification bodies. These partnerships will ensure clients benefit from both recognition and practical enhancements.

Educational Institutions

Partnerships with academic institutions, such as the Faculty of Tourism Brežice and the Vocational College for Hospitality and Tourism Maribor, as well as training centers affiliated with the Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia, will provide

Flextelligent with access to young talent, research insights, and collaborative curriculum development. INT2 emphasized: “Endorsement from a respected institution, e.g., University of Ljubljana, School of Economics and Business, would be received very differently”. Partnerships are not just about sharing knowledge, but also about inspiring and motivating the next generation of leaders in sustainable hospitality.

Industry Associations

The consulting firm will engage with associations like the TGZS, the Association of Caterers and Hoteliers of Slovenia, and regional chambers of commerce. INT1 pointed out: “The most direct way is to connect through the hotel association present at their conferences; pure advertising is not enough”. These bodies represent a broad cross-section of Flextelligent’s target clients. Through participation in seminars, newsletters, and joint training events, the firm can deliver tailored programs to its members. These associations may also assist in policy advocacy, addressing regulatory challenges identified through consulting projects. By supporting the collective advancement of members, Flextelligent will earn credibility as a sector ally.

Technology and Service Providers

Flextelligent will form partnerships with green technology suppliers, hospitality software developers, and service vendors offering sustainable solutions. For example, collaborations with providers of energy efficiency technologies or biodegradable cleaning products will enable Flextelligent to deliver comprehensive solutions to clients. While maintaining independence in selection, the firm will operate a curated referral network. Joint offerings such as bundled training and implementation support will facilitate smooth adoption of change by clients. These partnerships ensure that external resources are seamlessly integrated into the consulting process.

Government Programs and Funding Bodies

Accessing public funding is essential for many small and medium-sized businesses. Flextelligent will assist clients in identifying and applying for relevant subsidies and grants. An example is the “Public Call for Accelerating the Green Transition in Slovenian Tourism” (Javni razpis za pospeševanje zelene transformacije slovenskega turizma), coordinated by the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport (2023). This programme offers non-repayable financial support for sustainability audits, training, and certification processes in tourism enterprises. By guiding clients through such funding procedures, Flextelligent makes its services more affordable while supporting national objectives. The firm will also aim to become an approved provider in publicly funded programs to further increase access to its services.

4.3.8 Cost Structure

Flextelligent maintains a lean cost structure, mainly influenced by personnel and service delivery costs. As a consultancy and training firm, most expenses are variable and increase with project volume, while fixed costs are kept low during the startup phase.

- The most significant cost category is personnel. Consultant compensation, including taxes and insurance amounts to EUR 700 per month, or EUR 8400 annually and represents the core expense of value creation. In the early phase, the founder may draw a modest salary, estimated at approximately EUR 1,000–EUR 1,500 per month. Professional development (e.g., certifications or workshops) can add EUR 500–EUR 1,000 annually per team member, in general the total cost for the first year will be approximately EUR 30, 000.
- Travel and logistics and amortization form another key variable cost, given the on-site nature of hospitality consulting. A single regional project may incur expenses of EUR 100–400 for transport and accommodation, with an approximate annual total cost of EUR 4000.
- Marketing and sales activities require an initial investment to gain visibility. Website development and hosting can cost between EUR 300 and EUR 500 annually, with an extra EUR 100 to EUR 300 each month for online adverts and outreach campaigns.
- Participation in trade fairs or hosting workshops might incur project-specific costs of EUR 200–800 annually, with an approximate annual total cost of EUR 4,200.
- Operational tools and software are modest but essential. A business-grade laptop, productivity software, and audit tools may cost around EUR 1,000 in the first year. Cloud storage, survey tools, and training design platforms may require monthly subscriptions of EUR 20 to EUR 50, with an approximate annual total cost of EUR 1,500.
- Administrative and legal services, including accounting and permits, are estimated at EUR 1,000 to EUR 1,500 annually.

Overall, the total cost in the first year is expected to be approximately EUR 41,000. Flextelligent aims to maintain a value-driven financial model, investing in areas that directly improve service quality, such as training materials or enhanced client experiences. The business is designed to remain flexible, with costs rising to approximately EUR 500-800 every year in line with client demand and revenue. This adaptable model enables effective

cost management while supporting growth, which is crucial for a service-based startup in the Slovenian hospitality sector.

4.3.9 Revenue Streams

Flextelligent will generate income through the professional consulting and training services it provides to clients in the hospitality sector. The business model will include a combination of project-based consulting engagements, tailored training sessions, recurring service subscriptions, and the gradual introduction of digital educational products. These revenue streams will be structured to reflect the typical allocation of budgets and evaluation of service providers in the hospitality industry.

The primary source of revenue will be consulting engagements with hotels, restaurants, and other tourism-related businesses. Charging for these consulting services will be on a fixed-fee or daily fee basis, depending on the complexity and duration of the assignment. For example, a comprehensive sustainability audit and improvement plan for a medium-sized hotel may be priced between EUR 7,000 and EUR 8,000 per month, while a one-week engagement focusing on a specific operational area may cost between EUR 1,500 and EUR 2,000. This pricing structure reflects the professional time invested and the business impact generated. Interview participants confirmed that hospitality managers are willing to pay for such services when they improve cost-efficiency or enhance the guest experience. These responses support the conclusion that clients view consulting as a strategic investment when the benefits are measurable and relevant to operational needs.

Training services will become the second primary source of revenue. Flextelligent will provide in-house training sessions tailored to meet the needs of individual businesses, focusing on topics such as sustainable practices, customer service, and staff onboarding. Each session will cost between EUR 500 and EUR 1,200 depending on the level of customization and the number of participants. Additionally, the company will organize open-enrolment workshops for hospitality professionals from different organizations. These one-day seminars will cover essential skills and sustainable management principles. Pricing can be per participant or for groups. Besides generating direct income, these events will also help attract new clients indirectly.

Subscription-based advisory services will generate an additional stream of recurring revenue. Under this model, Flextelligent will offer monthly or quarterly support packages that include remote consultations, on-site check-ins, and periodic staff development sessions. The pricing for these packages ranges from EUR 300 to EUR 1,000 per month, depending on the scope of the services provided. This structure offers clients consistent access to expert guidance while ensuring a predictable revenue stream for the firm. In some

instances, clients who complete a project engagement may opt to maintain the relationship through such retainer agreements, ensuring continuity and long-term value.

Flextelligent will also seek collaborations with public institutions and government-funded initiatives. In Slovenia, programs such as the "Public Call for Accelerating the Green Transition in Slovenian Tourism" offer non-repayable grants to tourism businesses for investments in sustainability, including consulting and training services. By registering as a qualified provider, Flextelligent can take part in these projects and receive compensation either directly from the managing body or indirectly through clients who benefit from subsidies (Ministry of the Economy, Tourism, and Sport, 2023). These collaborations will help make the services more accessible to small and medium-sized enterprises, which might otherwise face financial constraints.

In the medium term, Flextelligent will expand its offerings to include digital educational products. These resources will consist of downloadable guides, instructional toolkits, and online courses, all of which will be available through the company's website or a dedicated learning platform. After an initial development investment estimated between EUR 2,000 and EUR 5,000 per product, these resources will generate revenue through single purchases or subscription access. This strategy will allow the firm to scale its knowledge delivery to audiences beyond its immediate geographical market.

Based on the outlined revenue and cost structure, Flextelligent is expected to generate revenue of between EUR 45,000 and EUR 47,000 in the first year, primarily through consulting and training services. The estimated total operating costs are projected at approximately EUR 41,000, including personnel, marketing, logistics, and essential operational tools. This results in a modest yet encouraging net profit of approximately EUR 5,000 to EUR 6,000, which will be reinvested into the business for further development. No significant amortization expenses are planned for the first year, as digital product development will begin in later phases. The entrepreneur is aware of the financial dynamics of the start-up phase and has adopted a lean and flexible operational model to ensure long-term viability.

4.3.10 Business Model Canvas Risk Points

Despite a well-defined value proposition, Flextelligent faces significant risks in operational execution and market engagement. The main risk pertains to client acquisition in a relatively small and saturated Slovenian hospitality sector. Many potential clients, especially smaller operators, remain cost-sensitive and may not see immediate value in consulting or training services. This can slow the sales cycle or reduce conversion according to INT3 & INT5.

Additionally, as a newly established firm, Flextelligent lacks a track record. The company must therefore overcome credibility barriers through testimonials, partnerships, and demonstrable outcomes. Another risk involves overdependence on a limited client base. If key accounts withdraw or delay payments, cash flow could become vulnerable. Operationally, providing customized services for a diverse range of businesses requires highly skilled staff and sufficient availability. Without internal training protocols or standardized modules, scalability may be limited (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

Pricing risk is also apparent. INT9 highlighted pressure to justify investment in training by demonstrating measurable return on investment. Misjudging pricing in the early stages can result in undercutting or unmet expectations. Additionally, regulatory changes or shifts in sustainability standards could impose new compliance demands on clients and, by extension, the consultant.

4.3.11 Research Results

The qualitative research, conducted with 15 professionals from the Slovenian hospitality sector, showcased the expertise and insights of these individuals. The interviews, 14 of which were conducted in Slovenian and one in English, provided a comprehensive understanding of the sector's challenges and potential solutions

The interview findings reveal a strong and ongoing demand for consulting services like Flextelligent, which combine sustainability integration with staff development and operational optimization within the hospitality industry. Professionals across the sector emphasized the critical need to address skill shortages, implement energy-efficient and waste-reduction measures, improve communication, and enhance overall service quality from the very start of operations. These efforts are essential not only to meet increasing environmental regulations and certification requirements but also to boost guest satisfaction and reduce costly employee turnover. Flextelligent, with its unique blend of services, is well-positioned to meet this demand, providing reassurance and confidence to the industry.

The data also demonstrate that sustainability is not merely a passing trend but a vital factor for long-term competitiveness and brand differentiation in hospitality. Businesses in Slovenia are increasingly recognizing this, yet many lack the expertise or resources to translate sustainability goals into practical, measurable actions. Overall, this underscores the urgency and importance of the issue, as well as the potential for companies like Flextelligent to make a substantial impact.

According to the interview findings, there are solid indicators of significant potential for growth and development in the hospitality sector, with a demand for companies such as Flextelligent, ranging from the integration of sustainable practices to the optimization of performance for hospitality staff, addressing the skills gap, and improving overall industry

performance in Slovenia and beyond. The interview analysis yields a solid understanding of the main challenges and improvement priorities identified by hotel directors, managers, and industry leaders. Using this information, we can develop future products and solutions to support and optimize the hospitality sector, ensuring consistent service quality and aligning with the latest sustainability trends to increase visibility as a recognized sustainable destination. Simultaneously, such initiatives contribute to building a better world for future generations.

The research confirms that Flextelligent's dual focus on sustainable innovation and service training addresses a crucial market need. By offering tailored solutions to overcome operational challenges and meet strategic goals, the company can substantially contribute to advancing Slovenia's hospitality sector towards greater sustainability, enhanced service excellence, and improved economic resilience, ultimately fostering a greener, more competitive future.

5 DISCUSSION

In what follows, I present the theoretical and practical implications of my research and highlight the opportunities for future research along with the limitations of my research.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings yielded within this research provide an overview of current literature on service innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship, specifically within the Slovenian hospitality businesses. Through the analysis and collection of views from business practitioners, this study connects theory and practice.

The primary theoretical tool used in this work was BMC (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). This framework helps visualize how a business is structured and how it creates value for customers. The interviews demonstrate that the Business Model Canvas is effective for small and fragmented markets like Slovenian hospitality, where resources can be limited and competition strong. Interviewees often emphasized that a new consulting business must provide solutions that fit the specific needs of local companies, especially regarding sustainability and staff training. This supports the view that understanding customer needs and shaping value around them is essential for success in hospitality (Morrison, 2018; Camilleri, 2018).

The first research question addressed whether there is genuine demand for consulting in sustainability and service training, based on the answers from the interviewee. Many interviewees said that outside expertise is important for their businesses to adopt more sustainable practices and improve staff development. Their responses are consistent with

research showing that sustainability is increasingly a requirement in hospitality, rather than just a trend (Boley et al., 2017; Mihalič et al., 2012b). The focus on green solutions in the interviews matches the shift in industry standards discussed by Bohdanowicz (2006).

The second research question explored how a consulting business should position itself in the market. The interviews show that credibility and trust are the most important factors, which come from proven expertise, clear results, and strong references. This finding supports literature that describes trust, partnerships, and transparent communication as critical for building a consultant's reputation and developing business in hospitality (Zehrer, 2009; Camilleri, 2018). Interviewees also often mentioned that working with public agencies and obtaining recognized certifications, such as the Slovenia Green certificate, increases credibility and market access, a point echoed by Hall (2008).

The third research question focused on the most in-demand services, as revealed by the interview results. Businesses are most interested in sustainability training, operational optimization, and staff development. These findings are in line with the service-profit chain model, which links investment in employee training and internal service quality to customer satisfaction and business results (Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994).

Overall, the results show that the Business Model Canvas and the broader literature on sustainable business and service training are valuable tools for understanding and developing business opportunities in Slovenian hospitality. The study demonstrates how theory and practice can work together in real business decisions and points to several directions for further research.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this research provide recommendations to hospitality businesses seeking to adopt sustainable practices and improve workforce capabilities. By identifying important barriers to green innovation, notably inadequate staff expertise, prohibitive certification expenses, and a lack of proper training, this thesis suggests practical measures to mitigate these challenges. For instance, the interviews conducted reveal that many organizations would benefit from the provision of guided support during the process of certification, complemented by the provision of group training workshops on both technical skills and service ethos. Thus, professional firms like the one outlined in this thesis can take a lead in bridging current knowledge gaps, breaking down complex sustainability standards into realizable targets, and advising firms on how to maximize available governmental incentives. By providing these services, firms are not only ensuring compliance with regulatory stipulations but also helping to reduce operational risks and improve general business resilience.

In addition to granting organizations some level of operational efficiency, the study emphasizes the importance of developing human capital through continued professionalization and specific training programs. Throughout the interviews, respondents routinely identified the rewards related to tailored training programs, mentoring, and hands-on workshops aimed at developing both technical and social skills. The implication is for hospitality businesses to shift away from sporadic seminars towards an organizational pledge for constant learning-by-experience aligned with the evolving requirements of patrons and sector norms. Such experiences produce measurable impacts on worker engagement, service delivery quality, and thus patron satisfaction. The intersection between official training and sustainability initiatives allows organizations to hire and keep staff, reduce turnover rates, and develop a more productive organizational environment.

The research findings have implications not only for individual business operations but also for industry trade associations and governmental policymakers. By shedding light on the benefits of partnerships between consultancy organizations, government agencies, and private companies, the study encourages the development of holistic strategies toward creating sustainability across the industry. Policymakers could use these findings to develop targeted support programs, such as subsidies for training schemes or environmental sustainability certifications, or to create cooperative workshops aimed at improving standards in the sector. Industry bodies may consider increasing the availability of best practices and networks for peer-to-peer collaboration. The practical implications of this thesis all extend the idea that sustainable change in the hotel industry is possible when companies invest more in human capital, adopt a systematic methodology to green innovation, and pursue widespread cooperative activities across the industry.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged for context and transparency.

First, the research is based on a small sample of 15 interviewees (with two participants in one session). This limited number of participants constrains the generalizability of the findings, as patterns identified might not hold in a larger or different population. For instance, the experiences and views in one city may not represent those in other regions, so the results must be interpreted with caution when generalizing beyond this context. Furthermore, all interviewees were drawn from the Ljubljana area, which introduces a geographical and selection bias. This means that the findings may not apply to a broader, more diverse population.

Second, despite multiple outreach efforts, the response rate to interview invitations was low. Some potentially insightful participants did not respond or declined, which means certain perspectives might be missing. This non-response could skew the findings if those who opted out have systematically different views or experiences from those interviewed. In other

words, valuable perspectives may have been excluded, limiting the study's comprehensiveness. For example, if those who did not respond or declined to participate had more negative views on the topic, the study's findings could be biased towards more positive perspectives.

Third, the study employed a primarily deductive thematic analysis approach, meaning the coding and theme development were guided by pre-existing concepts and the structure of the interview guide. While this theory-driven approach helped focus on relevant areas, it may have constrained the openness of the analysis to unexpected findings. Predefining thematic categories (for example, around anticipated topics like sustainability practices or training needs) risks producing what Braun and Clarke (2006) call "topic summary" themes that merely mirror the interview questions, rather than deeper insights.

6 CONCLUSION

This research investigated the development of a business opportunity in hospitality consulting, emphasizing green solutions and service training. The conceptual foundation was based on the business model canvas and supported by empirical data gathered through interviews with hospitality experts in Slovenia.

The study emphasizes a genuine need for adaptable, practical training services and external consulting support. Flextelligent's proposed model presents a feasible solution by connecting sustainability goals with daily operational challenges. The mix of project-based consulting, scalable training workshops, and strategic alliances offers a solid pathway to profitability and sectoral influence.

Ultimately, this thesis enhances both theory and practice by showing how a niche hospitality consulting firm can meet real market needs while aligning with broader goals like sustainability and service excellence. The insights gained may guide future entrepreneurs and support the development of more resilient and adaptable hospitality ecosystems.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek (Summary in Slovene Language)

V magistrskem delu sem obravnaval možnost ustanovitve svetovalnega podjetja Flextelligent, ki bi v slovenskem hotelirstvu in gostinstvu povezovalo zelene rešitve in storitveno usposabljanje. Namen moje raziskave je bil preveriti, ali je takšna storitev na slovenskem trgu zaželeno, izvedljiva in ekonomsko smiselna. Kot izhodišče sem obravnaval ključne izzive panoge: fluktuacijo zaposlenih, neenakomerno kakovost storitev, pritiske za zniževanje stroškov ter potrebo po bolj sistematičnem pristopu k trajnosti.

Raziskavo sem izvedel s kvalitativno metodo. Izvedel sem štirinajst polstrukturiranih intervjujev s petnajstimi sogovorniki iz slovenskega hotelirstva in gostinstva (v enem intervjuju sta sodelovala dva sogovornika). Intervjuje sem transkribiral in jih analiziral z deduktivno tematsko analizo, utemeljeno na vnaprej določenih raziskovalnih področjih. Uporabil sem kodni priročnik, rezultate pa predstavil v preglednicah, iz katerih sem oblikoval tematske povzetke.

Na podlagi odgovorov intervjuvancev sem ugotovil, da obstaja jasno povpraševanje po podpori, ki združuje trajnost in razvoj kadrov. Sogovorniki so najpogosteje izpostavili ukrepe za učinkovitejšo rabo energije in zmanjševanje odpadkov, standardizirana usposabljanja za zagotavljanje kakovostne storitve in učinkovite komunikacije ter boljšo notranjo organizacijo dela. Poleg tega so poudarili potrebo po usposabljanju novega vodstvenega kadra. Pri manjših ponudnikih sem opazil izrazito cenovno občutljivost, pri vseh pa pričakovanje merljivih rezultatov usposabljanj.

Na podlagi ugotovitev iz intervjujev sem pripravil tudi poslovni model Canvas za Flextelligent. V njem sem opredelil ciljne segmente (manjše in srednje nastanitvene obrate ter restavracije), vrednostno ponudbo (svetovanje za zelene prakse in praktična usposabljanja), kanale in odnose s strankami ter ključne vire in partnerstva. Ocenil sem tudi glavna tveganja, kot so pridobivanje prvih referenc, odvisnost od nekaj ključnih naročnikov in potreba po standardiziranih modulih usposabljanja.

Finančna presoja kaže zmerno, a pozitivno izhodišče. V prvi fazi bi večino prihodkov prinesla svetovalna in izobraževalna ponudba. Ocenjujem, da bi letni prihodki znašali v razponu od 45 do 47 tisoč evrov, stroški pa okoli 41 tisoč evrov. Nastalo razliko bi namenil za nadaljnji razvoj ponudbe in gradnjo referenc. Srednjeročno načrtujem razvoj digitalnih učnih gradiv in spletnih tečajev, ki bodo omogočili širitev in prenos znanja.

Prispevek mojega dela je dvojen. Na teoretični ravni povezuje storitvene inovacije in trajnostno podjetništvo v kontekstu slovenskega turizma. Na praktični ravni ponuja strukturiran in izvedljiv model, s katerim lahko organizacije merljivo zmanjšajo svoj okoljski odtis, izboljšajo standarde usposabljanja in dvignejo kakovost storitev. Za zaključek

bi rad izpostavil opažanja iz intervjujev: pri uvajanju trajnostnih rešitev v gostinstvu in turizmu sogovorniki največji poudarek namenjajo zniževanju stroškov, pri čemer kot glavno oviro navajajo omejena finančna sredstva. Pri usposabljanju kadrov in opredeljevanju ključnih kompetenc pa na prvo mesto postavljajo pomen učinkovite komunikacije pri interakciji z gosti, takoj za njo pa organizacijsko kulturo; med dejavniki visoke fluktuacije zaposlenih pogosto izpostavljajo tudi delovne pogoje.

Appendix 2: Interview Protocol Questions

PROTOKOL ZA INTERVJU ZA – MAGISTRSKO DELO

Nikola Todorovski (svetovalka: izr. prof. dr. Alenka Slavec Gomezel)

Zaporedna številka intervjuja:

Datum in ura intervjuja:

Trajanje intervjuja (se izpolni na koncu):

Ime in priimek intervjuvanca:

1: Spol:

2: Starost:

3. Podjetje:

4. Trenutna funkcija ali položaj v podjetju:

Druge opombe:

Lepo pozdravljeni.

Sem Nikola Todorovski, študent na Podjetniški študiju na Ekonomski fakulteti v Ljubljani. Za ta pogovor sem vas prosil, ker potrebujem vaše mnenje v povezavi s temo, ki jo

obravnavam v okviru svojega magistrskega dela, v katerem preučujem o razvoj zelene rešitve za gostinstvo in storitveno usposabljanje.

Pogovor bo potekal predvidoma 45 minut. Vključeval bo predvsem vprašanja odprtega tipa, pri čemer me bo zanimal vaš pogled na obravnavano tematiko. To pomeni, da ni pravih ali napačnih odgovorov.

Preden začneva, me zanima, ali se strinjate, da najin pogovor snemam, saj mi bo to pri kasnejši obdelavi podatkov v veliko pomoč. Vaše odgovore bom uporabil/a v Magistrskem delu. Zato me zanima, ali dovolite objavo imena vaše institucije in morebiti tudi vašega imena ter prepisa intervjuja?

Dovoli snemanje:	DA	NE
------------------	----	----

Dovoli objavo imena institucije:	DA	NE
----------------------------------	----	----

Dovoli objavo svojega imena:	DA	NE
------------------------------	----	----

Dovoli objavo prepisa:	DA	NE
------------------------	----	----

Imate morda še kakšno vprašanje, preden začneva s pogovorom?

Polstrukturirani intervju: Okvirna vprašanja za raziskavo magistrske naloge

Hvala za vaš čas in sodelovanje. Vaši odgovori bodo dragocen prispevek k boljšemu razumevanju izzivov in priložnosti slovenskega turističnega sektorja na poti k večji trajnosti in kakovosti storitev.

Raziskovalna tema: Potencial svetovalnega podjetja na področju razvoj zelene rešitve za gostinstvo in storitveno usposabljanje.

Vprašanja:

Uvodna vprašanja

1. Kako ste se odločili za vključitev v turizem/gostinstvo? Kaj je vplivalo na vašo odločitev? _____

2. Kako po vašem mnenju prepoznamo trajnostno naravnost v gostinstvu in turizmu? Ali poznate kakšen primer dobre prakse v Sloveniji? _____

Trajnostni razvoj v turizmu/gostinstvu (okoljski, družbeni in ekonomski vidik)

3. Kako ocenjujete trenutno stanje trajnostnega razvoja v slovenskem gostinskem/turističnem sektorju? _____

4. Katere glavne izzive in priložnosti opazate na poti k bolj trajnostnemu poslovanju? _____

5. Kako se vaše podjetje prilagaja nacionalnim smernicam in zakonodaji s področja trajnosti? _____

Zeleni vidik poslovanja

6. Ali ste že ob začetku poslovanja razmišljali o uvedbi zelenih rešitev? Zakaj da/ne? _____

7. Katere konkretne ukrepe ste uvedli za zmanjšanje okoljskega vpliva? _____

8. Katere tehnologije, metode ali inovacije uporabljate za učinkovitejše upravljanje virov? _____

Družbeni vidik in kadrovske izzivi

9. Kaj so po vašem mnenju glavni razlogi za visoko fluktuacijo zaposlenih v gostinstvu? _____

10. Kako vplivajo delovni pogoji, plačilo, delovni čas in napredovanje na zadrževanje kadra? _____

11. Kakšno vlogo imajo izobraževanje, mentorstvo in stalno usposabljanje pri zmanjševanju fluktuacije? _____

Izobraževanje in usposabljanje v gostinstvu

12. Kako ocenjujete obstoječe možnosti izobraževanja v gostinstvu (npr. F&B, strežba, vodenje)? _____

13. Katere kompetence in mehke veščine bi morali zaposleni bolj razvijati (mehke veščine, komunikacija, vodenje, medkulturna občutljivost)? _____

14. So podjetja in zaposleni po vašem mnenju pripravljeni vlagati v dodatno izobraževanje, kaj bi jih k temu spodbudilo? _____

Potencial svetovalnega podjetja za zelene rešitve (primer: Flexteligent)

15. Ali bi bilo po vašem mnenju zanimanje za svetovalno podjetje, ki bi nudilo pomoč pri uvajanju trajnostnih praks in usposabljanju? _____

16. Katere storitve bi bile po vašem mnenju najbolj iskane? _____

17. V katerih primerih bi bila podjetja pripravljena investirati v tovrstno svetovanje če bi to prineslo dolgoročne koristi (nižji stroški, večje zadovoljstvo gostov/zaposlenih)?

18. Kako naj se takšno podjetje pozicionira na trgu, da bi bilo uspešno (npr. sodelovanje z institucijami, reference, certifikati)? _____

19. Kako bi takšno podjetje lahko prispevalo k uresničevanju ciljev nacionalne strategije ta trajnostni turizem? _____

Appendix 3: Codebook for Questionnaire Thematic Analysis

Code	Meaning	Short definition	Linked questions
AWARE	Awareness	Rising understanding of sustainable practice.	Q3
BRND	Brand positioning	Creation of a clear and competitive market image.	Q18
CERT	Certification	Use or pursuit of recognized certificates.	Q2, Q18, Q19
CMPL	Compliance	Adherence to guidelines and standards.	Q5
CO2	Carbon footprint	Tracking and reducing emissions impact.	Q2

COMM	Communication	Importance of communication in general.	Q6, Q12, Q13, Q16
COSTB	Cost barrier	High upfront investment that hinders change.	Q4
CULT	Culture	Importance of culture.	Q10, Q12, Q13, Q15, Q16
EDUC	Education and training	Formal learning and on-the-job skill development.	Q1, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q14, Q16, Q19
ENE.S	Energy saving	Measures that lower energy use or improve efficiency.	Q2, Q4, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q16
EVID	Evidence and metrics	Need for data and indicators to justify action.	Q17
FAMI	Family influence	Family background shaping career choice.	Q1
GOVS	Government support	Public policy, regulation, or aid that supports action.	Q3, Q5, Q15, Q18, Q19
GUES	Guest satisfaction	Improvement of the guest experience and reviews.	Q10, Q16, Q17
GWH	Greenwashing	Claims about green practice without substance.	Q3
IMPL	Implementation support	Help that turns plans into daily practice.	Q19
LOCL	Local sourcing	Use of local or seasonal suppliers.	Q2
LOWC	Lower cost	Actions that reduce operating expenses.	Q4, Q16, Q17
MIND	Mindset change	Shifts in attitudes or work culture.	Q4
MOTV	Motivation	Goal directed effort	Q9, Q10, Q11, Q14

NETW	Networking	Partnerships with peers and institutions.	Q18
OPPT	Career opportunity	Prospects for professional or business growth.	Q1
PASS	Passion or interest	Personal enthusiasm for hospitality work.	Q1
QUAL	Quality improvement	Raising standards and service performance.	Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q9, Q15, Q16, Q19
REFS	References	Use of case proofs and recommendations.	Q18
ROI	Return on investment	Expectation of payback and measurable gains.	Q4, Q17
SUST	Sustainability	Environmentally responsible practices and policies.	Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q15, Q16, Q17, Q19
TECH	Technology	Impact of technology on energy saving.	Q7, Q8
TURN	Employee turnover	Issues and actions related to retaining staff.	Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q14, Q17
WAST	Waste reduction	Steps that limit waste and improve handling.	Q2, Q4, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q16
WATS	Water saving	Actions that reduce water use.	Q2

Appendix 4: Thematic Codes for Interview Responses (Q1–Q19)

Interview	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19
INT1	OPPT, PASS	CERT, ENE.S, LOCL, SUST	AWARE , QUAL, SUST	ENE.S, SUST	CMPL, GOVS, SUST	SUST, WAST	ENE.S, WAST, TECH	TECH, WAST, SUST	TURN, MOTV, EDUC, QUA	TURN, MOTV, CULT	EDUC, MOTV, TURN	–	COMM, CULT	EDUC	SUST	SUST	GUES	BRND, CERT, NETW, REFS	GOVS, SUST
INT2	EDUC, PASS	CERT, LOCL, SUST	AWARE , GOVS, SUST	ENE.S, SUST	GOVS, SUST	SUST	ENE.S, WAST, SUST	TECH, SUST	TURN, EDUC, MOTV	TURN, MOTV, EDUC	EDUC, TURN	–	COMM, CULT	EDUC	SUST	SUST	GUES	BRND, CERT, GOVS, NETW, REFS	SUST
INT3	OPPT	LOCL, SUST, WAST	GOVS, GWH, SUST	COSTB, LOWC, SUST	GOVS, SUST	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	TECH	TURN, MOTV	TURN, MOTV	EDUC	EDUC	COMM, CULT	EDUC	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	GUES, ROI, SUST	BRND, CERT, NETW, REFS	GOVS, IMPL, SUST
INT4	FAMI, OPPT, PASS	CERT, ENE.S, LOCL, QUAL, SUST, WAST, WATS	AWARE , GOVS, SUST	SUST	CMPL, GOVS, SUST	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	TECH	TURN, MOTV	TURN, MOTV	EDUC	EDUC	COMM, CULT	EDUC	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	GUES	BRND, CERT, NETW, REFS	SUST
INT5	OPPT	SUST, CERT, WAST	SUST, GWH, GOVS	TURN, MIND, EDUC, COSTB	-	-	-	TECH	TURN, MOTV	TURN, MOTV	EDUC	EDUC	COMM, CULT	EDUC, EVID	SUST	ENE.S, WAST, CERT	LOWC, ROI, GUES, SUST	CERT, REFS, NETW, BRND	SUST, CERT, GOVS, QUAL, IMPL, REPT
INT6	OPPT	SUST, CERT	SUST, GWH, GOVS	MIND, EDUC, COSTB	-	-	-	TECH	TURN, MOTV	TURN, MOTV	EDUC	EDUC	COMM, SUST	EDUC, EVID	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	LOWC, ROI, GUES, SUST	CERT, REFS, NETW, BRND	SUST, CERT, GOVS, QUAL, IMPL, REPT
INT7	FAMI, OPPT, PASS	CERT, ENE.S, LOCL, SUST, WAST	AWARE , GOVS, SUST	COSTB, ENE.S, LOWC, SUST	CMPL, GOVS, QUAL, SUST	SUST, COMM	ENE.S, WAST	TECH	TURN, MOTV	TURN, MOTV	EDUC	EDUC	COMM, CULT	EDUC	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	EVID, GUES, LOWC, ROI, SUST, TURN	BRND, CERT, NETW, REFS	QUAL, SUST

INT8		CO2, LOCL, SUST, WAST	SUST	COSTB, LOWC, SUST	GOVS, SUST	ENE.S, SUST	ENE.S, TECH, SUS	TECH, ENE.S	TURN, MOTV	TURN, MOTV	EDUC, TURN	EDUC, TURN	COMM, CULT	EDUC, MOTV, TURN	SUST, GOVS	WAST,E NE.S, LOWC, GUES	GUES, LOWC, ROI, SUST	BRND, CERT, NETW, REFS	EDUC, SUST
INT9	EDUC, OPPT, PASS	CERT, ENE.S, LOCL, SUST, WATS	SUST	ENE.S, ROI, SUST	GOVS, SUST	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	TECH	TURN, MOTV	TURN, MOTV	EDUC	EDUC	COMM, CULT	EDUC	–	SUST	GUES	BRND, CERT, NETW, REFS	EDUC, SUST
INT10	PASS	SUST	SUST	SUST, WAST	CMPL, GOVS, SUST	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	ENE.S, WAST	TURN, MOTV	TURN, MOTV	EDUC	EDUC	COMM, CULT	EDUC	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	GUES, LOWC, ROI	BRND, CERT, NETW, REFS	SUST
INT11	–	QUAL	–	–	–	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	ENE.S, TECH	TURN	TURN	EDUC	EDUC	COMM	EDUC, TURN	–	COMM		REFS	
INT12	EDUC, FAMI, PASS	CO2, ENE.S, SUST	GOVS, SUST	COSTB, ENE.S, LOWC, SUST	CMPL, GOVS, SUST	WAST, SUST	WAST	ENE.S, TECH	MOTV	MOTV, TURN	EDUC, MOTV	COMM, CULT	COMM, CULT	EDUC, MOTV	SUST, CULT	–	GUES	BRND, CERT, NETW, REFS	SUST
INT13	EDUC	CERT, SUST	SUST	SUST	GOVS, SUST	SUST	ENE.S, WAST	TECH, ENE.S, WAST	TURN, MOTV	TURN, MOTV, GUES	EDUC, MOTV, TURN	EDUC	COMM, CULT	MOTV, EDUC	SUST	COMM, CULT	GUES	BRND, CERT, NETW, REFS	EDUC, SUST
INT14	PASS	CERT, ENE.S, LOCL, QUAL, SUST, WAST	SUST	COSTB, ENE.S, LOWC, QUAL, ROI, SUST	CMPL, GOVS, QUAL, SUST	SUST	ENE.S, TECH	–	TURN	TURN	EDUC, TURN	EDUC	COMM	MOTV	SUST	EDUC	EVID, GUES, LOWC, ROI	BRND, CERT, NETW, REFS	IMPL, QUAL, SUST
INT15	PASS	LOCL, WAST, ENE.S,	SUST	COSTB, CMPL,	CMPL,	SUST	ENE.S, WAST, SUST	–	TURN, EDUC, MOTV	TURN, EDUC, MOTV	TURN, EDUC, MOTV	EDUC, COMM	COMM, CULT	EDUC, MOTV	SUST, QUAL	SUST,Q UAL,CO MM, ENE.S, LOWC	ROI, LOWC, GUES, EVID,	REFS, CERT, NETW,	IMPL, SUST, MIND
SUMMA RY (Domina nt code and % across all interview ees)	PASS (36%)	SUST (27%)	SUST (46%)	SUST (29%)	GOVS (37%)	SUST (76%)	ENE.S (41%)	TECH (55%)	TURN (45%)	TURN (47%)	EDUC (60%)	EDUC (75%)	COMM (54%)	EDUC (61%)	SUST (81%)	ENE.S (28%)	GUES (38%)	REFS (26%)	SUST (41%)

Appendix 5: Summary of Interview Responses

Interview Question	Summary of Responses
Q1: How did you decide to enter the tourism/hospitality industry? What influenced your decision?	The majority of interviewees described a longstanding personal interest or passion as their motivation for entering the hospitality industry. Many (approximately 10 out of 15) had decided on a hospitality career early on, often during their school years, driven by a passion for working with people and a fascination with travel or hotels. Several respondents (around 4 out of 15) pursued formal education in tourism/hospitality from a young age, indicating they were drawn to the industry for its practical training and language opportunities. A few interviewees mentioned that they had transitioned from other sectors or seized a business opportunity. However, even in these cases, their decision was influenced by an existing enthusiasm for the hospitality sector.
Q2: In your opinion, how can we recognize sustainability orientation in hospitality and tourism? Do you know any examples of good practice in Slovenia?	Almost all interviewees (roughly 12 out of 15) identified formal eco-certifications and standards as key indicators of a sustainability-oriented hospitality business. They frequently mentioned certificates, such as the Slovenian Green Label and the International Green Key award, as visible proof of their sustainable practices. Many respondents also pointed to specific operational measures, such as extensive waste reduction efforts, the elimination of single-use plastics, the use of energy-saving technologies, and the sourcing of local products, as signs of a genuine sustainability commitment. Several interviewees provided concrete examples of good practices in Slovenia, often highlighting their hotels or those that have received awards or implemented innovative green solutions (e.g., one hotel achieving an advanced “BREEAM” sustainability certificate and operating an electric shuttle for guests). Overall, the presence of recognized certifications coupled with visible eco-friendly initiatives was seen as the clearest markers of a sustainability orientation in tourism.
Q3: How do you assess the current state of sustainable development in the Slovenian hospitality/tourism sector?	Most interviewees agreed that sustainability in Slovenian hospitality is improving, but they noted it is still evolving. A majority (nine out of 15) perceived that the sector has made significant progress, observing

	increasing awareness and participation in sustainability programs, with more hotels obtaining green certifications each year and treating sustainability as an emerging standard for quality. However, five respondents offered a more critical view, suggesting that many efforts remain superficial. These interviewees commented that some businesses meet only the minimum requirements for certificates or talk about being green without taking substantial action. This indicates considerable room for improvement. Additionally, some pointed out that while voluntary initiatives by hospitality providers are driving progress, there is a need for stronger, more targeted support, such as clearer legislation or incentives to further advance sustainable development in the sector.
Q4: What are the main challenges and opportunities you observe on the path to more sustainable operations?	Interviewees identified several key challenges in pursuing more sustainable operations. The most frequently cited challenge (noted by approximately 8 out of 15 respondents) is the financial aspect: sustainable solutions often entail higher costs, which is difficult in an industry with tight profit margins. Many pointed out that investing in eco-friendly materials or technologies (e.g. biodegradable products or energy-efficient infrastructure) can strain budgets, and these expenses are hard to justify unless they pay off in the long run. Another commonly mentioned challenge is changing mindsets and expectations. For instance, persuading stakeholders and guests (especially in luxury hospitality) to accept specific changes or limitations for the sake of sustainability. Some interviewees noted the difficulty of implementing new practices without established models or external guidance, meaning businesses often have to innovate solutions on their own. In terms of opportunities, respondents unanimously agreed that the long-term benefits of sustainability are substantial. Many (approximately half) emphasized that sustainable operations can become a competitive advantage and improve efficiency over time. They described the opportunities as “endless,” citing potential improvements in energy savings, brand reputation, and guest satisfaction. Overall, the interviewees suggest that while cost and mindset challenges are significant, there

	is optimism that every incremental step toward sustainability is worthwhile and can open up further opportunities for improvement.
Q5: How is your company adapting to national guidelines and legislation in the field of sustainability?	Importantly, across the board, interviewees did not report significant difficulties with legal compliance, underscoring the smooth and effective nature of national guidelines. Instead, they view these guidelines as a baseline and are continually updating practices to maintain or improve upon those standards.
Q6: Did you consider implementing green solutions at the start of business?	All 15 interviewees indicated they had considered implementing sustainability measures when starting their business. Sustainability was by far the most frequently mentioned theme among business start-ups. Additionally, a few interviewees also cited specific green practices, such as waste reduction (2 out of 15) or energy-saving initiatives (1 out of 15), during the launch phase.
Q7: What specific measures have you implemented to reduce environmental impact?	Nearly all participants reported adopting energy-saving measures (13 out of 15) and waste-reduction practices (12 out of 15) to lessen their environmental impact. In contrast, only a few interviewees mentioned introducing new technology solutions (3 out of 15) or other general sustainability initiatives (3 out of 15) as part of their environmental efforts.
Q8: What technologies, methods or innovations do you use for more efficient resource management?	The majority of interviewees have implemented technology-based solutions to improve resource efficiency (11 out of 15 mentioned using modern technology or innovations). Several also employ energy-saving practices (5 out of 15), while only a small number indicated focusing on waste reduction (3 out of 15) or other sustainability measures (2 out of 15) in this context.
Q9: What are the main reasons for high employee turnover in hospitality?	Almost all interviewees (approximately 13 out of 15) identified poor employee motivation and the industry's challenging working conditions as key reasons for high staff turnover in the hospitality sector. Lack of employee motivation was the most frequently mentioned factor driving staff to leave. Only a few interviewees (approximately 2 out of 15) suggested other contributing factors, such as inadequate training or low service quality standards, as reasons for high turnover.
Q10: How do working conditions, salary, working	All 15 interviewees agreed that factors like working conditions, compensation, working hours, and career advancement opportunities have a significant impact on

hours and advancement affect staff retention?	staff retention. Many participants (roughly 12 out of 15) particularly emphasized that better salary and growth opportunities improve employee motivation and thus boost retention. Only a couple of interviewees (2 out of 15) mentioned any other considerations besides these, such as the role of workplace culture or the need for additional training, when it comes to influencing retention.
Q11: What role does education, mentorship and continuous training play in reducing turnover?	All interviewees unanimously acknowledged that continuous education and training play a crucial role in reducing employee turnover. Approximately half of the respondents (7 out of 15) explicitly noted that providing more training and mentorship directly improves staff retention. Only a few (around 5 out of 15) mentioned employee motivation in this context, for example, suggesting that training boosts morale, which is less commonly highlighted compared to the consensus on the benefits of training itself.
Q12: How do you assess existing hospitality education opportunities (e.g., F&B, service, management, culture)?	The majority of interviewees focused on the availability and quality of current hospitality education programs, often suggesting that more extensive or improved training is lacking in the industry. Only a couple of respondents (2 out of 15) mentioned other aspects in their assessments, such as communication skills or cultural components of existing training. Almost no one raised additional themes beyond these points when discussing the state of hospitality education.
Q13: Which competencies and soft skills should employees further develop (communication, leadership, intercultural sensitivity)?	All 15 participants emphasized communication skills as a critical soft skill for employees to further develop. Almost as many (roughly 12 out of 15) also stressed the importance of intercultural or cultural sensitivity among staff. By contrast, very few interviewees prioritized other soft skills (for instance, hardly anyone specifically highlighted leadership) in their responses.
Q14: Are companies and employees willing to invest in additional training, and what would motivate them to do so?	Nearly all interviewees (13 out of 15) responded that both hospitality companies and their employees are willing to invest in additional training programs. Several participants (around 5 out of 15) noted that strong motivation or clear incentives (such as opportunities for career advancement or personal development) are key factors driving this willingness to invest. Only a small number of interviewees (approximately 3 out of 15)

	directly linked the desire to invest in training to its potential effect on reducing staff turnover.
Q15: Would there be interest in a consulting company offering support in implementing sustainable practices and service training?	An overwhelming majority of interviewees (approximately 13 out of 15) agreed there would be interest in a consulting service that helps hospitality businesses implement sustainable practices and provides service training. In particular, sustainability considerations were noted as the main selling point of such services. Only one or two respondents mentioned any additional factors that might drive interest (for example, one interviewee pointed to alignment with company culture), indicating that sustainability is by far the primary draw for these consulting offerings.
Q16: Which services do you think would be most in demand?	The services most frequently cited as in demand were those related to resource efficiency, especially energy-saving programs (mentioned by around 10 out of 15 interviewees) and waste-reduction initiatives (noted by approximately 8 out of 15). Far fewer participants pointed to other types of services. For instance, only a handful (roughly 3–4 out of 15) suggested a high demand for communication-skills training or cost-optimization consulting services.
Q17: In what cases would companies be willing to invest in such consulting if it brought long-term benefits (lower costs, higher guest/employee satisfaction)?	All 15 interviewees agreed that companies would be willing to invest in green consulting, provided it demonstrably delivers long-term benefits, particularly by lowering costs and improving guest (and employee) satisfaction. Additionally, a sizable number of participants (approximately 7 out of 15) mentioned that the prospect of reducing staff turnover would also motivate companies to invest, with virtually no other factors beyond these primary benefits considered.
Q18: How should such a company position itself on the market to be successful (e.g., cooperation with institutions, references, certifications)?	The most common recommendation (from roughly 10 out of 15 interviewees) was that the consulting company should establish strong industry networks and partnerships to position itself effectively (for example, by collaborating with relevant institutions or industry associations). Many interviewees (around 8 out of 15) also emphasized the importance of having institutional support or recognized certifications to bolster the firm's credibility. Only a few respondents (perhaps 3 out of 15) mentioned additional positioning strategies, such as obtaining formal quality accreditations or cultivating a

	sustainability-focused brand image, which are less critical compared to networking and institutional backing.
Q19: How could such a company contribute to the implementation of Slovenia's national sustainable tourism strategy?	The majority of interviewees (approximately 11 out of 15) believed that a consulting company dedicated to sustainability and training could act as a vital bridge between policy and practice in the hospitality sector. Most agreed that such a company could offer practical tools, guidance, and services that help businesses translate national sustainability objectives into actionable measures. Many (around 9) stressed that by providing tailored training, audits, and implementation support, the firm would enhance industry compliance with green standards and accelerate the adoption of best practices. A few respondents also noted that the company could promote cooperation between tourism providers and public institutions, thereby aligning the private sector with national development goals. Some participants suggested the company could assist with certification acquisition or reporting, easing the administrative burden on smaller operators. Overall, interviewees considered the role of such a company highly relevant for increasing the hospitality sector's contribution to Slovenia's sustainable tourism strategy.

Appendix 6: Interview and Written-Response Details (Dates, Modes, Locations, Durations)

Interviewee	Interview / Response Details
Interviewee 1	Interview conducted on April 7, 2025, in Ljubljana at her office. Duration: 24 minutes. The interview was recorded.
Interviewee 2	Interview conducted on April 7, 2025, in Ljubljana at her office. Duration: 22 minutes. The interview was recorded.
Interviewee 3	Interview conducted on April 15, 2025, in Ljubljana at her office. Duration: 37 minutes. The interview was recorded.

Interviewee 4 and 5	Interview conducted on April 25, 2025, via video call. Duration: 1 hour 15 minutes. The interview was recorded.
Interviewee 6	Interview conducted on May 6, 2025, via video call. Duration: 1 hour 41 minutes. The interview was recorded.
Interviewee 7	Interview conducted on May 22, 2025, via video call. Duration: 46 minutes. The interview was recorded.
Interviewee 8	Interview conducted on May 30, 2025, in Ljubljana at his office. Duration: 1 hour 14 minutes. The interview was recorded.
Interviewee 9	Interview conducted on May 30, 2025, in Ljubljana at his office. Duration: 15 minutes. The interview was recorded.
Interviewee 10	Interview conducted on June 5, 2025, in Ljubljana at Hostel Celica garden bar. Duration: 38 minutes. The interview was recorded.
Interviewee 11	Interview conducted on June 11, 2025, in Ljubljana at Bloom Lounge Hotel InterContinental. Duration: 29 minutes. The interview was recorded.
Interviewee 12	Interview conducted on June 23, 2025, in Ljubljana at Bloom Lounge Hotel InterContinental. Duration: 28 minutes. The interview was recorded.
Interviewee 13	The participant submitted written responses on June 24, 2025.
Interviewee 14	The participant submitted written responses on July 12, 2025.
Interviewee 15	The participant submitted written responses on July 19, 2025.