

Graduate Research Paper IHMN 690  
Sustainable Elements of the Backpacker Experience

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore how environmental practices contribute to the backpacker experience at hostels. Discovery of what environmental practices positively or negatively affect the backpacker experience will help when developing sustainable management strategies for hostels. There is a variety of material and academic studies regarding “green” tourism practices, however, to date, little research has been completed regarding the backpacker experience and environmental practices of hostels. The material presented in this literature review represents the backpacking experience on an international scale as well as important characteristics of sustainable tourism trends.

This applied research project used a mixed method approach including the use of quantitative and qualitative research measurements. The quantitative research helped to identify the positive and negative elements of the backpacker experience at hostels. Data collection for the qualitative research was completed through a semi-structured telephone interview with a sample size of four experts in sustainable practices and hostels.

A key element for the data collection was the conceptual framework of the European Customer Satisfaction Model (ECSI) model. This model indicated how sustainable elements can influence the backpacker experience depending on the designated technical or functional purpose of the sustainable practice. The outcomes of the research including the finding that functional elements have a larger influence on the backpacker experience are presented in an adapted ECSI model. Additionally, the data produced a list of the critical success factors required for the implementation of sustainable practices at hostel location.

*Keywords:* Backpacker, backpacking, hostels, environmental practices, sustainable tourism, visitor experience

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## **Introduction**

The aim of this research project is to explore the effects of environmental sustainable practices on the backpacker experience at hostels. Specifically, this paper will explore the particular environmental practices that contribute to a positive backpacker experience within hostel accommodation settings. The purpose of the project is to understand what specific practices affect the experience in order for Hostelling International Pacific-Mountain-Region Canada, hostel managers, and owners to focus limited financial and human resources on these particular practices in order to improve the backpacker experience.

The growth and expansion of tourism throughout the world impacts the environment, local communities, people and local economies. The tourism industry's environmental footprint, including aspects such as travel, accommodation, and tourist activities is considered significantly large (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). In response to the environmental impacts tourism sectors are having on an area, many tourism businesses are starting to develop sustainability practices into part of their management plans (McCool and Moisey, 2009). The scope of sustainable practices can include environmental, economic and social factors. However, due to project time constraints, the proposed research will focus specifically on the environmentally sustainable practices.

Environmental resources are considered an essential element to tourism development however, the resources must be utilized in such a way that the development helps conserves the surrounding natural environment (United Nations Environment Programme, n.d.). The recently released *Building a National Tourism Strategy* (Canada Federal Government, 2011) lists sustainable tourism as one of the primary focuses. The strategy suggests that the tourism industry will be dependent on the ability of local tourism operators and owners to adopt and

practice environmental stewardship (p. 15). However, the strategy does not outline specifics on how to achieve sustainable practices or how to use current resources. In order to develop sustainable practices, an understanding of what can be done and how it impacts the visitor is required. The forthcoming research will discover how sustainable practices affect the visitor backpacker experience by exploring the importance of the sustainable practices to the individual. The first phase of research including quantitative data collection focuses on current hostel environmental practices and the impact on the backpacker experience. The second phase of research involved qualitative interviews within the hostel management sector including management and owners of selected businesses that are currently implementing environmental sustainable practices. The findings and recommendations considered both phases of research along with identifying the critical success factors required for implementing sustainable practices in hostels as found in the research. This mixed method approach allowed for a thorough understanding of sustainable practices and the effects on the visitor experience.

## **Definition**

### **The Visitor Experience**

A definition of the visitor experience and why the visitor experience is important to tourism will give direction to the research and methodology. The visitor experience has been defined by Shaw and Ivens (2005) as “an interaction between an organization and a customer. It is a blend of an organization’s physical performance, the senses stimulated and emotions evoked” (p.22). Pine and Gilmore additionally suggest that every person has an experience which is inherently individual that is derived from the interaction with the surrounding environment and the individual’s state of mind (1999, p.99). Based on these definitions, for the

purpose of this study, the visitor experience is assumed to be the combination of different elements, including environmental, which interact together to construct a memorable overnight stay for the hostel guest.

### **Research Objectives**

The aim of this study is to research the impacts of different sustainable practices on the visitor experience in hostels. Robson (2011) suggests that research objectives will help to “define the project, set boundaries, give direction and define success” (p.59). The following research objectives provide direction regarding current sustainable hostel practices and the effects on the backpacker experience. The primary research objectives for this project include the following:

- 1) Examine what types of sustainable practices positively or negatively affect the visitor experiences.
- 2) Compare the role of technical and functional elements of environmental practices on the visitor experience.
- 3) Explore backpacker motivations to stay and/or spend more at hostels with environmental practices.
- 4) Identify critical success factors for the implementation of sustainable practices in hostels.

### **Significance of the Study**

The final outcomes of the research may benefit hostels that have limited resources for the implementation of sustainable practices. The outcomes of this research are intended to explore what elements are important to the backpacker experience in order for hostel management to

focus resources on those factors that enhance the experience. Ritchie and Hudson (as cited in Ritchie, Sun Tung, Ritchie, 2011, p.431) found that within tourism experience research articles that “experience research methodologies is one of the most neglected and/or difficult research areas in the field”. For example, Ritchie et al. (2011) argue that research efforts “should be devoted to achieving a better understanding of the various types of tourism experiences, and the criteria that individuals use to differentiate among them” (p. 432). Additionally, Chitty, Ward and Chua (2007, p.577) state that more research dedicated to external elements specific to the backpacker is required in order to optimize the development of hostels as accommodation options while creating an optimal visitor experience. To date, little research has been undertaken regarding the visitor backpacker experience and sustainable practices. The researcher intends to develop and build new knowledge of sustainable practices specifically for hostels in Alberta and British Columbia, in order to demonstrate which environmentally sustainable practices contribute the most to the backpacker experience. The use of a conceptual model presented in the conclusion, will help to illustrate the factors of importance that influence the visitor backpacker experience, which may contribute to the development of sustainable environmental action plans for hostels.

## **Chapter 1. Literature Review**

## **Introduction**

The intent of this chapter is a review of the literature as it relates to how the visitor experience is enhanced through sustainable practices at hostel accommodations. Various contributing components of the visitor experience create a complex web of factors that combine to form particular experience outcomes. Specifically, components include the community environment, educational opportunities, market appeal, hostel appeal, hostel trends and current environmental sustainable practices (Firth and Hing, 1999; Murphy, 2001; Wilson and Richards, 2008). The outcome of this literature review will help to increase knowledge regarding backpacker motivations and trends from a consumer perspective, and review the elements which combine to create a positive and memorable visitor experience. First, the literature will review academic articles, and relevant organizations to contribute to the creation of a conceptual framework of the visitor backpacker experience. The factors that contribute to sustainable practices will help to determine the measurable elements which may enhance and create a positive backpacker visitor experience within the conceptual framework. Second, the literature review will analyze current research regarding what sustainable practices can be measured and implemented in hostels. Third, a discussion regarding the literature findings will follow the literature review to give context to the development of the visitor backpacker experience conceptual framework. Lastly, the literature review will help to identify gaps that will be addressed in the research analysis including a contribution towards addressing the ongoing question of the return of investment of sustainability in tourism.

## **Sustainable Tourism Trends**

Prior to assessing the research regarding factors that contribute to a visitor experience, a brief overview of sustainable tourism and practices will provide direction. Sustainable tourism has been active since the early 1980's (Leung, Marion and Farrell, 2008, p. 19) with the publication of the Bruntland Report (1987). The Bruntland Report may present one of the most common definitions and driving forces behind sustainability. According to the report, sustainability is defined as "...meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (United Nations, 1987, chpt. 2, para. 1). However, it was noted by McCool & Moisey (2009) that agreement into a standard definition has yet to be determined (p. 4). This trend has been suggested as a large barrier to implementation of sustainable practices as there is no one definition to follow (McCool & Moisey, 2009; McMinn, 1997; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Despite the lack of a universal definition, the concept of sustainable tourism involving people, places and profit has contributed to evolution of sustainability practices being incorporated into a business management structure, which has been referred to as corporate social responsibility (CSR) planning. CSR as defined by the World Bank is "the commitment of businesses to contribute to sustainable economic development...in ways that are both good for business and good for development (anonymous, 2006, p.11). Additionally, CSR plans can be developed in conjunction with management plans that specifically regard the elements of a visitor experience and sustainable practices.

According to the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC), sustainable tourism is a growing area of interest for consumers and businesses (2005, p.1). This trend is supported by the 2005 release of *Green your Business: Toolkit for Tourism Operators* in that it provides a step-by-step guidebook which enables tourism businesses to implement sustainable tourism plans

(TIAC, 2005). TIAC also suggests that having a green strategy will attract the emerging market of travellers looking for sustainable services and products (2005, p.1). Furthermore, the Canadian Federal government's most recent report on tourism, *Building a National Tourism Strategy*, states that sustainable tourism plans will soon no longer be an option for tourism business, but a demand driven by the consumer market (2011, p.15).

Specific to the accommodation sector, the 2011 Hotel Association of Canada's Canadian Travel Intentions Survey found that 37 % of travellers stated that accommodation environmental programs are important to them (author, p.3). Schaper and Carlsen (as cited in Dodds and Holmes, 2011, p.490) also suggest that external pressure from consumers, government and competition may trigger sustainable practices to be implemented within tourism businesses. The use of sustainable practices is a growing trend in tourism and will be an important part of future tourism planning as the demands of the tourist change. As the consumer market has the ability to increase profit and marketability of a product or accommodation it will be important to understand the market, in this instance, the backpacker and the demands that they may have. Defining the backpacker and hostel experience in the next section will be essential to discover the sustainable practices that contribute to a positive hostel experience.

### **Backpacker Characteristics**

The type of traveller visiting and staying at hostel style accommodation typically refers to themselves as a backpacker. The backpacker guests have certain similarities between each other that are found regardless of the backpackers' background. Cohen (2003) defines a backpacker as a traveller who is taking a break from "their otherwise routine life path" (p. 101), and a rite as passage before entering adult hood (p. 102). Likewise, Maoz (2007) expanded on this definition to define backpackers as "self-organized pleasure tourists on a prolonged multiple-destination

journey” (p. 123). Additionally, Zouni and Kouremenos (2008) suggest that a backpackers’ experience is created by small encounters provided by a variety of elements (p.283). For this reason, hostels are able to design a space that contributes to the overall creation of the experience. Scott, Laws and Boksberger (2009) suggest that a visitor experience is designed by both the visitor and the supplier (p.101) which is significant to the backpacker in that they can contribute to their own experience. Many hostel users share similar characteristics in that they are looking to meet new people and cultures through their travels (O’Regan, 2010) and a community environment can provide is experience for backpackers and flashpackers alike.

Jarvis and Peel (2010) introduce a sub-component of the backpacker culture which is distinctly defined as a flashpacker. The new market of flashpackers is changing the way in which the hostel physical environment is experienced. The flashpacker is an older age bracket with an increased level of income and hospitality experience demands such as their own room and bathroom defines them (p.22). Flashpackers were once backpackers and desire the same backpacker experience they had previously had but now there is a willingness to spend more for value added service (Hecht and Martin, 2006, p.70).

The backpacker market has been increasing over the past 10 years including an increase in Asian and South American backpackers (Hecht & Martin, 2006, p.74). As Canada prepares for an increase in Asian travellers with Canada’s new status as an approved destination, understanding the backpacker demands of this particular market will be important to maintain market standards (CTC, 2010). Hecht & Martin (2006) additionally argue that Asian travellers desire the hostel experience and budget price with increased services such as private lockers, female only dorms, custom directions to the dorm and increased 24 hour front desk service (p.74). The increased demand for certain features may allow a hostel to make changes that

follow environmental practices. These environmental changes are beneficial to the hostel because sustainable practices have been found to be beneficial to a business or operator, and they have also been found to be of value to the backpacker experience (Firth & Hing, 1999). Experiences of the backpacker can occur in many areas, however, the accommodation of backpackers, hostels, as suggested by (O'Regan, 2010), is considered one of the important elements of the backpacker experience

### **Hostel Visitor Experience**

The experience in which the hostel provides is essential to the word of mouth reputation and marketing of the hostel experience between travellers. As backpackers tend to travel to particular enclaves (Cohen, 2003; Wilson & Richards, 2008), the word of mouth reputation is critical to a hostel destination success (Murphy, 2001, p. 51). Particularly regarding hostels, Firth & Hing (1999) argue that hostel guests are interested in staying at accommodations that positively contribute to the environment. Murphy (2001, p. 55) also concluded that the unique community environment of a hostel contributes to a user experience that reflects a more positive influence and meets backpacker expectations of being social. Additionally, hostels foster a community environment, which embraces the sharing and learning of different cultures and people (O'Regan, 2010, p. 91). Moreover, Manaktola and Jauhari (2007) argued that consumers are more likely to stay at a facility those markets and implements environmental practices. The importance of the experience of a destination, in this instance a hostel, has become increasingly significant for the tourism visitor.

Literature regarding the visitor experience has increased in recent years however, Pine & Gilmore (1999, p. 10) introduced the importance of the experience. Pine & Gilmore (1999) argue that an experience is “using services as a stage and goods as the props to engage an

individual” (p.11). The importance of the experience is the engagement of the customer, in this project, the backpacker. Shaw & Ivens (2005) defines the experience as a “blend of an organizations physical performance” (p.6). Physical components can be composed of the physical product, price and quality (Shaw & Ivens, 2005, p.7). Further to this, Scott et al. (2009) additionally argue that people are seeking the “extraordinary” experiences in using an “experiential elements in physical goods” (p.99). As the hostel accommodation experience is made up of both physical and emotional elements such as customer service and educational programs (Shaw & Ivens, 2005) it is important to understand how each of these elements contributes to the backpacker experience in order to measure and monitor them. Furthermore, it is argued by Dube and LeBel (as cite in Scott et al., 2009, p.102) that the emotional experience can be classified into four elements including sensory, social pleasure, emotional pleasure and intellectual pleasure. As many backpackers are on ‘gap’ years or a career break, this research is interested in exploring the relationship between intellectual and emotional pleasure derived from the knowledge of sustainable practices.

The hostel experience is a combination of the physical products, including sustainable elements, as well as the emotional experiences such as customer service and interactions between backpackers. Murphy (2001, p. 52) elaborates that the physical products in an experience are to include the following four categories: props (decorations, objects), boundaries (physical hostel building), modifiers (color, light, odor) and spaces (distances between people and objects). Schaffer (2004, p.147) also suggests that the props that a backpacker travels with are also key elements of the experience. Such props include can include the backpack, hostel stays, clothing attire and journals (Schaffer, 2004). Relative to sustainable elements, each of the four areas suggested by Murphy (2001) could contribute an enhanced visitor experience. Firth & Hing

(1999) discovered that the most common sustainable elements that were implemented in hostels were items relating to props and modifiers such as low flow shower heads, recycling and energy efficient light bulbs (p.252). These items could be suggested to help increase the visitor experience as it was found that 25% of backpackers would stay at ecofriendly hostels had they been marketed or heard about (Firth & Hing, 1999, p. 253). The importance of the interaction of physical elements will be essential to record as Scott et al. (2009, p. 104) emphasised the importance that controlling the physical setting and design will have on the service experience. Furthermore, as backpackers view hostels as more than just an accommodation option (Hecht & Martin, 2006, p.75); it is relevant that hostels recognize that the physical and emotional elements of the hostel environment create the experience. Bell (2008) argued that “the experience of the environment is indeed a central part of [the backpackers] experience” (p.347). Moreover, many hostels are located in unique natural environments and this particular physical environment can also be considered an element of the hostel experience that will have to be considered as a physical prop. In order to understand the contribution of elements behind the backpacker visitor experience, the use of the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) conceptual model will now be explored.

### **European Customer Satisfaction Index Model**

A variety of models and applications have been created for understanding different experiences including the co-constructing of meaning (Chronis, 2008), and the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), however a applicable study specific to hostels was completed by Chitty, Ward and Chua (2007) that involved the measurement of backpacker loyalty to certain hostels and hostel chains. This study modified the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) to measure the satisfaction levels of backpackers. This particular model has relevance for the

forthcoming research in that it can be adapted to include physical and emotional related sustainable elements. The ECSI model is comprised of several areas including technical dimensions (physical elements), image, functional dimension (emotional elements), and the perceived value which formed to create the visitor satisfaction experience (p.565). By modifying the ECSI model to include sustainable elements as components of both the technical and functional dimensions, it may provide understanding of how sustainable elements contribute to the backpacker experience. The ECSI model will be combined with the four elements presented by Murphy (2001) which include props, boundaries, modifiers and spaces. The sustainable elements will be categorized based on their purpose, which will contribute to the understanding of what elements influence to the backpacker experience. It is also important to acknowledge that the literature stated that if the backpackers have a positive experience relative to the service of the hostel that a loyalty pattern, which may also be measured, may occur (Chitty et al., 2007, p.568). However, before being able to market a particular tourism product, accommodation or experience, types of methods for measuring environmental impacts should be understood in order to create a baseline for comparison between hostel experience based on what elements are currently offered and measured. Moreover, in order to know what possible barriers are to sustainable practices, an understanding of what is being measured is required.

### **Measurements of Sustainable Tourism**

Discovering the variety of physical indicators relative to sustainable tourism practices is essential in order to apply physical elements to the methodology section of the project. Without an understanding to what can be measured, or what should be measured, it will be difficult to measure current hostel sustainable components contributing to the backpacker experience and apply to the ECSI model. Hudson and Miller (2005) suggest that the following areas are

essential to review when implementing an environmental sustainable CSR agenda including: policy on wildlife; policy on vegetation; waste management; fuel management; energy and recycling; education and training; research; and knowledge (p.134). Lim and McAlleer (2005) additionally suggest that the intensity of land use and physical impact be monitored, along with water consumption and conservation in ecological sensitive areas. Additionally, *The Green your Business: Toolkit for Tourism Operators* recommends that tourism businesses begin by monitoring the following physical environmental elements (TIAC, 2005): energy including types of lighting, sound environmental use (turn off lights, computers, etc...), maintain heating and ventilation, energy appliances, alternative sources of energy, reduce impact of unoccupied rooms (turn down heat); water including increasing efficient of hot water tanks and heaters, reduce waste water, improve greywater re-use, improve blackwater management, upgrade laundry facilities, and update dish washing area; waste management including reducing amount of paper used, properly dispose of waste, use recycle programs, donate unwanted items, use reusable products, and manage food waste; purchasing choices including better paper, environmental safe products, use local goods and services, and source local food products and finally community engagement including involving guests in environmental experiences (composting, recycle, etc...), sharing knowledge with others, and celebrating sustainable choices. These types of measurements are able to contribute to the overall experience of the visitor if measured carefully. Each of the listed physical and emotional elements is capable of having a measurement attached to them, which for the forthcoming research will be recorded to measure if a particular element influences the visitor experience. The ability to implement the suggested environmental practice is directly affected by overcoming possible barriers. In the next section barriers including community, financial and attitudes will be reviewed.

## **Barriers**

Literature on limiting barriers specifically relating to the hostel sector were limited, however, adapting research from other tourism sectors and business provided insight into what possible barriers to implementing sustainable environmental elements are. Barriers that have been suggested include community factors, knowledge, staffing, finances, attitudes and lack of support (Kasim, 2007; Aysuo, 2006). In this next section, the different barriers to implementing sustainable practices will be reviewed. This area is relevant to the visitor experience because understanding what barriers to overcome may enable hostels to improve upon the visitor experience in relation to sustainable practices.

### **Community barriers.**

Kasim's (2007) study of barriers to green strategies in the Malaysia hotel sector discovered that without the support of the local business and community residents, the hotels were less likely to be involved in the implementation of sustainable practices. In addition, it was suggested that if the employees of a particular business are not concerned or do not care about implementing an environmental strategy that little progress can be made (Kasim, 2007, p. 686). However, in a report completed by Vancouver Island University (VIU), it was found that if a business owner or employee was motivated by personal beliefs regarding environmental policies, that 65% of them would incorporate those beliefs into sustainability plans (2009, p.19). Ayuso (2006) further supports this in that in order to involve the employees of a tourism business that "the adoption of an environmental business strategy supposes a change of mind of managing directors, but also of middle managers and employees (p.216). However, the challenge to involving employees in the environmental plan in hostels may be difficult due to the percentage of frontline staff turnover rates. Despite the high turnover rate in some hostels, Dodds &

Kuehnel (2010) recommend that the stakeholder (hostel owners) power regarding the environment and how it is applied will be critical factors for the future implementation of sustainable tourism strategies (p.233). This argument is important as it recognizes how attitudes and perception can influence hostel management practices. In addition to the challenge of overcoming community support, a lack of accessibility to resources including financial barriers was discovered to be one of the largest determinants that could affect the implementation of sustainable practices and the backpacker experience.

### **Financial barriers.**

This aspect of the literature review confirmed current tourism beliefs regarding financial barriers. The cost of implementing the mentioned measurements such as new appliances, hardware for water measurement or the larger expenses such as alternative energy is a large deterrent for some business wanting to implement sustainable environmental elements. VIU (2009) reported that 50% of respondents for a study involving rural tourism operators in British Columbia stated that lack of money was the number one reason for not implementing programs (p. 20). This is supported by Kasim (2007) in that “environmental agenda[s] will be put aside – no money, no talk” (p. 689). Ayuso (2006) also reported that costs which may be incurred involving sustainable investments and human resource efforts is a barrier to implementation (p.212). However, Tyrrell and Johnston (2005) argued against the challenge of money by means that if the environmental quality and therefore experience increases than profits will increase (p.127). Regardless of financial difficulties or lack of resources, the visitor experience as reflected in the ECSI model, is also composed of emotional elements including education programs, customer service elements and other non-cost associated methods of sustainable practices. The implications of the low-cost factors may be recognized by visitors in a positive

manner and ultimately be the main contributing element to the backpacker experience. Moreover, the exploration of knowledge and resource development for hostel managers and staff provides an insight into the current tourism sustainable education which could be improved upon.

### **Resources and attitudes.**

The discovery that the lack of knowledge and resources was a common challenge for tourism businesses was thought-provoking. As there are numerous amounts of readily accessible information online, it was surprising to identify that this would be an issue for tourism operators and businesses (*Sustainable Tourism Lab*, n.d.; *Sustainable Tourism - Tourism BC*, 2011; TIAC, 2005; *Tour Operators Initiative*, n.d). However, VIU reported that 85% of tourism businesses that had not yet incorporated sustainable plans into their business stated that they had limited access to ideas on how to be more sustainable (2009, p.25). Business owners wanted toolkits in “simple terms” and “no nonsense resources” (VIU, 2009, p. 27). Furthermore, Kasim (2007) argues that “lack of information and targeted educational campaigns...is another barrier” (p. 693). An additional challenge to lack of accessibility to resources may also be the lack of human resources to implement a plan. Some businesses were discovered to have other priorities to complete before a CSR plan could be created however, it is suggested that having one full-staff member, who has an interest in environmental practices, may be essential to gaining accessibility to the required resources (Tourism BC, 2011; TIAC, 2005). The literature states that the attitudes of tourism business operators and staff, in this instance hostels, play a significant role in the implementation of environmental practices. Aysuo (2006) also recommended that managers are the lead “initiators of environmental change in the company” (p. 217). However, if the owner does not hold value in environmental practices or visitor experience, the likelihood of

plans being implemented is quite low as discovered by VIU (2009, p.) who found that 43 % of tourism operators who were not implementing an environmental practice plan felt that the “eco-crisis has been largely over exaggerated by society”. This issue is important because a lack of manager and staff buy-in may be found to inhibit the implication of the sustainable practices and consequently the backpacker experience. The use of best practices to help demonstrate the use of limited resources will provide an understanding of the current opportunities for sustainable practices in hostels.

### **Best Practices**

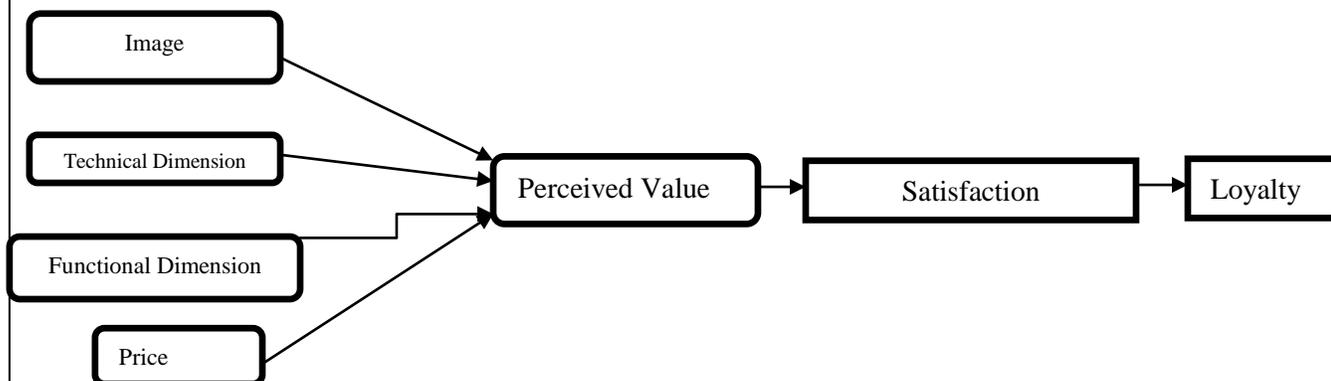
A review of recognized hostels around the world for their efforts in sustainable practices was undertaken in order to establish successful elements that can be incorporated into the ECSI model for the applied backpacker experience. These case studies provide a baseline for concrete sustainable elements that are currently affecting the backpacker experience. For example, the YHA Hostel located in Langdon Beck, UK has implemented sustainable elements such as recycling programs and energy breaks (YHA Langdon, n.d.). In addition to the physical elements of sustainable practices, Langdon YHA also offers weekend programs on environmental and outdoor practices. This is a demonstration of possible emotional experiences that could be offered to increase the visitor experience at Canadian hostels. Another hostel that has received attention for its sustainable practices is the Grampians YHA Eco-Hostel located in Australia (YHA Grampians, n.d.). Current sustainable elements at this hostel include local organic food in the kitchen, rain water collection and it is powered by solar panels. An additional concept relative to sustainable elements has been implemented by the Camiguin Eco Lodge Hostel in the Philippines (Camiguin Hostel, n.d.) which incorporates sustainable physical and emotional elements such as supporting local artists and the local community. This type of

sustainable element could be suggested as two-fold as it is a physical prop that contributes to the visitor experience but it also is an emotional prop that contributes to the development of local artists. Lessons that could be applied for the future regarding best practices include the combination of physical elements (technical) and emotional (functional) elements of educational programs regarding environmental practices and the outdoor areas.

### Conclusion of Literature Review

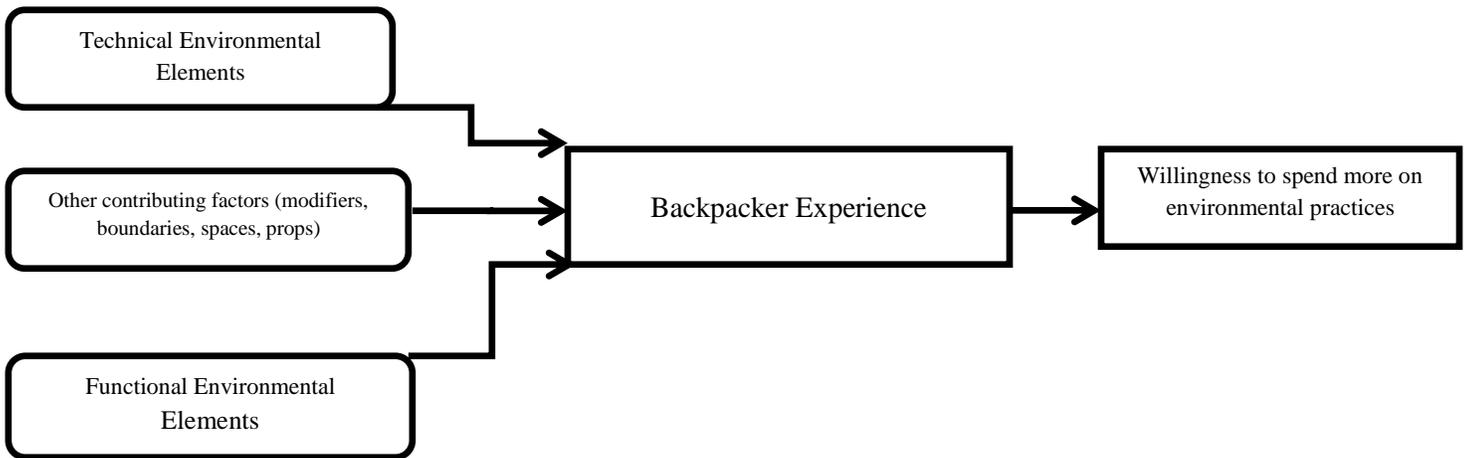
The literature review introduced an experience model called the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) model. The study presented by Chitty et al. (2007) was designed to measure the backpacker loyalty to certain hostels and hostel chains based on a variety of elements. The original ECSI model, as seen in Figure 1, is comprised of several areas including technical dimensions, image, functional dimension and the perceived value which form to create the visitor satisfaction experience (Chitty et al. 2007, p.565). For the purpose of this adapted model, technical dimensions are defined as good services and services which are physical and tangible in nature. Functional dimensions are those services which are intangible in nature; those that do not have a physical product associated with them (Chitty et al., 2007, p. 565).

*Figure 1. European Customer Satisfaction Index Model by Chitty et al. (2007).*  
From “An application of the ECSI model as a predictor of satisfaction and loyalty for backpacker hostels” by Chitty, B, Ward, S., and Chua (2007). *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 25(6), 563-580. Adapted with permission.



*Figure 2. Adapted ECSI model: the Backpacker Sustainable Experience model.*

Adapted from “An application of the ECSI model as a predictor of satisfaction and loyalty for backpacker hostels” by Chitty, B, Ward, S., and Chua (2007). *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 25(6), 563-580. Adapted with permission



*Note.* This model represents specific sustainable elements and other modifiers that affect the backpacker experience at hostels.

The adapted ECSI, referred to as the Backpacker Sustainable Experience (BSE) model presented in Figure 2 will include sustainable elements as components of both the technical and functional dimensions; the addition of these dimensions will contribute to the understanding of how sustainable elements contribute to the backpacker experience. The BSE model has also been combined with the four elements of an experience presented by Murphy (2001) which include props, boundaries, modifiers and spaces. The following list of sustainable measurements is based on those suggested by the literature. These function and technical elements will be measured in the impending research.

### **Functional elements**

- Guided walks
- Green energy buying such as Bullfrog Power
- Signs or messages supporting/promoting environmental practices
- Educational programs
- Information board with local activities
- Environmental activities for guests
- Power saving notices in rooms

- Evening activities
- Employee support/promote environmental practices

### **Technical Elements**

- Biodegradable soaps and detergent
- Biodegradable cleaning supplies
- Composting program
- Recycling program
- Energy efficient light bulbs
- Rainwater storage
- Composting toilets
- Buy/serve local food
- Energy Star laundry machine
- Solar panels
- Energy efficient shower heads
- Bicycles
- Wi-Fi access

The intention of this model is to guide the questions asked in the quantitative survey issued to hostel guests, as well as provided a conceptual framework in which to compare the data within. The data collected will assist in determining the degree of importance of technical versus functional sustainable elements in order to demonstrate the overall weight and importance of each area on the backpacker experience.

The backpacker experience is as much an individual and personal experience as in any service area; however, the requirements in which to satisfy the backpacker differ from many tourists. To determine how and if sustainable practices effect the backpacker experience, the use of the BSE conceptual framework will be used. Possible results of the study may result in the development of the environment which is designed in order to optimize the backpacker experience and uniqueness of each individual hostel. Nevertheless, to what extent sustainable physical and emotional elements are required to enhance the visitor experience has not yet been measured. The literature review has found gaps in current research involving sustainable

practices and the backpacker experience however; this current research project will look to fill some of the gaps regarding sustainability and the backpacker experience through quantitative and qualitative research methods.

## **Chapter 2. Methodology**

## **Overview**

The following research design is part of a mixed methods research project to determine how sustainable elements contribute to the visitor experience at hostels. The primary method of research will be conducted through use of a quantitative survey which will be triangulated with qualitative data and secondary research. The project has been developed to build on the literature review and complete the gaps in the research regarding sustainable elements and the backpacker experience. As suggested in Cohen, S. (2010, p. 78) backpackers are “more composite and multifaceted than ever” which has contributed to not targeting a specific demographic of hostel user and backpacker. As such, the research is focused on the motivation and experiences of the hostel visitor, not a specific age category as hostel visitors’ travel for many reasons and at any age. The scope of sustainable practices can include environmental, economic and social factors, however, due to time constraints the proposed investigation focused specifically on the environmentally sustainable practices of hostels and backpacker motivations.

## **Quantitative Research: Survey Distribution**

### **Procedure.**

The quantitative research design for this study is an online survey targeted to a specific population. The proposed survey was constructed through the online survey host Survey Monkey. The online survey method was chosen for a number of reasons including participant’s access to computers, ease of completion of the survey, anonymous response of questionnaire answers, ease of distributing the survey and the ease of collection of the data (Robson, 2011, p.249). Additionally, due to the research topic of sustainability, online surveys require minimal paper waste when compared to a mail-out questionnaire. Furthermore, due to the locations of the possible participants, creating an interview style questionnaire would take a considerable amount

of time and travel to complete. As suggested by Robson (2011, p.264) a pre-test of the questionnaire occurred before distribution including reviews by Hostelling International Canada management and backpacker travelers. This step was essential to get feedback regarding style, formatting, word and grammar presentation as well as maintaining a focus on the research objectives.

### **Sampling frame.**

Doyle (n.d., chapter 10) recommended that the population aspect of the research methodology includes details regarding the sampling plan and criteria for the sample size selection. As such, the quantitative survey population chosen for the sampling frame was created from the following criteria:

- Hostelling International Pacific Mountain Region sponsored the survey distribution in return for a presentation of the results at the Annual General Meeting in June 2012.
  - E- newsletter (22,500 subscribers) and online blog beginning February 15, 2012
  - Embedded survey into email reservation confirmations from February 12, 2012 to March 22, 2012

Sending out the survey through a monthly Hostelling International Alberta and British Columbia “Backpacker Buzz” newsletter was chosen due to the number of people receiving the on-line newsletter. Additionally, the link to the survey was embedded in all online reservation email confirmations that occur in the HI Canada online reservation system from February 12 – March 22, 2012. This method of distributing a survey allowed a diverse population of respondents and was not limited to a certain demographic staying at a particular hostel or a particular time of year. It also allowed for a potential large number of respondents which

increased the significance of the data when being analyzed and decreased any generalizations made (Robson, 2011, p.271). The survey was introduced through a short blog style entry which can be found in Appendix A, created by the researcher introducing the project and providing the link to the survey with the distributed online newsletter. The newsletter database consists of HI members as well as members of the public who have an interest in hostelling who have entered themselves onto this particular mailing list. In order to increase the response rate to the survey, an incentive of a \$150 gift certificate for Mountain Equipment Co-op was offered to those who completed the survey. Participants could opt into this draw upon survey completion by entering their email address. It was not requirement to enter the draw in order to complete the survey. This quantitative survey approach will allow for a wide range of hostel user demographics from across Canada which contributed to the research findings.

The following considerations, as suggested by Garson (2009, survey section) were followed in order to present a clear and concise survey. The survey layout begins with simple, non-threatening questions to engage the participants, which then move into more personal beliefs regarding sustainability and experiences. Additionally, the questions follow a thematic scheme so as to not confuse potential participants by moving between topics. Appendix B contains the introductory portion of the survey. The survey questions were chosen to help discover relationships between the following factors:

- 1) Backpackers and their hostel experience.
- 2) Current sustainable practices and the backpacker experience.
- 3) Criteria of the hostel and the backpacker experiences.
- 4) Sustainability and backpacker motivations.

### **Data analysis.**

A total of 101 responses were collected through Survey Monkey with a final completion rate of 90%. The responses were analysed through a summary and thematic coding of certain responses. Using the data collected in questions 7 and 8 (Appendix C) the elements were categorized based on the adapted ECSI model of physical or service based elements. The following elements were divided into either functional (F) or technical (T) areas representative of the categories of the BSE model.

#### Technical Elements:

- Biodegradable soaps and detergent (T)
- Biodegradable cleaning supplies (T)
- Energy efficient light bulbs (T)
- Energy efficient shower heads (T)
- Solar panels (T)
- Composting toilets (T)
- Energy Star laundry machine (T)
- Green energy buying such as Bullfrog Power (T)
- Composting program (T)
- Recycling program (T)
- Rainwater storage (T)

#### Functional Elements

- Print when necessary messaging (F)
- Educational programs (F)
- Environmental activities for guests (F)
- Power saving notices in rooms (F)
- Buy/serve local food (F)
- Employees support or promote environmental practices (F)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_ (T/F)

Categorizing the data into two categories created a method of breaking down which element, either technical or functional, influences the backpacker experience. Additional measurements

regarding elements were analyzed through a theming method which resulted in further evidence for certain element preference over others. Once the categories were analyzed, the overall effects of each element were compared to each other. This comparison is demonstrated in the final BSE model of sustainable elements and the backpacker experience in chapter four.

### **Limitations.**

The research design was limited by a number of variable factors including time restrictions, and monetary resources. It is hoped that the use of an online survey decreased the impact of monetary and time constraints however, it is noted that some costs occurred such as hosting the web survey site and the purchase of MEC gift certificate. An additional limitation includes only targeting hostel visitors who have made reservations online through the Hostelling International Canada reservation system and who were included in the “Backpacker Buzz” database. Another limitation was that the retraction of the data from the online survey was delayed due to the survey being held over in the HI reservation system for an additional week. However, this delay allowed for a higher number of respondents than expected for the quantitative analysis.

## **Qualitative Research: Interviews**

### **Procedure.**

The second part of the mixed methods exploratory research involved conducting individual telephone interviews, to gain an insight into the business perspective of sustainable practices and the backpacker experience. The resulting information contributed to the triangulation of the quantitative research and literature review. Kvale (as cited in Jennings, 2005, p. 102) suggests that “[a] qualitative research interview is a construction site for knowledge” which will triangulate with the data collected in the quantitative research. Specifically, the interviews focused on why the managers chose to implement sustainable practices and how they view the visitor experience at their hostels. The interviews were semi-structured as this allowed for the researcher to prepare questions that they would like to explore, as well as provided an opportunity for the conversation to flow more freely than in a structured interview setting (Jennings, 2005; Robson, 2011). This type of interview method was selected as in-depth interviews allow the researcher to gain information regarding attitudes and behaviors that otherwise may not be captured (Robson, 2011, p.280). Due to the distances between the potential interview participants, a focus group study was not ideal in this setting.

### **Sampling frame.**

The sampling frame was based on the selection of four experts in the hostel sector including hostel managers and/or owners who currently have been recognized for the hostels environmental practices and on the expertise of the manager in the implementation of sustainable practices. The potential participants were contacted through an invitation to participate email with a follow-up phone call to set up an interview time with in-person or a telephone interview. Appendix D outlines the invitation to participate email. It is recognized by the researcher that

conducting personal interviews required practice, patience and “trusting your instincts” (Jennings, 2005, p. 106). These skills improved as the researcher recorded and reviewed field notes throughout the process. The qualitative design includes an interview guide which has been adapted from Boyce and Neale (2006) and Robson (2011, p. 284). Appendix E contains the interview guide used for each telephone interview.

### **Data analysis.**

The data collected through the interview process was transcribed and collected in excel spreadsheets. Information from each question was then themed based on key words regarding sustainability practices, business motivations and effects on the backpacker experience. Robson (2011, p.479) suggested that coding can be divided into such events as conditions or constraints (barriers), strategies (applications) and meaning (definitions). By using the coding process to analyze the data, the researcher was able to explore key themes that emerged regarding the business perspective of environmental practices and the visitor experiences. The resulting thematic coding was used for triangulation with the hostel experience quantitative survey and the secondary literature review.

### **Limitations.**

The respondents to this portion of the research were interested in the project and all participants echoed the sentiment that they are excited to see the outcome of the project. The selection of who to contact was difficult, and the researcher made an effort to select participating hostels from across Canada and North-West United States that have been recognize for current environment practices and procedures. Due to the nature of the quantitative method distribution through Hostelling International, the researcher was limited to which hostels to contact regarding current practices. Hostels that would have presented a conflict of interest due to competition

were specifically not chosen. During the interviews other hostels were suggested to contact, however given the time frame, the researcher was unable to proceed with these new options. Given the limited number of participants and nature of qualitative research, the qualitative results will not be generalized to settings beyond those in the study. However, it is hoped that the results may be implied in other similar tourism settings and identify areas for further research.

## Chapter 3. Data Analysis

## **Quantitative Overview**

The following data summary is the result of the online quantitative survey distributed through the HI- Pacific Mountain Region February 2012 Backpacker Buzz Newsletter as well as the email reservation confirmation of HI PMR region through February 12, 2012 – March 24, 2012. A total of 101 respondents were collected with a 90% completed response rate.

### **Information regarding the backpacker.**

The first two questions were designed to discover trends of demographics of the backpacker travellers. It was found that the demographics of the backpacker were reflective of Cohen's (2003) concept that each backpacker is an individual traveller with no defining demographics. The data evenly distributed the age of the traveller between each category without one age dominating over another. This was surprising, as the researcher was anticipating a much younger demographic to respond to an environmental survey. The majority of the backpackers were found to use hostels an average of 1- 5 times a year with 66.3% of respondents staying a hostel 1-5 times a year. Respondents indicated that the motivations for selecting hostel accommodation was primarily for the budget accommodation (90.1 %) however, a number of respondents also indicated other influencing factors such as a sense of community (57.4%), ability to meet other travellers (68.3%) and to gain new experiences (40.6%) as part of the selection process. The concept of community is important as a community setting is an essential part of the experience setting for the backpacker as indicated by Wilson & Richards (2008, p.193). Additional comments regarding why hostels were chosen as an accommodation included the location of hostel being an important theme that emerged:

- “Proximity to outdoor locations”.
- “The location in relation to the activity and experience chosen”.

- “Supporting cultural diversity.”
- “Often located in heritage buildings.”
- “Locations.”
- “Prepare our own meals.”
- “Usually well-located in the centre of town.”

### **The backpacker experience.**

The following questions were designed to gain information regarding what elements, functional or technical, that could contribute to a negative or positive experience at a hostel. There are four questions reviewed below that were created to be open ended in order to discover any themes regarding elements and experience.

*Question 3.* What physical elements contribute to a positive experience at hostels for you?

Respondents contributed a variety of responses with the cleanliness of a hostel being one of the most apparent themes with 51 respondents out of 95 (53.6%) stating it is part of what creates a positive experience. Other comments indicated the importance of access to a welcoming and warm communal space to interact and meet other travelers (17%), and environmental practices. Following are a few of the most significant comments:

- “Ability to lock belongings securely, easy access to shower, cleanliness.”
- “A clean place.”
- “Clean washrooms and showers, clean bed linens, comfortable area to relax.”
- “Comfy place to sit and read.”
- “Area for people to congregate.”
- “Considerations for environmental concerns.”
- “Community dining opportunities.”

- “Comfortable common space (good for meeting people).”
- “Efficient common area.”
- “Natural Environment. “
- “Interaction, great kitchen area, sustainable practices. “

Additionally, certain elements were mentioned that reflect the props and modifiers required to create a positive experience. Examples of physical props which were mentioned that can be controlled or stage by a hostel included:

- “Have a home stay feel.”
- “Calm quiet natural atmosphere. “
- “Adequate Lighting.”
- “Warm playful décor.”
- “Pleasant Lighting.”

*Question 4.* What physical elements contribute to a negative experience at hostels for you?

Survey respondents gave an overwhelming response of 61 out of 95 (65%) indicating that the lack of cleanliness at a hostel is the largest contributing factor to a negative experience. Additionally, having a lack of access to recycling programs at the hostel and cold feeling physical environment are also factors that negatively affect the backpacker experience:

- “No recycling facilities.”
- “Sterile/cold atmosphere.”
- “Too large/institutional feeling.”
- “Unnecessary fancy things.”
- “FILTH.”

- “Too much like a hotel.”
- “Blank walls – put up posters!”
- “Loud music.”
- “Sloppy housekeeping.”
- “Negativity.”
- “Cluttered and unclean rooms and facilities.”
- “Large volumes of waste.”

*Question 5.* What service and activity elements create a positive hostel experience for you?

This question was looking specifically at service and activity elements offered in hostels for visitors. Out of the 94 responses, 59 valued access to programs and local culture exposure. The desire to experience the local culture reflects the arguments of Noy (2004) and Murphy (2001) in that backpackers want to discover and learn about the cultures of the destination that they are visiting. Murphy (2001) also indicated that backpackers were looking for hostels that had a “friendly, relaxed atmosphere, pleasant and comfortable, friendly staff and no “cliques” of working backpackers” (p. 58) which reflects the additional elements that were found to contribute in a positive manner to the experience including staff attitudes (25%), free Wi-Fi services (45%) and up-to-date information boards (18%). Survey respondents reflected the importance of organized activities to help experience the local culture and as a way of meeting other travellers:

- “Evening activities, local culture, meeting new visitors.”
- “Anything organized with groups of travellers whether it be a quick guided walk or a talk about some of things to go there.”

- “Local culture and events posted, bike rentals, free Wi-Fi and friendly hosts.”
- “Free Wi-Fi, free films, guided walk, local culture, green/ethical practice, friendly and helpful staff.”
- “Great, friendly staff; ideas as to what would be fun to do in the area and knowledgeable.”

*Question 6.* What service and activity elements create a negative hostel experience for you?

The responses to this question reinforced the importance of good staff and a welcoming atmosphere with 32.9% of respondents stating that uncaring staff directly effects their hostel experience:

- “Indifferent staff, inefficient staff.”
- “Unfriendly or clicky hosts. Lack of community information about the area.”
- “Uncaring/unknowledgeable staff.”
- “Disinterested/unhelpful staff, no local info.”

Murphy (2001) also found that there was “dissatisfaction with staff who treated guests as if there were a nuisance” (p. 64). In addition to negative staff attitudes, 29.7 % of respondents suggested that lack of information as well as limited access to local activities and culture is a large element that can create negative experiences for backpackers. An interesting trend appeared in this portion regarding activity options. A number of respondents indicated that pressure to participate in offered activities negatively affect their experience:

- “Uniformed staff or too much sale-type pressure.”
- “Pressure to attend activities, lack of local culture and connections to community.”

- “When there is nothing organized at the hostel it makes it harder for people to meet other travellers (many times all travellers are sitting in the same space, but not communicating), it's nice to have the opportunity to have tours that are organized through the hostel, then you're sure to end up on a tour when other backpacker's.”

### **Backpacker experience and the environment.**

The intent of these questions was to gain perspective on the degree to which certain environmental practices are deemed important and relevant to the backpacker experience. Furthermore, the questions were meant to understand what elements are most important to the backpacker. There are three questions reviewed below.

*Question 7.* What types of environmental practices do you think are important in hostels?

The respondents were asked to select sixteen different elements on levels of general importance in hostels. Out of 93 respondents the most important elements selected included:

- Recycling Program (90.3%)
- Biodegradable soaps in kitchens and bathrooms (67.7%)
- Energy efficient light bulbs (73.1%)
- Biodegradable cleaning supplies (62.4%)
- Composting program (64.5%)
- Buy/Serve local food (62.4%)
- Signs or messages supporting environmental practices (67.7%)
- Employees support/promote environmental practices (64.5%)

One respondent stressed the importance and value of environmental practices:

- “Anything that expands our ideas of environmental practices beyond recycling.”

Another respondent additionally commented on that importance of the environmental practices:

- “They’re all important and in developed countries there’s no reason they shouldn’t be evident.”

The least important environmental practices at hostels were those that did not have an immediate impact on the backpacker included composting toilets (24.7%), and Green Energy purchasing (35.5%). A full overview of the data can be found in Appendix C.

*Question 8.* Of these environmental practices which ones do you feel have a positive impact on your experience and stay at a hostel?

This question was developed to understand which of the elements had a positive influence on the backpacker experience at the hostel. It was found that recycling programs have the most direct impact on the visitor with 76.3% of respondents finding this important. Other practices that were deemed important to the individual experience included:

- Employees support/promote environmental practices (62.4%)
- Buy/Serve local food (59.1%)
- Composting program (48.4%)
- Signs or messages supporting/promoting environmental practices (46.2%).

One respondent suggested that identifying possible local environmental projects which they could participate in (invasive weed pulling) would be a good practice to put in place for backpackers.

In concluding the questions specific to environmental practices and the experience, the respondents were then asked to rank the most important elements in the following categories: not important, somewhat important, important and definitely important.

*Question 9.* Please rank the practices that you feel contribute to creating a positive experience for you as a hostel guest.

As found in the other two questions, access to a well maintained recycling program was found to be the overall contributing factor to the visitor experience with 70 respondents selecting this program as definitely important. Following this were the following four most important elements:

- 1) Employees support/promote environmental practices.
- 2) Energy efficient shower heads and light bulbs.
- 3) Environmental messaging.
- 4) Buy/serve local food and energy star appliances.

The top ranked practices are a mix of both technical and functional elements that positively affect the visitor. This finding is important as the recommendations are informed by the relevance and statistical importance of the technical and functional element breakdown in the BSE model.

### **Marketability of hostels.**

There are two questions reviewed below which were designed to understand if respondents were willing to pay more for environmental services and practices. This issue is

important as it demonstrates the demands of backpackers and what they are willing to pay for those expectations to be met.

*Question 10.* If you had a choice, would you prefer to stay at a hostel that has environmental practices over a hostel that does not have any environmental practices?

Respondents answered an overwhelming yes (90.2%); they would prefer to stay at environmentally friendly hostels. However, it is noted by one respondent the accountability of a hostel would be important for them:

- “Yes I would prefer green hostels but this would require a rating system and notation so I could compare and choose.”

In addition, respondents also stated that environmental practices are good as long as they do not affect the other aspects of the hostel experience:

- “I would prefer to stay at a hostel that implements environmental practices over a hostel that does not only if it had the key elements that I find affect my stay (free Wi-Fi, hot showers, common areas, free tours, bicycle rentals).”
- “If everything else was equivalent, I would prefer the environmentally responsible hostel but other factors such as location, cleanliness, and price would influence my decision more strongly.”

*Question 11.* If a hostel was accountable for environmental practices, would you be willing to pay more for your hostel stay?

Respondents were given an option to select a percentage of increase of the overnight stay at a hostel if environmental practices were accountable and visible. 27% stated that they would be willing to pay an increase of 1 – 3 %, followed by 25% were willing to pay an increase of 4 –

6 %. Overall, 52% of survey respondents were willing to pay for environmentally accountable hostels. Only 20 % of all survey respondents stated that they would not pay for any price increase. This finding is important as it demonstrates that accountability has implications for business planning and financial stability of hostels.

### **Backpacker motivations.**

The intent of the next question was to understand the personal motivations of backpackers and their views regarding sustainability practices. The following question was intentionally left until the end of the survey to prevent altered viewpoints throughout the survey. *Question 12.* In a few words, please describe your personal views on sustainability and the environment.

A number of themes emerged in the responses however the most common theme was the level of importance that sustainable and environmental practice. In particular, 42% of respondents mentioned the word importance and the context of personal responsibility for the future generations:

- “Important issues, I think young travellers are the kind of people to be interested.”
- “We each need to do our part.”
- “I think sustainability is ensuring that future generations can live and see what we see now.”
- “If you are looking for budget accommodation in the midst of nature, sustainability is the backbone for the future.”

Many respondents stated that educating people will be important for the environment in the future. Furthermore, respondents suggested that hostels provide a good environment in which to start that education:

- “I think sustainability is critically important but shouldn’t need to be costly (focus on conservation and limiting environmental footprint).”
- “It’s a very important value to transmit to young people and hostels should help enhance good practices.”
- “Hostels must set an example, be an agent of change and education.”

Additionally, some respondents were aware of the impacts of travel and appreciated efforts made by hostels and other accommodation to accommodate environmental practices:

- “Important in hostelling business given high turnover of resources.”
- “Travel involves a lot of transportation energy, so it’s best that we save some energy once we arrive at our destination!”
- “Travel is wonderful and can only be sustainable if we make a sustainable effort to act in environmentally responsible ways.”

### **Conclusion.**

This last question of the survey was an open-ended question designed to receive any additional feedback from the respondents.

*Question 13.* Are there any additional comments you would like to add regarding your hostel experience, environmental practices or any additional thoughts or suggestions.

Survey respondents had a variety of comments, although a trend in the ability of hostels to provide environmental services did arise:

- “I fully support hostels which have a sustainable, world-ethical environment and which walk the walk”
- “Going to a hostel w/good practices makes the experience feel more personal and that they really care about the environment.”
- “These environmental considerations add to the attraction and philosophy of hostels.”
- “I’m not willing to sacrifice daily comforts just to be sustainable.”

Additional comments that can be considered relevant to the modifier, props and staging of the hostel experience include:

- “Post notices on environmental stewardship in the hostels.”
- “Recycling needs to be clearly labelled, too often bins are confusing. Use pictures rather than words for non-English speakers. “
- “Given options, I would choose a hostel that advertised that it promoted local environmental projects.”

As found in the data collected regarding positive and negative service elements the topic of staff attitudes were presented again by respondents:

- “Appreciate the employees that support this.”
- “Some staff support environmental practices, some don’t. Encourage the staff that do and get rid of those who don’t. “

Overall the evidence collected presented some interesting findings which will be discussed along with the implications for hostels, hostel management and the backpacker experience.

## **Qualitative Overview.**

During a 3 week period in March 2012, qualitative interviews were completed with four experts in the area of sustainable practices and hostels. The experts were selected based on the criteria that each manager or owner currently operates a hostel that has been recognized through various agencies for the current sustainable and environmental practices occurring at the hostel. Such recognition includes the following: Sustainability at Work's third Gold Certified organization, Climate Smart Business recognition, Best Eco Lodges, Best Environmental Program awards and print media reviews. Each of the hostels currently is implementing some or all of the environmental practices mentioned in the quantitative study. The information provided by the hostel managers/owners provided invaluable information regarding the implementation of practices into hostels and how they influence the visitor experience.

### **Interviews.**

The interviews were designed to reflect a semi-structured format that intended to explore motivations behind business decision, the environment and reflections on the backpacker experiences. Each respondent contributed to the understanding of hostel management and revealed a variety of areas to further explore. Furthermore, the collected answers generated supplementary support for the way forward regarding hostel management and sustainable practices.

*Question 1.* Please describe the characteristics of the hostel.

The intention of this question was to get a general sense of the different type of hostel structures that are implementing practices. One respondent originally designed the structure as a field station but expanded to include hostel style accommodation to gain business. Another manager operates with 60 beds, which is down from the original number of 80 beds. This

particular respondent began at this location in 2009 with a derelict building to work with. Another operation is a large summer only facility that was built in 1931. Current occupancy stands at 250 beds. It was found that each hostel operation varied in age and occupancy which leads to the conclusion that sustainable practices are able to occur in any style and size of operation depending on other factors including resources, education and staff.

*Question 2.* Can you describe the current sustainable practices being implemented at the hostel?

Each of experts had varying degrees of sustainable practices being implemented however; they each stressed the importance of the practices to the hostel and visitor. Some of the themes that were found included:

- Use of local food in the breakfasts.
- Accessibility to edible gardens for guests.
- Access to reusable grocery bags with maps to local markets instead of box stores.
- Staff training in environmental practices.

Some of the most interesting practices that were being used include:

- “Common green room with recycled jean insulation, bamboo floors, salvaged windows and doors, Metro recycled paint and FSC certified lumber.”
- “8,000 gallon rainwater harvesting system that supplies toilets with water nine months out of the year.”

Respondents also indicated that they are looking for methods of incorporating more elements this summer including composting programs and rainwater collection. One interviewee indicated that they would like to move the hostel to operating with a more “holistic operations approach” within business and hostel practices.

*Question 3.* How much does sustainability play a role in your planning?

A theme that occurred was that sustainable programs were not designed to be separate from the business aspect of hostel management. Respondents indicated that sustainability is an integral part of business planning “sustainable practices affect all aspects of business not just a stand-alone piece”. In addition, interviewees also stated that it makes financial sense: “Need to look to save money it may be more upfront but saves money in long-run”. The common trend among respondents was that sustainability needs to be a part of future business planning for many reasons including environmental but also it is business smart because of the clientele: “Clientele expect location/identity of hostel to reflect environmental standards”. Another expert indicated the level of external influence in implementing environmental practices: The environmental purchasing structure places demand on external suppliers to provide environmental responsible products. If the supplier is not able to provide the materials, the hostel looks elsewhere

*Question 4.* How do you think visitors perceive your sustainable practices?

The respondents indicated that many of the visitors appreciated the sustainable practices at hostels. One interviewee even stated that it was a way to “connect and touch the guest”. One expert further indicated that guests stay because of the practices and they are curious. The curiosity fosters discussions which keep hostel staff on their toes. Moreover, this particular manager suggested that “guests are happy and excited to be a hostel with a level beyond the basic low hanging fruit (lights, recycle, etc...); the hostel is after meat & potato practices that reflect the triple bottom line approach to sustainability”. Another interviewee suggested the

common space provided an area of discussion in which “80 % of visitors are smart people who increase discussions around common space” regarding environmental practices. This finding is important because it reinforces the importance of the common space prop suggested by the adapted BSE model. Nevertheless, it was found that although each of these operations were implementing environmental practices, managers indicated that they could be marketing them better to the backpacker in order to promote the operation and perhaps increase traffic.

*Question 5.* As a hostel manager/owner, how do you think the sustainable practices affect the visitor experience at the hostel?

The respondents indicated that the sustainable experiences offered at the hostel positively affected the backpacker experience. One respondent suggested that “perception is important, which is why staff education is key.” Specifically to the backpacker experience, one manager indicated that although environmental practices are important, the overall backpacker experience at the hostel is most important perception:

- “Backpacker experience ; they are there for 3.5 days, it is their home, expectation of their own creature comforts and something they would do at home (ex. Low-flow shower heads).”
- “Enjoy providing an experience that is less environmentally expensive but provides a satisfactory experience for guests.”
- “Guests seek it out and want that experience.”

Subject experts also suggested that the experience of staying at a sustainable accommodation option also provided a way to get people talking: “Where people will end up talking about it and then take back home with them”. Another indication of the changing demands was found when

a particular environmentally expert sought out a particular hostel because of its' social and environmental practices.

*Question 6.* Do you have any other advice regarding environmental practices in hostels or additional comments?

Respondents re-instated the importance of personal drive from a management perspective when looking to implement sustainable practices. Without manager or owner support, it was suggested to be difficult to support practices. Each expert had a different version of what and where to start including:

- “Innovate old fashioned experience for guests from 1940-1950 eras (everything old is new again).”
- “Hard to get going.”
- “Slow to progress but making progress.”
- “Can save money by training during shifts (practices applied upfront and see better results).”
- “Need to accept challenge – small steps but with view of the bigger picture.”
- “Need to respect community, environment, guests, that you are in.”
- “Make HI Q environment a mandatory part of it to motivate managers to implement.”
- “Takes a lot of effort and variables to implement.”
- “Search out best practices of other hostels.”
- “Use resources like Sustainable Travel International webinars.”
- “Grant writing.”

One expert stressed the importance a national and network support system that could be a resource for hostel managers. This would demonstrate buy-in and support from management as well as show support for managers by working with them instead of “assigning tasks”. The concluding remarks of the experts are important because it specifies that although implementing practices can be difficult and a challenge at times, which the way forward for hostels and developing the backpacker experience requires small steps. Subject experts all expressed the requirement of the passion and drive of the hostel manager as a required element to implementing environmental practices at hostels which reflects Kasim’s (2007) findings which argue that a top-down approach regarding environmental behaviors from managers is needed to for the adaptation of practices within a business. Overall respondents indicated that moving towards sustainable practices makes business and guest sense. Backpackers are demanding certifications as stated by one expert, and hostels will need to react to the changing market. As suggested by Hecht & Martin (2006) backpackers area growing up and hostels must grow and change “concepts, products and services to match the ever-changing needs and services preferences of the key market segments” (p.76). Subject experts also indicated that moving forward requires support and resources however; asking for help is a great way to push forward towards changes.

## **Chapter 5. Findings and Recommendations**

## Overview

The quantitative and qualitative data collected from the survey including 100 quantitative responses and four subject interviews, provides insight into what elements are required for the backpacker experience at hostels and what environmental practice are viewed as important practices to be implementing. Using the research objectives as a guiding tool, the following is a summary of the key findings:

*Table 1. Summary of Key Findings*

- 1) Staff environmental training program;
- 2) Incorporation of relative functional and technical elements listed in Table 1 ;
- 3) Creation of positive modifiers and access to backpacker props;
- 4) Accountability of environmental practices to backpackers.

**Objective 1: Examine what types of sustainable practices positively or negatively affect the visitor experiences.**

Respondents indicated a varying degree of positive sustainable practices affected their experience at a hostel. Based on the data collected Table 1 presents the overall average of the elements.

Table 2. Technical and Functional Elements.

<b>Technical Elements</b>	<b>Important Practices at Hostels</b>	<b>Positive Impact to Visitor Experience</b>
Biodegradable soaps and detergent	.677	.387
Biodegradable cleaning supplies	.624	.366
Energy efficient light bulbs	.731	.323
Energy efficient shower heads	.699	.430
Solar panels	.505	.290
Composting toilets	.247	.172
Energy Star laundry machine	.527	.247
Green energy buying such as Bullfrog Power	.355	.226
Composting program	.484	.484
Recycling program	.763	.763
Rainwater storage	.269	.269
<i>Average total*</i>	<b>.534</b>	<b>.3597</b>
<b>Functional Elements</b>		
<b>Functional Elements</b>	<b>Important Practices at Hostels</b>	<b>Positive Impact to Visitor Experience</b>
Signs or messages	.677	.462
Educational programs	.366	.323
Environmental activities for guests	.376	.398
Power saving notices in rooms	.548	.398
Buy/serve local food	.624	.591
Employees support or promote environmental practices	.645	.624
<i>Average total**</i>	<b>.539</b>	<b>.466</b>

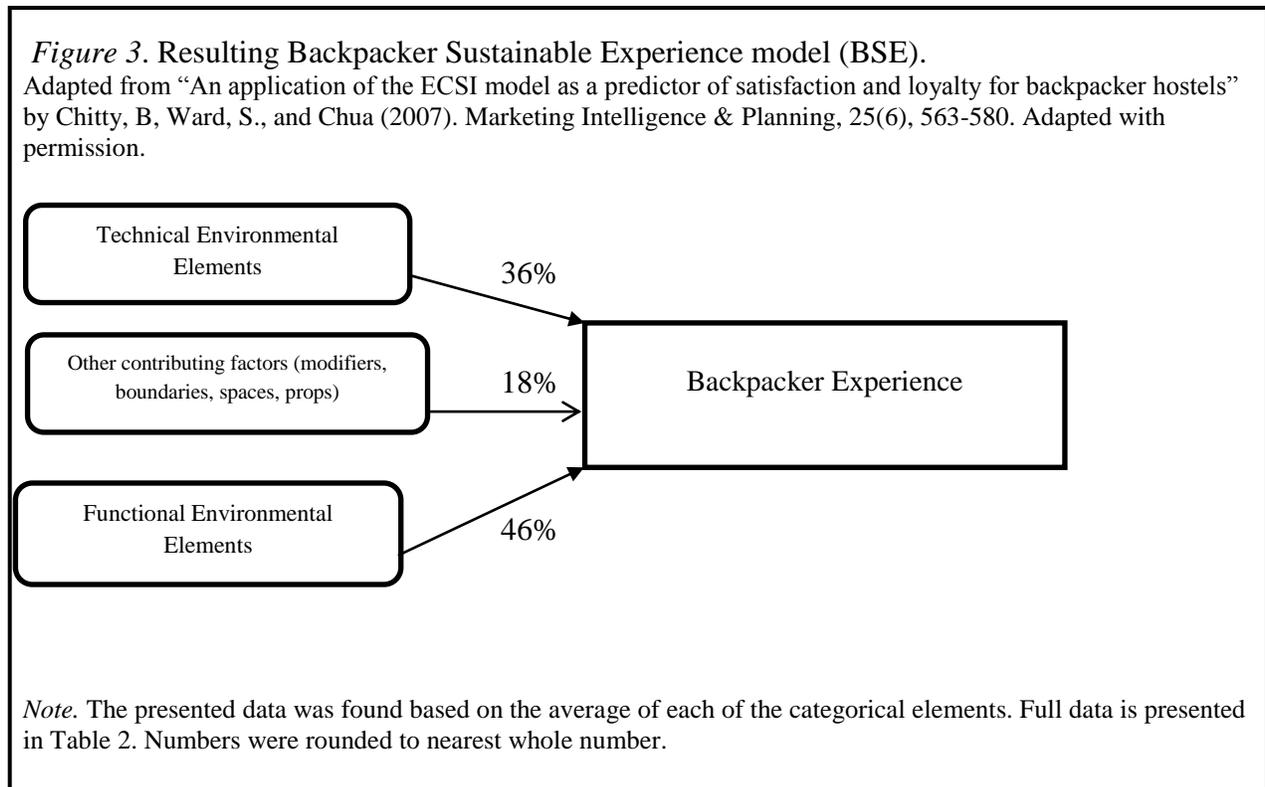
Table 2. Indicates the averages of importance and rate of positive impact to the backpacker experience at hostel. \*\*Average total based on 93 respondents

Additional important information to present is the overall emphasis on employee attitude and promotion of environmental practices as indicated by subject experts. An additional 83% of survey respondents ranked employee attitude as an important or definitely important element of their experience at the hostel as seen in Appendix C. This finding is important to consider as a hostel manager, as the implications of negative staff or lack of customer services will affect the visitor experience and the bottom line. Subject experts recognized that the staff attitude and

knowledge of environmental education is important to the overall experience with one even incorporating environmental training into the training procedures. Although the data collected presents technical elements as a second factor in the backpacker experience the importance of the tangible environmental practices should not be overlooked.

**Objective 2: Compare the role of technical and functional elements of environmental practices on the visitor experience.**

The information collected throughout the research and in Table 1 has contributed to the formation of the Backpacker Sustainable Experience (BSE) model which is presented in Figure 4.



As presented in the methodology, each of the sustainable elements was categorized based on the respondents' answers and allocated accordingly. The data resulted in the level of importance of each element, technical, functional or other on the backpacker experience analysed with surprising results. Data was analysed based on respondents' indication of positive influence and averages were created based on the number of elements in each function. Based on the evidence present it was found that the backpacker experience is most affected by the functional environmental elements at 46%. Following is the technical environmental elements with a contributing significance of 36%. Finally, other modifiers were found to contribute 18% to the visitor experience.

**Objective 3: Explore backpacker motivations to stay and/or spend more at hostels with environmental practices.**

A hostels' ability to be accountable for environmental practices was also found by respondents to be required in order to market environmental practices of the hostel. Survey respondents indicated that in order to increase prices of the overnight stay at a hostel, methods of accountability must be implemented. As evident by the survey responses, environmental hostel marketing may increase the number of guests however, as suggested by Firth & Hing (1999) many hostels do not advertise environmental practices (p. 253). Subject experts echoed this sentiment in that "they could be doing more to market the practices". One survey respondent suggested the use of a green rating system. This system could be designed to reflect standards of other "green" programs including the LEED certified program (Canada Green, n.d.). Hostel experts also encouraged the use of a standardized reporting system in order to be accountable to

staff and hostel networks. Regardless if the hostel is privately owned or part of a corporation, a measurement or accountability system could be created to present to potential backpackers.

An example of accountability is that of HI Portland. HI Portland has a landing page dedicated to current sustainable practices and environmental education activities (HI Portland, n.d.). This online page is readily accessibility by potential backpackers looking to make an overnight booking. Each of the current practices being implemented at the hostel is listed along with any environmental programmes and awards the hostel has received due to the practices. As evident by the survey respondents' suggestions, creating a transparent system to educate staff and hostel guests can contribute to the marketability of environmentally friendly hostels. Other forms of accountability can include backpacker feedback notice boards. This could be a notification board of what the hostel currently practices and the direction moving forward. Backpackers could have an option to leave comments on the suggested environmental direction or if they have any other suggestions specific to environmental practices. As suggested by subject experts, a staff recognition program or committee could be designed and implemented for hostels. This type of program could recognize contributors to the hostel environmental practices based on involvement and attitude. Awareness of the recognition program should be made to both staff and backpackers in order to maintain accountability to all involved parties.

Another method of accountability was suggested by interviewees, is that the hostel audit and standards that currently occur for Hostelling International (HI Canada) should make the section on environmental practices mandatory. This would create a mandatory level of environmental accountability for managers and hostels to have a comparison and standards to meet across Canada specific to HI Canada. Standardizing environmental practices is a difficult area to develop as indicated by one hostel expert, however, the benefits of being accountable to

hostel staff and guests may allow for an increase in profits as 90.2 % of survey respondents indicated would prefer to stay at an environmentally friendly hostel. This is relevant because it allows for environmental practices to not only improve the backpacker experience but also the bottom-line for business.

**Objective 4: Identify critical success factors for the implementation of sustainable practices in hostels.**

The overall functional and technical elements depicted the value of each to the backpacker experience however; certain elements within each area are considered the most influential on the backpacker experience. These particular elements can be considered the critical success factors (CSF) of the backpacker experience and sustainable practices. These critical success factors contribute to the overall positive backpacker experience and the implementation of them is essential to the backpacker experience. The most relevant critical success factors that were found include elements from both the technical and functional designation and reflect the views of the subject experts. These elements work together as indicated in the BSE model to create the overall experience. Critical success factors to be considered include how the employees present the hostel to the backpacker, environmental messaging, the implementation of tangible practices that are available to the backpacker, and finally how the hostel presents itself to the backpacker through use of décor, props and common spaces.

***Employee education and training.***

The outcome of the research and data collection presented surprising information regarding the importance of staff to the backpacker experience. Overall, there was an overwhelming positive response that hostels have the ability to educate backpackers while

lessening the environmental impacts. For the development of the backpacker experience, the attitude of the staff specific to environmental practices presents even stronger implications for this particular element. The resulting data indicated that the role of staff attitude is a large contributor to the backpacker experience at 62.4% of survey respondents indicating the importance followed by 60 respondents mentioning staff attitude when describing positive or negative elements. In order to improve upon the backpacker experience at a hostel, survey respondents indicated the importance of employee engagement and attitude. To promote an environmentally responsible team of employees, designing an in-house training program along with educating staff may be of value to the hostel. As suggested by the subject experts, the “sustainable practices are driven from the passion from the managers to make changes”. This supports the findings of Aysuo (2006) and by Doppelt (2010) in that strong leadership is required to implement sustainable practices as well as to engage the employees (p. 145). Hostels that have implemented staff training have had success in the implementation as mentioned by one interviewee that “staff education is essential”. Papis (2006) further argues that staff training is a cost-free approach to improve the hostel business (p.593). Components of a staff environmental education program could be added to the current welcome and training program offered by some hostels. One subject expert trains staff on environmental practices during their regular shifts to save on human resource costs. Alternatively, environmental training could occur throughout the season at staff meetings. One interviewee stated that “hosting meetings with the staff to get ideas about what could be implemented was important as it gave the employees personal responsibility” which supports the argument suggested by Papis (2006) that staff empowerment is essential to staff engagement, motivation and attitude (p.597). Training programs can be

effective in educating staff however; they must be developed to reflect the hostel management style and the employees.

Elements to be developed and included in a training programme could be those suggested by Wehrmeyer (as cited in Jabbour, Teixeira, Caldeira, and Soubihia, 2010) which includes having short, informal training sessions and groups, employees involvement in the issues through open sessions, maintaining short and simple environmental message, treating environmental dimension as a new organizational cultural value and evaluating the effects of the training program on the routine of employees (p.837). Furthermore, Jovicic (2010) argues that the outcomes of an environmental training program will result in new behavior towards the environment as a result of increased knowledge and awareness of the impacts of environmental practices as well as interdependence of the hostel on the environment around it (p. 944). The level of environmental education as well as basic customer service will be important as staff attitude was found to be one of the main contributors to the experience. Staff environmental education is one method of focusing and improving on staff engagement at hotels, however other functional elements that were relevant to the backpacker experience also included environmental messaging and programs.

### ***Messaging and programs.***

Environmental messaging can have an impact on the visitor experience as indicated by respondents. 46.2% of survey respondents indicated that environmental messaging around the hostel contributed positively to their backpacker experience. This matter is important as designing and implementing environmental messaging can be a relatively inexpensive method of constructing the visitor experience. Manaktola & Jauhari (2007) found that visible communications to guest is a significant contributor to the consumer attitude (p.370). Creating

messaging systems for the backpacker can have implications for the degree of backpacker mindfulness at the accommodation. It is argued that mindful backpackers are more likely to enjoy their experience and are more aware of the consequences of their actions (Moscardo, 1996, p.382). A model of mindfulness presented by Moscardo (1996, p.383) specific to mindful visitor interpretation can be adapted for use in hostel design. Mindful elements to consider when designing environmental messaging can include the use of novelty phrasing, asking questions, and physical/cognitive orientation of the messaging. An example of physical/cognitive orientation as suggested by one respondent includes the use of pictures for recycling areas and not just written English. Moreover, the messaging should also allow the backpacker to make personal connections to the environmental experience. As teleology based messages are “those that specifically illustrated a consequence from their performance to or non-performance” (Fennell, 2006, p.232), this type of messaging system should be used when developing messages. These types of messages which have a statement and a reason create a stronger sense of connection to the visitor. This type of messages could be created within the hostel to influence the backpacker. An example of such a message could be:

When buying your groceries, please remember to use our free reusable bags. This prevents plastic bags from being consumed by local animals which causes them direct harm or death.

In addition, connections can be to the environment through use of metaphors, and by giving the backpacker an opportunity to ask questions (Moscardo, 1999, p.71). As suggested by one hostel manager, “guests 80% of guests come with some knowledge and the other 20% of guests leave with new knowledge from conversations with staff and other guests”. Facilitating the backpacker conversations directly relates to the level of staff education and training. This again

presents the level of importance of staff training programmes. Messaging and programmes can also be designed to educate the backpacker through direct cause and effect such as messaging about local gardening and direct access to local food.

***Buy/serve local food.***

Hostels and other accommodations around the world are beginning to understand the importance of offering or serving locally produced food and/or food products to visitors. As found in the research, having access to local food was rated as a high level of importance with 59.1% of survey respondents indicating that it provides a positive impact on their backpacker experience. It was also found that in 3 out of the 4 hostels interviewed, that consideration and action was taken towards offering local produce in the form of edible gardens to hostel guests. Crotts and Kivela (2006) suggest that the food, also known as gastronomy, can affect the visitor experience as the consumption of food is considered a “feel good factor” of an experience (p. 355). Furthermore, it is found that food products and culinary offerings “play a pivotal role in the marketing of some tourism destinations” (Crotts & Kivela, 2006, p. 356). This issue is relevant because hostels have an opportunity to provide local, environmentally based culinary experiences to their guests through use of edible gardens, culinary products served in cafés and information regarding the community which has a positive influence on the backpacker experience. One subject expert indicated that they provide maps and directions to the local markets near the hostel for the backpacker as well as carry locally made breads and dairy products. In order to implement this type of practice in a hostel, sourcing out local producers and farmers when available was suggested by one interviewee. Another suggestion was to start small as the implementation of an edible garden for guests requires time, financial start-up resources and a designated care-taker. However, this type of programme could also evolve to

involve the hostel guests who would like to volunteer in a garden or as indicated by one expert through grant writing and project development. One survey respondent indicated that having “access to environmental programmes at the hostel” would be a great way to involve themselves in the community. The ability of a hostel to provide a sense of community through staff attitude and education, environmental messaging and access to local produce and products are essential elements that the data concluded had a positive influence on the visitor experience. The adapted BSE model indicated that 46.6 % of a backpacker experience is affected by these functional elements; however the model also indicated that backpackers are almost equally affected by technical elements such as recycling programmes, access to biodegradable products and energy efficient products at the hostel.

### ***Recycling and composting.***

Technical elements were found to have an important role in the creation of the backpacker experience at hostels. Most relevant was the impact and importance of the availability of recycling programs within the hostel with 76.2% of survey respondents indicating its importance. Recycling programs usually consists of an area to put recyclable materials include paper, plastic, and metal products. These types of programs are easy to implement and can be a tool to educate the backpackers. Each of the subject experts indicated that recycling and composting programmes were a part of hostel accommodation environment. One subject expert even stated that they wanted to go further than the “low hanging fruit of recycling” and move into the “meat and potatoes” of sustainable practices. To facilitate the implementation, hostel management may have to look at methods of implementing the programs including how to transport the recyclable to the nearest facility. Moreover, the location of the recycling options should be dispersed throughout the hostel and available in high use areas including common

rooms and kitchens. Certain items such as bottles can be exchanged for money, which could be placed towards an environmental fund or local environmental agency.

In addition to recycling programs, hostels should also continue or begin to implement composting programs. As indicated by one subject expert, the composting programme helps provide nutrients for the edible garden which the backpackers have access to, creating a holistic cycle of environmental practices and the visitor experience. Composting programs can work in a variety of methods including worm bins; vermin-culture or garden used composting (Composting, n.d.). Depending upon the location and local regulations, different types of composting programs may be implemented which will complement the recycling programs offered. The availability of recycling program in hostels was found to be the most important influencing technical factor regarding the backpacker experience therefore implementation of this program should not be overlooked.

### ***Biodegradable products.***

The use of biodegradable products is another element that was rated of high importance to the backpacker experience with 37% of survey respondents indicating its importance. Biodegradable products are considered products that are capable of being broken down into innocuous products (Merriam-Webster, 2012). In addition, many biodegradable products are suggested to be safe for human consumption. One interviewee stated that if a child were to come across the cleaning products and ingest them that they would be okay as the natural product contained no harmful or poisonous chemicals. The tangible and immediate impacts of the products may be an indicator of the popularity. One interviewee indicated that using biodegradable and local products bought in bulk was part of the sustainable plan for the hostel and that it lessens the impact on the environment and purchasing in bulk saves on costs.

Additionally, two interviewees also stated that they prefer to support local biodegradable products created within the area whereas one expert places external demands on suppliers to source these types of products. These external demands were found to support local community industry while promoting environmentally sound products.

Biodegradable products are classified as a technical element of the visitor experience, however, hostels have an opportunity to combine this product with the environmental messaging system by providing brief messages throughout the hostel where the products are found. As consumers look for tangible demonstrations of a commitment to environmental practices (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007, p. 370), hostels could optimize on the attachment of goods and services to a place by offering the local products that are used to the backpacker for purchase which also provides an experience cue and memory post-trip. An example can be seen in hostels in Tofino, British Columbia or Canmore, Alberta that uses a local soap company's products in their washrooms and shower facilities.

### ***Energy efficient products.***

Another important element to the visitor experiences was the availability of energy efficient products and appliances. These were found by 32.3% of survey respondents to have a positive impact on their backpacker experience and 72.3 % indicated the importance of this practice at hostels. These products can include low-flow shower heads, energy star appliances and energy efficient lights. One hostel expert suggested that these types of products are still able to provide the creature comforts of home and they are also products that could be implemented once the backpacker returned home. This also reflects another interviewee's statement that 80% of backpackers come with the knowledge, but the remaining 20% leave with new knowledge regarding environmental practices. In order to implement these practices, hostels should begin

with small steps towards change. Changes can be done as suggested by one subject expert, by creating a work plan to reflect when certain existing products will be replaced with energy efficient ones along with allocating the financial resources required. Although these types of energy efficient products were rated as a high element of importance on the visitor experience, the products could also be considered as larger aspect of the hostel props.

### ***Modifiers and props.***

Props and modifiers are considered items that enhance the visitor experience but they are constructed areas which the backpacker has access to. An example of props and modifiers that were seen as important to backpackers included having access to a common room. A number of respondents stated that a common room is a key element of the hostel experience as it provides a place for backpackers to meet and converse which is found to be a large part of backpacker travel (Murphy, 2001; Schaffer, 2004). One survey respondent indicated that having warm and welcoming décor was a positive element that contributes to their experience. Another modifier of the hostel experience that was found was the accessibility of transportation methods to the backpacker. Examples of suggested transportation modes included access to bicycles as 18% of respondents indicated that this is a positive contributing factor to their experience. Additionally, almost 45 % of survey respondents stated that having access to Wi-Fi internet affected their hostel experience. Respondents were not looking for access in the dorm rooms, but unlimited internet access in the common room and access to computers was a repetitive trend from the respondents. This type of access forms part of the backpacker culture of desiring to share with others and maintain communication (Schaffer, 2004). These examples of modifiers and props of the backpacker experience contribute 17.63 % to the backpacker experience and should not be overlooked when creating a hostel environmental management plan. Schaffer (2004) illustrates that these props help to create the “authentic” backpacker experience. The creation of an

environmental management strategy for hostels should reflect the elements that have an overall positive effect on the backpacker. However, the messaging and promotion of the environmental programs will allow the hostel to be transparent about the practices and maintain a level of accountability to the backpacker.

## **Chapter 6. Conclusion**

## Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to explore the effects of environmental sustainable practices on the backpacker experience at hostels. Specifically, this paper explored the specific environmental practices that can contribute to a positive or negative backpacker experience. Understanding what specific practices affect the experience will allow hostel managers and owners to focus limited resources on these practices. Through a mixed method approach including a review of academic literature and use of primary qualitative and quantitative research, an understanding of how sustainable practices influence backpacker experience at hostels was attained. The investigation into the backpacker experience at hostels revealed sustainable practices that are of importance to the backpacker experience. The use of an adapted European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) conceptual framework, the Backpacker Sustainable Experience (BSE) model, illustrated how environmental technical, functional and modifier elements combine to create the backpacker experience. It is evident that without each element, the backpacker experience would not be complete. The props and modifiers are a critical component of the backpacker experience, as without the common room and hostel community, the hostel would not be complete which inevitably affects the backpacker experience (Murphy, 2001; Schaffer, 2004). In particular, the research demonstrates those elements which have a greater impact on the backpacker experience. This enables hostel managers and owners to facilitate the backpacker experience by focusing resources on the following elements first:

- Recycling and composting programs;
- Buy/serve local food;
- Environmental messaging;
- Staff awareness and attitudes;

- Biodegradable products;
- Energy efficient products;
- Transparency.

The resulting data presented insightful and applicable information, however some challenges also presented themselves. In particular, the limited amount of secondary research pertaining to sustainable practices influencing the backpacker experience affected what available resources could be studied, however, the primary researched contributed to filling the gaps in current research. In conclusion, the implications of the proposed Backpacker Sustainable Experience model for hostels may allow hostels to created business management plans that reflect the positive factors of the backpacker experience and develop methods to mitigate negative elements. Moreover, the findings will help Hosteling International Canada and independent hostels create sustainability plans that consider the backpacker experience while maximizing resources. Furthermore, it is intended that the results will generate the need for additional research in the area of the visitor experience and environmental practices.

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## Appendix A: Survey Blog

*By Heather Knowles*

Hostels are located in some of the most unique locations around the world and across Canada. What could be better than waking up to look at the majestic Rocky Mountains or hearing the waves of the Pacific Ocean? The natural environment we get to travel in is awesome. We live in it, we play in it and we travel in it.

So what exactly can be done to help protect the environment we enjoy so much and make our hostel stay that much more awesome? The Three R's (reduce, recycle and reuse) are terms we are familiar with but did you ever wonder how being an environmentally friendly hostel could improve your experience? I sure did, so I have set forth on a journey to find out what types of environmental practices affect your experience during a hostel stay.

I have put together a quick and easy survey to fill out that also includes an opportunity to be entered into a draw for a \$150 MEC gift certificate (because playing outside requires gear!). If you would like to participate and share your awesome ideas on this topic, please [click here >>](#) Watch this space for the results of the survey in the April edition of the Backpacker Buzz

## **Appendix B: Survey Introduction**

My name is Heather Knowles, and this research project, Environmental Practices and the Backpacker Experience, is part of the requirements of the Master of Arts in Tourism Management program at Royal Roads University in Victoria, BC. Specifically, this survey is interested in learning about what environmentally friendly practices enhance your experience while staying at hostels. The research project will consist of this survey and is foreseen to take approximately 10 minutes to complete the 15 questions.

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University, the completed research project may be presented at future workshops and conferences. You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice.

All survey participants are eligible to enter for a draw for a \$150 HI gift certificate for any Hostel International Canada hostel upon survey completion. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless your specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

In the event that your survey response is processed and stored in the United States, you are advised that its governments, courts, or law enforcement and regulatory agencies may be able to obtain disclosure of the data through the laws of the United States.

My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning XXXXXXXX Bird at XXXXXXXX. If you have any further questions regarding the project please contact the researcher at XXXXXXXXXX

Do you accept the conditions of this survey? If the questionnaire is completed, it will be assumed that consent has been given.

## Appendix C: Survey Data

<b>Question 7: What types of environmental practices do you think are important in hostels. Select all that apply.</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Biodegradable soaps in kitchens and bathroom facilities	<b>67.7%</b>	63
Biodegradable cleaning supplies	<b>62.4%</b>	58
Composting program	<b>64.5%</b>	60
Recycling Program	<b>90.3%</b>	84
Energy efficient light bulbs	<b>73.1%</b>	68
Rainwater Storage	37.6%	35
Composting toilets	24.7%	23
Buy/Serve local food	<b>62.4%</b>	58
Energy Star appliances	52.7%	49
Green Energy buying such as Bullfrog Power	35.5%	33
Signs or messages supporting/promoting environmental practices	<b>67.7%</b>	63
Solar Panels	50.5%	47
Educational Programs	36.6%	34
Environmental activities for guests	37.6%	35
Power saving messages in guest rooms	54.8%	51
Energy efficient shower heads	<b>69.9%</b>	65
Employees support/promote environmental practices	<b>64.5%</b>	60
Other (please specify)	8.6%	8
	<b><i>answered question</i></b>	<b>93</b>
	<b><i>skipped question</i></b>	<b>8</b>

**Question 8: Of these environmental practices which ones do you feel have a positive impact on your experience and stay at the hostel? Select all that apply.**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Biodegradable soaps in kitchens and bathroom facilities	38.7%	36
Biodegradable cleaning supplies	36.6%	34
Composting program	48.4%	45
Recycling Program	76.3%	71
Energy efficient light bulbs	32.3%	30
Rainwater Storage	26.9%	25
Composting toilets	17.2%	16
Buy/Serve local food	59.1%	55
Energy Star appliances	24.7%	23
Green Energy buying such as Bullfrog Power	22.6%	21
Signs or messages supporting/promoting environmental practices	46.2%	43
Solar Panels	29.0%	27
Educational Programs	32.3%	30
Environmental activities for guests	39.8%	37
Power saving messages in guest rooms	39.8%	37
Energy efficient shower heads	43.0%	40
Employees support/promote environmental practices	62.4%	58
Other (please specify)		8
	<i>answered question</i>	<b>93</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>8</b>

Question 9. Please rank the elements that contribute to creating a positive experience for you as hostel guest.

Answer Options	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Definitely Important	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Biodegradable soaps in kitchens and bathroom facilities	7	26	35	23	2	2.81	93
Biodegradable cleaning supplies	5	26	33	26	2	2.89	92
Composting program	7	29	25	31	0	2.87	92
Recycling Program	3	4	13	70	1	3.67	91
Energy efficient light bulbs	6	13	28	41	1	3.18	89
Rainwater Storage	10	38	29	11	2	2.47	90
Composting toilets	23	32	22	9	5	2.20	91
Buy/Serve local food	8	14	30	34	4	3.05	90
Energy Star appliances	5	17	32	31	4	3.05	89
Green Energy buying such as Bullfrog Power	16	22	27	19	5	2.58	89
Signs or messages supporting/promoting environmental practices	5	17	28	41	1	3.15	92
Solar Panels	10	24	34	18	5	2.70	91
Educational Programs	14	21	29	24	3	2.72	91
Environmental activities for guests	16	30	16	26	3	2.59	91
Power saving messages in guest rooms	7	20	22	40	2	3.07	91
Energy efficient shower heads	5	14	26	40	5	3.19	90
Employees support/promote environmental practices	3	9	24	52	3	3.42	91
Other (please specify)							2
<i>answered question</i>							93
<i>skipped question</i>							8

## **Appendix D: Invitation to Participate**

Dear [**Prospective Participant**],

My name is Heather Knowles and I am graduate student at Royal Roads University Master of Arts in Tourism Management Program. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling XXXXXXXX at XXXXXXXX. As part of my graduate requirements, I am conducting research regarding environmental practices in hostels and the backpacker experience. Due to your expertise in the area of sustainability and hostels, I am wondering if you would be interested in participating in my research project.

The commitment required would approximately half hour of your time, either in person or through telephone to conduct an interview style questionnaire to explore your knowledge of sustainable practices, hostels and the backpacker experience. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a MA in Tourism Management], I will also be sharing my research findings potentially at conferences, workshops and in journal articles. A copy of the final report will be published and archived in the RRU Library. Information will be recorded and where appropriate summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless your specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate please reply to this message or contact me at XXXXXXX. I will be following up with all potential interviewees by March 15, 2012. You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

I look forward to speaking with you and I hope that you are willing to contribute your understanding and expertise of sustainability to my research project.

Name: Heather Knowles

Sincerely,

Heather Knowles

## **Appendix E: Interview Guide**

*For interviewer: probes are placed where expansion of the participant's knowledge may be possible (Robson, 2011).*

### **Warm-Up**

Can you tell me about your hostel?

*Probe: any unique features? How long has it been in operation?*

### **Main body of interview**

This portion of the interview is focused on sustainability elements being implemented at your current hostel. Please free feel to elaborate when possible including examples.

1) What current sustainable practices does your hostel offer?

*Probe: Why or why not?*

2) How important is sustainability for your customers?

3) How do you think visitors perceive your sustainable practices? Cutting edge? Good enough? Needs more work?

4) How much does sustainability play a role in your planning?

5) As a hostel manager/owner, how do you think the sustainable practices affect the backpacker experience at the hostel?

### **Cool-off**

Thank you for sharing your insight into your hostel and environmental practices! I have couple of questions before we end the session:

1) Do you have any other advice regarding environmental practices in hostels?