Is certification for sustainable tourism complementary to ISO 9000 certification? The case of the Parque del Lago Hotel in Costa Rica

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Resumen: El valor de este trabajo radica en el hecho de que proporciona un análisis comparativo entre las normas ISO 9000:2000 y las normas de sostenibilidad de Costa Rica CST. Su objetivo es obtener las diferencias y similitudes entre ambos sistemas de certificación, a partir de su comparación y del análisis de su contribución a la gestión empresarial y la sostenibilidad. El análisis destaca que los deben realizarse cambios organizativos en la empresa para lograr la eficiencia y garantizar la satisfacción del cliente.

Palabras clave: Turismo sostenible; Certificación turística; Certificación de calidad; Estudio de caso.

Título: ¿Es la certificación de turismo sostenible complementaria a la norma ISo 9000? El caso del Hotel parque del Lago en Costa Rica.

Abstract: The value of this paper lies in the fact that it provides a comparative analysis between ISO 9000:2000 standards and the Costa Rica CST sustainability standard. It aims to obtain differences and similarities between both certification systems from this comparison and to analyze how they contribute to business management and sustainability. The analysis highlights which organizational changes a company must develop in order to achieve efficiency and ensure customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism; Tourism certification; Quality certification; Case study

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Introduction

The critical situation of nature and the ecological and social crisis all over the world has increased public awareness of respect for the environment. As a consequence, the last few years have shown a rapid increase in ecotourism[1] (Hassan, 2000). This naturalist approach to tourism has meant a change in the habits and expectations of tourists all over the world (Honey, 1999), which have evolved into a different kind of tourism in which tourists take a more active role and are more involved with the environmental and cultural interests of tourist destinations. People thus demand higher quality services which protect the environment and preserve local cultures yet also enable them to enjoy their leisure time at the same time (Honey, 1999).

Ecotourism is the specialized segment of responsible tourism which encourages nature conservation and respect for the cultural values of the different destinations. Ecotourism favors the social and economic improvement of diverse local communities and tries to create awareness about the local problems and satisfy customers ethically. This means designing activities based around the environment and facilitating direct contact with nature and local culture.

Costa Rica was a pioneer in this kind of tourism and became one of the world's main "green" destinations, as we can observe in literature: "Costa Rica has established a reputation as an ecological paradise (Napier, 1997, WEF, 2007). "The country boasts breath-taking natural beauty and national parks teeming with wildlife" (Napier, 1997). "Costa Rica is one of the world's most biodiverse countries and, with more than dozen parks and other protected areas, has preserved more than 10% of the country's primary forests. The country has also experienced rapid growth in international tourism arrivals due in large part to these national parks" (Lindberg and Aylward, 1999). "An emblem of Costa Rica tourism, the country's level of environmental sustainability earned it 27th place in the world" (Garnica, 2009). 28% of the territory is protected (WEF: 2008, Bien, 2000) and has become a potential place to visit for the ecotourism segment. Moreover, private initiatives are being adopted to protect other forests in the country, in an attempt to make this tourist advantage stronger and enable Costa Rica to compete as an international ecological destination.

Costa Rica was ranked in 44th place (WEF, 2008) in the World Economic Forum's tourist competitiveness assessment. The determining factors of the ranking are nature and cultural resources together with human resource factors. Also, Costa Rica (Coco Island) is ranked as the number one destination for biodiversity research (ICT: 2008) and number two as an ecotourism destination for NAT GEO (Bien, 2006; ICT, 2008). And ICT data (2008) shows that the main reasons for visiting Costa Rica (90%) are directly related to nature. Bearing in mind these considerations it can be thought that hotels in Costa Rica have interest in adapting their systems and facilities to cater for this profile of potential tourist.

Moreover, tourism is vital for Costa Rica as it represents the main source of income, over and above the coffee, banana, pineapple and pharmaceutical industries. According to Porter (1996: 36) Costa Rica's tourist industry is based on three elements: a) the country and region's position, b) ecological diversity and unique environmental resources, c) agricultural and forest potential all year round. To this respect Molina and Chaves (2004) add that the competitive advantage that Costa Rica has got in ecotourism is based on local, national and transnational companies; local, foreign and international non-profit organizations; national research centers and other public organizations.

From a worldwide perspective, the tourist sector is highly competitive and globalization increases competitiveness. In this context, the development of quality management systems becomes a potential source of competitive advantage for firms competing in this industry (Escrig et al., 2001; Flynn et al., 1995), though Dale (2007: 303) establishes that a company does not achieve superior performance merely by quality management certification as the latter becomes a pre-competitive issue and separate from the ability to compete, which depends on many other factors.

In the early stages of the use of quality in the tourist sector, and especially in the case of hotels, measures concentrated on assessing the physical facilities (comfort, cleanliness, number of rooms, etc.) which determined the number of stars. Subsequently, different service-related aspects have been added to evaluation methods and tools. To this respect, outstanding have been the contributions of Parasuraman et al. (1988, 1991, 1993 and 1994) with the creation and refinement of the SERVQUAL method. The consideration of both tangible and intangible aspects of service quality is today the fundamental base for measuring hotel quality.

As has been the case in other sectors, hotels have been influenced by the use of ISO 9001 & ISO 14001 standards (Bien, 2000; Padrón and Espino, 2007). One of the main advantages of ISO standards is that they are respected internationally and potential customers recognize the importance of having ISO certification. However, ISO standards do not include sustainability issues which are highly relevant in countries oriented

to ecotourism, such as Costa Rica (Bien, 2008). Similarly, although there is a technical ISO committee on tourism (TC 228) there is no ISO standard on sustainable tourism and there is little likelihood that an ISO standard with those characteristics will be developed (Bien, 2008: 15).

Costa Rica, as a leader in sustainable tourism, has used a good strategy to promote its advantages internationally. The government has helped the process by designing and encouraging specific policies and international agreements on sustainable development (Bien, 2008). In this respect, the Costa Rica Tourism Institute (ICT) proposed the program for Certification for Sustainable Tourism, "CST". This certification has been accepted by the World Organization for Tourism, as a program that is modifying the way tourism is conducted (Bien, 2000: 3; Rivera, 2002; Monge, 2003; 6). Although CST has been created for the whole tourist sector, hotels have been the first group to use it (Monge, 2003).

CST is being extensively developed as short-term results show. In addition, the Inter-American Development Bank asks interested firms to pass the evaluation process in order to offer help to new tourist projects (with emphasis on sustainable tourist projects).

The "CST" brand represents fulfilling tourist expectations regarding sustainable tourism (Molina and Chaves 2004; Bien, 2008) and influences demand considerably, as tourists prefer to go to hotels which have CST. Consequently, certified firms will achieve competitive advantages and higher levels of profitability (Rovinsky, 2007: 24). To a certain extent, the international market demands certification; if the firm has it, certification will turn into a real source of competitive advantage based on the international image of Costa Rica with respect to the environment (Honey and Bien, 2005).

Given the relevance of standards for hotels, the present paper tries to compare the certification for sustainable tourism (CST) given by the Costa Rica Tourism Institute (ICT) and ISO 9001:2000 certifications to check how they compliment each other with the aim of analyzing how the combined use of both certifications can improve managerial practices and sustainability. The analysis was carried out on the Parque del Lago Hotel (PLH), the first hotel in Costa Rica to obtain both certifications.

The work is structured into an introduction, a subsequent section which includes the main aspects included in ISO and CST standards. A third section, which compares the analysis of both certifications, a fourth section describing the methodological aspects, and a fifth section which includes results from the case analysis. Finally, the main conclusions and references are set out.

The ISO 9000 standards: a brief description

The ISO standard is an international regulation which is said to be the world's number one standard. It "is gradually being adopted by hospitality companies" (Claver et al, 2006). ISO certification shows a clear customer orientation and an interest in internal efficiency (Casadesús and Karapetrovic, 2005). Accordingly, when a firm tries to certify its quality system under ISO standards it aims to achieve two important results: increased productivity and external recognition (Salleh and Wee-Keat, 2001).

Increases in productivity are obtained thanks to better documentation of procedures, more knowledge of quality issues, better communication strategies and a positive cultural change. These changes cause an increase in efficiency and operational productivity as costs are reduced. The objective is to develop "a documented Quality Management System, and not a system of documents" ISO/TC 176. Additionally, the required formalization contributes to making different work instructions clear, to improving internal communication and favoring employees' commitment and motivation (as they participate in the improvement of the different processes) (Nield and Metin, 1999; Chow-Chua et. al., 2003).

At an external level, the ISO standard enables the firm to look for new market opportunities. The quality image of the firm improves, and as a result so does the degree of customer satisfaction. Consequently, the firm will increase its participation in the market thanks to the competitive advantage that certification offers (Casadesús and Karapetrovic, 2005; Chow-Chua, et al., 2003; Santos et al., 2002). Firms will also be able to take further advantage and increase profits if they define clear objectives, involve all the employees and obtain the commitment of the organization as a whole (Naveh, et al., 2004).

Most studies "suggest that ISO certification should help a company improve operations, strengthen marketing and boost staff morale" (Nield and Kozak, 1999; Wong, 1998; Claver et al., 2006). Claver et al. (2009) assure that quality certifications in hotels is an important strategic option "because they may facilitate the development of key factors and may have an impact on the firm's performance". The authors propose the need for more research to investigate the relationship between certification and performance (Claver et al., 2009), given the scarce literature on the subject.

To implement the ISO 9000 standard employees must be specifically trained; the firm has to define its document structure and the organization's characteris-

tics in order to focus on customer requirements (Ho et al., 1995; Walker and Salameh, 1996; Sheldon, 2003). However, the implementation of the standard can be perceived as costly (in time and invested resources), bureaucratic and with a limited margin for employee participation.

Implementation and certification of a Quality Management System based on the ISO 9001 standard has organizational implications; namely, changes in working methods, procedure control and the management of non-conformities, affecting what, who, how and why (Schenkel, 2004; Moreno et al., 2001).

Table 1 summarizes different research on ISO standards. As we can observe, and as a result of certification, some organizations have improved their position in the market and have increased productivity; but others have not obtained satisfactory results, perceiving the process as time-consuming, expensive and bureaucratic (Brown, 1993).

These results suggest that is not the standard but the way of managing the process and the market segment the firm operates in which are the key factors in the process. A proper structure based on internal and external customer requirements, and strategic agreements with suppliers are the key factors for successful management (without certifications that support this way of managing) (Ruzevicius et al., 2004: 9). Consequently, hotels that want to be ISO 9000 certified need to establish equilibrium between achieving quality and the efforts required to obtain certification; and may also adapt the process to their own characteristics and to the type of service offered (Gavin et al., 2001).

The Costa Rica Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST): a brief description

The main goal of CST is to convert the concept of sustainability into something real, practical and necessary for tourism to be competitive in Costa Rica. As a consequence, the way of using natural and social resources, active participation of local communities and firms' competitiveness will improve (ICT: 2008; Honey and Bien, 2008).

CST is a tool for tourism firms as it generates an increase in the demand for more sustainable tourism that preserves natural resources.

CST guarantees the homogeneity and quality of products and services, allowing the customer to observe the existing differences between diverse firms in the sector (Solano, 2007: 25; Honey and Bien, 2005). Simultaneously, CST encourages a model for sustainability that enables an improvement in quality through the participation of the different sectors involved. This process gives the model institutional support, credibility and reliability (Solano et al. 2003: 27).

CST has international prestige and constitutes a differentiating element for the firms that have it. Certification assures that the firm has an internal quality management system (Honey and Bien, 2005:2). Nowadays, CST forms part of the ISTC (International Sustainable Tourism Commission), under the supervision of the OMT (Honey and Bien, 2005; Rivera, 2002). Both organizations (ISTC, OMT) are promoting CST to become an official

Advantages of certification ISO 9000	References
Quality improvements/Costs reduction Implanting ISO 9000 generates quality of the products and a cost reduction	Sun 2000, Khan and Hafiz, 1999, Mc Adam and McKeown 1999, Sun, 1999, Kanji 1998, Rao, Ragu-Nathan and Solís, 1997
Sales improvement Superior sales and a better positioning of "certified" firms with respect of those not certified	Sun, 2000, Khan and Hafiz 1999, McAdam and McKeown 1999, Kanji 1998, Rao, Ragu-Nathan and Solis 1997.
Improvement in management practices Improvement in management practices compared with the previous situation to certification	Lee and Palmer 1999, Rao, Ragu-Nathan and Solís 1997
Improvement of the perception of quality on the part of employees, together with a better understanding of individual responsibilities	Acharya and Sanjit 2000; Lima, Resende and Hasenclever 2000, Lee and Palmer 1999; Mcadam and McKeown 1999, Mezher and Ramadan, 1999, Kanji 1998, Rao, Ragu-Nathan and Solís 1997, Skrabec and Ragu-Nathan, 1997
Improvements of communication and coordination among departments and organization	Acharya and Sanjit 2000, Lee and Palmer 1999, Bhuian 1998, Kanji 1998, Elmuti 1996.
Disadvantages of the ISO 9000 Standard	References
Implanting the ISO 9000 standard does not encourage productivity, quality or profitability	Zhang 2000, Lima, Resende and Hasenclever 2000, Simmons and White 1999, Terzionski, Sohal, and Moss 1999; Van Der Wiele and Brown 1998, Van Der Wiele and Brown 1997
The system does not affect sales, competitiveness or profits	Simmons and White 1999, Van Der Wiele and Brown 1998, Van Der Wiele and Brown 1997
Certification does not generate better quality practices	Hua et al. 2000; Huarng Horng and Chen 1999; Lee and Palmer 1999; Huarng, 1998; Shih, Huarng and Lin 1996.
The system requires a lot of documents and requirements to update the system, thus increasing quality costs	Simmons and White 1999, Van Der Wiele and Brown 1998.

Table 1.- Research on the results of implementing the ISO 9001 standard. Source: Adapted from Jason et. al. (2005)

ISO standard (Bien, 2000).

There are 84 certified hotels in Costa Rica and another 16 firms linked to the country's tourist sector. It is being used in Central America and South America, and has been adapted to the specificity of every environment and country. This is precisely one of its most important virtues as the organizations are in the same continent but their needs are different and the standard is able to consider these differences (Monge, 2003). Countries like Belize, Brazil, Peru and others are implementing CST certification (ICT: 2009).

To obtain CST, the organization must be assessed in four areas (Solano et al., 2003: 26): the physical-biological environment, service facilities, service management, and the external customer and socio-economic environment. Different criteria are assessed in the first area (physical-biological environment), namely the firm's internal organization or the policies in favor of the natural environment where the firm is located. Service facilities are assessed from environmental, social and political perspectives. The CEO must put the emphasis on the adoption of managerial practices oriented to and respectful with the environment. Different communication and participation strategies are developed for external customers. Internal customers are also considered and communication and group management are assessed. Finally, the socio-economic environment is assessed. This is linked to economic benefits, local culture, health services, the creation of employment and worker training. At this stage, management is more creative and innovative.

Certification is shown as a stamp in the shape of a leaf with a human face. This stamp has created a positive impact on visitors, as it reinforces the human facet of the management of natural resources. As shown above in the case of the ISO analysis, table 2 presents the main advantages and disadvantages of CST.

CST provides diverse benefits for the firm (see table 3). It facilitates international promotion, participation in international conferences, etc. (Bien, 2007). Another relevant aspect is that CST has no additional costs for the hotels that apply for it (Rivera, 2002; Bien, 2008). CST facilitates cost reductions using environmentally friendly technologies and processes, which contribute to enhancing the "green destination" reputation (Rivera, 2002; Bien, 2000).

This certification is also useful in the firm's administrative, environmental and service management. It

CST advantages	CST disadvantages
Can be applied to any kind of firms	
The cost is accessible for any firm in Central America and for firms all over the world	Competes with other similar certifications
It is an external certification, performance is measured	Forgets some legal elements
It takes into account the social environment to determine sustainability	Focuses mainly on the environment
It is government awarded, and that adds value to this certification	The assessor is not internationally recognized

Table 2.- Advantages and Disadvantages of CST in Costa Rica, Central America. Source: Monge (2003: 23)

Agents	Benefits of CST		
	Enables destination differentiation	Offers a tourist product with sustainability orientation	Controls for the use and abuse of the "eco", "green" or "sustainable" concept
Managers	Competitive element	Product differentiation	Saving of organizational, financial, physical and human resources. Reduction of energy resources
Tourists	Knows that the hotel is acting in favor of the environment, culture and society	The firm takes on a commitment to managing quality	The hotels' employees are trained in sustainability
Productive sectors	Possible emergence of new supplier firms	Participation of environment friendly firms	Generation of recycling, waste management and other related firms

Table 3.- Benefits of CST for involved agents. Source: Solano et al. (2003: 30)

is compatible with different firms and with different certifications, such as ISO 14000 (environmental certification), SERVQUAL (customer service), ISO 9001 (management) and "green stamps" (Bien, 2000). CST is a good complement for other certifications, such as ISO 9000, as it enriches the standard and contributes to the development of sustainable tourism.

The process of CST implementation and certification is organized into four stages (Barrantes and Castro, 2009: 8). Firstly, the hotel is pre-diagnosed across the board in administrative, financial, marketing, operational and other areas. When data is obtained it is verified "in situ". At this stage, the firm develops an implementation plan and decides how to accomplish every item of the standard. At this point, the data reflects the reality of the hotel and can be compared with CST requisites. In the third stage, changes in policies and manuals are brought about to guarantee compliance with the standard. The fourth step implements the action plan with the relevant corrective measures and finally, the firm is assessed again. When the hotel thinks that it can pass the evaluation, it registers officially and receives the assessment team. This procedure is very similar to the ISO implementation process, but much simpler.

CST affects the organizational structure directly. CST certification considers vital aspects of the organization, such as:

- Training for all organizational members.
- Events organization with the community. This opens the doors of the organization to its immediate environment.
- Workplaces are structured according to processes, so the profiles of the workplaces are different.
- Worker involvement is very important as this ensures the established plans are complied with.
- Suppliers must share a vision and mission which is related to customer satisfaction and time deadlines.
- The facility layout varies because it must be correlated to the biological environment.

After this definition of the basic characteristics of ISO and CST certifications, we can make a comparative analysis of their characteristics, focusing on their organizational implications and on their main differences, which will enable us to analyze how they complement each other.

Implementation and certification of ISO 9001:2000 and CST standards: a comparative analysis

The comparative analysis of both certifications will enable us to analyze their degree of compatibility or complementariness from a theoretical viewpoint. We will focus on principles, processes (implementation and certification) and organizational implications.

With respect to principles, the ISO 9001:2000 standard has an explicit doctrine whilst CST has philosophical principles that respond to its essence, sustainability (Monge, 2003). Nevertheless, explicit and implicit principles are compatible, as all these principles have similar orientations. Consequently, in this area we cannot observe significant differences between both standards.

We find highly similar stages in the processes of implementation and certification. The first stage is diagnosis; the second is named differently in each of the standards but the content is similar (designing action plans and defining manuals, for quality in the case of ISO standard or to protect the environment in the case of CST). However, the third stage is different as documentation is the most important factor in this phase in the ISO standard yet CST does not require documents, or it is not essential to physically have these documents.

CST requires an assessment of the firm's internal and external opportunities, including suppliers and their strategic alternatives. CST includes waste management and the firm's social responsibility. This kind of processes are not present in the ISO standard, thus at this particular stage we can state that CST complements the ISO standard. CST goes beyond the firm's administrative management by focusing on the natural and cultural environment, internal and external customers, suppliers, neighborhood, community, other firms and the government (Bien, 2007).

CST makes the results of its audits public, but in the case of the ISO standard, results are private and are extremely costly. The main point of confrontation comes from documentary requirements but there are technologies and means to harmonize both standards.

Finally, with respect to organizational implications the comparative analysis shows that there are organizational changes and modifications in Human Resources (HR) policies (table 4).

CST is accepted, valued and recognized by tourists who have the same mindset as the sustainability philosophy. This is why CST is more useful to the hotel industry oriented towards green tourism than the ISO 9001 standard (Bien, 2007: 35).

Finally, each standard has different advantages, as we have shown before. Consequently, organizations and particularly hotels have to analyze which certification is best suited to its strategy and market, and must look into how both standards can complement each other.

ISO 9001:2000	CST
Restructuring according to processes	Processes based on satisfaction
Improvement of administrative processes	Moving outside the organization and living near the neighborhood, community and sector
Continuous improvement of organizational processes	Green alternatives to solve normal situations in the organization
Guarantees for the organization's administrative processes	Assessment material for environmental, cultural, administrative and facility solutions
Efficiency and effectiveness in the firm's results	Environmental, ecological and human awareness

Table 4.- Organizational implications for implementing ISO & CST standards

Research methodology

This section contains the description of the methodology used in our empirical research. As this work analyzes organizational processes, it is fundamental to develop the analysis in the same context the process takes place in. Consequently, we have adopted a qualitative research methodology, in line with the objective of this research (Bernal, 2006; Bryman, 1988; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Cepeda, 2006; Chetty, 1996; Hartley, 1994; Pérez Aguiar, 1999; Saunders et al., 2003; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1981, 1989, 1993 and 1999). We decided to use the case study method (Yin, 1989 and 1993) to analyze and compare how the PLH implemented and certified a quality management system based on the ISO 9001:2000 standard and a sustainability-oriented management system based on the CST standard. From this comparison, we obtained differences and similarities between both certifications, and were able to see how they helped organizational activity.

Two relevant aspects must be taken into account when using case study methodology: the number of cases and the selection criteria (Céspedes and Sánchez, 1996; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Pérez Aguiar, 1999; Yin, 1989). With respect to the first question, we chose one case, as this enabled more in depth research. Regarding the second question, the case of the PLH was chosen for two basic reasons; because it was the first hotel in Costa Rica to obtain both certifications and because it is an important organization which is considered as a management model for other firms; secondly, we had access to the organization and its staff, which enabled us to obtain large amounts of information.

We interviewed people who were directly involved in the certification processes. We interviewed the hotel's owner, the former human resources and quality manager, the person in charge of customer service and the consultant who participated in the certification process. All of them were semi-structured in depth interviews. The interviews were recorded and lasted for a total of five and a half hours. Moreover, a wide variety of documents was checked to triangulate with the obtained information (organizational chart, job descriptions, company references on the internet, internal publications, quality manuals and previous CST studies, among others).

Case study: application and certification of the ISO 9001:2000 and CST standards in the Parque del Lago Hotel

The context

The PLH is near Sabana Park, 2 km from the centre of San José. Its proximity to the international airport of Juan Santamaría (16km), makes it the perfect place for both business travelers and leisure tourists.

In 1999, the hotel joined the Barceló hotel chain. It is a four star, four leaves hotel (in sustainability tourism) and it is oriented to businessmen and first class tourists. The hotel has 30 rooms and 10 suites, and offers a broad set of services. Since October 2004 it has been under the management of Cayuga "Sustainable Hospitality", a firm dedicated to the management and development of lodges, hotels and other projects related to sustainable and ecological tourism in Central America and the Caribbean. Since then, management has been oriented towards process management and workers have participated in the continuous improvement strategy. The main leitmotiv of the company is "act in harmony with nature".

According to the documents and information collected from the company, the mission of the hotel is "to exceed the expectations of all our customers through the development of hotel services in a framework of quality and sustainability". Its vision says, "We want to become the leading hotel in Central Valley, offering our customers the best location, new infrastructure, efficient service, excellent value for money and a strong orientation to environmental, cultural and economic sustainability".

The occupation levels of the hotel are 100% in high season and 70% in low season. This data show that the

PLH is very efficient, obtaining increasing annual sales and revenues of $850,000.00 per year.

PLH: quality and sustainability policy

In 2007, the PLH obtained the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST), with four leaves. In 2008, it also obtained certification (three leaves in this case). Its present objective is to obtain level 5 of this certification.

In February 2008, the hotel obtained ISO 9001:2000 certification. This certificate does not mention the strengths and weaknesses of the firm, and is different to CST in this respect which does include them.

For the interviewed people, the application of the ISO standard enables the firm to study and think about the best way to develop an activity and obtain a goal. Consequently, what is decided by everyone is written down, and then carried out.

Manuals and process definition are necessary to understand and study the task. What distinguishes a quality system is the simultaneous consideration of the activity and the person that carries it out. The quality philosophy of the PLH is focused on ecotourism.

According to its mission and vision, the PLH is focused on its customers, as can be seen in figure 1. Its customer orientation and the associated organizational structure existed before it obtained the certifications; and it has not undergone serious changes since then. It must be pointed out that the new management of the hotel (Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality, S.A.) has improved the hotel's performance.

The first steps towards quality management were taken explicitly with the management of Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality, S.A, taking quality as the development of hotel services whilst respecting the principles of sustainable tourism. This concept covers both the administrative and operational departments of the organization.

ISO and CST certifications at the PLH

CST: Costa Rica is an ecotourism destination and the present strategy of the PLH and its management (Cayuga, S.A.) is in line with sustainability. Consequently, when the ICT invited hotels to acquire sustainable tourism certification, the hotel managers decided to initiate the process, as certification was congruent with the firm's philosophy and strategy. The development of the process was as follows: the pre-diagnosis was carried out using the proper tools (facilitated by the Consejo Nacional de Acreditación) with the assistance of Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality S.A.'s consultants.

The reasons for trying to obtain CST were to satisfy the requirements of the present and future "ecotourism" market; and the firm's corporate social responsibility.

ISO: The hotel also put in for ISO certification to obtain different goals, namely: to assure the quality of the product and services offered; to assure the firm's management that the desired level of quality was obtained, and to establish the guidelines for the use of standards
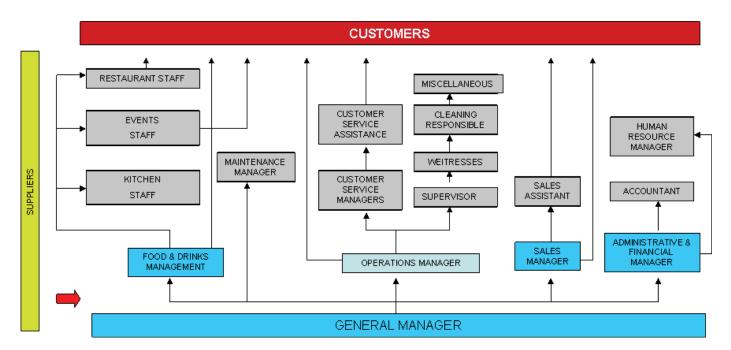

Figure 1.- Organizational chart of the PLH

in the organization.

In this particular case, the desire of one of the hotel's owners was to be the first ISO-certified hotel in Costa Rica and in Central America. This was actually the main reason behind obtaining this certification as this would give the hotel an international reputation and would also be a good basis for differentiation in the competitive arena.

As we mentioned before, CST certification was obtained previously to the ISO standard. The process for obtaining CST lasted less than a year, and after five months they obtained the ISO 9001:2000 certificate. This fact may imply that the guidelines used in CST certification and its dynamics favors the attainment of other certificates, such as ISO 9001. In this respect, the people interviewed declared that many of the elements considered in CST were used again for ISO 9001:2000

certification. For example, quality policies, quality manuals and documents oriented to continuous improvement.

The hotel signed a contract with a consultancy firm, Norts Consulting, S.A., to facilitate the ISO implementation process. Equally, Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality, S.A. helped the process from an economic and technical viewpoint (table 5).

CST fits in perfectly with the profile of the assessing firm (Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality, S.A.) of the PLH, which is vital for the hotel. As the former human resources and quality manager stated, "the hotel had previously worked with strategic plans, and was customer service sustainability-oriented".

Table 6 shows the main changes derived from both CST and ISO certifications.

As we can observe in table 6, the changes generated

CST	ISO 9001:2000
The hotel had worked previously with Cayuga Sustainable Hospitality S.A.	An industrial engineer (external consultant) together with the different leaders designed the process diagram and registers. The consultant developed the corrective actions, verified the system and re-adjusted the requirements to certification
The pre-diagnosis was done, and afterwards a committee began to implement each of the parts of the designed program.	Staff received specific training in the use of the intranet. New workers (due to staff leaving) received explicit training
Verification was carried out and the new proposed changes and adjustments were implemented to obtain certification	Afterwards, several internal audits were carried out every three months. After an INTECO (local organization) pre-audit was passed, in February 2008 the final audit was carried out and ISO 9001:2000 certification was given

Table 5.- Implementation of ISO 9001:2000 and CST: some important aspects

Changes derived from CST	Changes derived from ISO 9001:2000 certification
Global service culture	Standardization of the service
A culture to do things better	Understanding quality as something important in day by day work, continuous improvement
Staff identified with environment	Staff perception is that goals have been reached
Customer satisfaction	Increased customer satisfaction
International and local reputation	Greater reputation and prestige
Superior costs but immediate benefits	Organization, cost reductions
Better management of every supplier relationship	Better supplier practices

Table 6.- Some organizational changes after implementing ISO 9001:2000 and CST

by both certifications may be considered complementary since they have contributed to improving the performance of the hotel in different areas. For example, human resource training and lifelong learning has become a constant and regular practice. Process management has also obviously improved. But what has clearly improved are the aspects related to the environment and nature.

ISO 9001:2000 certification has facilitated the achievement of real improvements at an internal level (as process management has improved) and CST has had a clear influence at the external level, with positive results on the local community and beyond. This guarantees that the hotel respects and is fully integrated with natural paradises. The former HR manager declared that a "mix" between both certifications was feasible and perfect for the hotel.

Another important topic in this research is the study of the role of CST as a facilitator for ISO 9001 certification. The following table shows the different aspects that facilitated the certification of the quality management system.

tive effects for the firm, such as people responsible for implementing different processes leaving the organization. But these situations were an exception.

The following table shows the main obstacles that emerged during the process to achieve both certifications (table 8).

With respect to CST and ISO certification processes, one of the problems was related to the need to print some specific documents. CST insists on printing only what is strictly necessary. On the other hand, ISO requires the printing of some documents which are associated with the operational part of the hotel service. Finally, the PLH contacted a software company (with the help of the INA) to develop an intranet to reduce the use of paper as much as possible. Training was organized by the INA which carries out this kind of initiatives in Costa Rica (INA: 2001). As a conclusion, CST requirements have contributed to the enrichment of ISO certification, and this fact shows the complementary nature of both certifications.

Concerning the results of both certifications, table 9 synthesizes them.

Aspects related to CST	Aspects related to ISO 9001:2000
Help from the assessment team	Having a previous certification
Help from the management committee	Help from the management committee
Help from general manager	Help from the assessment team
Help from different governmental institutions	Help from general manager who believed in the project
Help from non-governmental organizations	Positive staff reaction
People creativity	Internal competence
Having access to technology, according to the requirements for certification	Having funds to buy the necessary resources and make the required contracts
Experts in different certification-related subjects	Assessment team with experience in certifications
Human resources from outside the organization (students from different specialties)	The firm has the assistance of the National Institute for Learning (Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje or INA)

Table 7.- Aspects that facilitated the certification of the quality management system

CST	ISO 9001:2000
Environmental constraints	Organizational culture, mainly bureaucracy
Nature consideration for the hotel	Breaking psychological barriers on quality
Staff leaving	Staff leaving; the hotel is small and when one worker leaves some processes have to start again
The belief that CST is not possible	Auditors do not always agree; some processes are valid whilst others are not

Table 8.- Main obstacles for certifications in the PLH

As we can observe in table 9, CST obtains results in different situations; it enables sustainable development of administrative and operational hotel processes and permits process documentation which has a low impact on the environment, community, hotel workers and their families.

From a financial point of view, the hotel has invested resources to become culturally, socially and environmentally friendly. However, the managers interviewed think that the hotel will recover the invested money, as customers are satisfied with results, as customer satisfaction questionnaires show.

Certifications have become a marketing tool. When the customer consults the hotel webpage, they can see the certification. The hotel also receives positive service quality assessments from their customers. Consequently, the level of loyalty is increasing.

In short, the experience of implementing the previous certification facilitated the second certification process; it must be added that human resources have already been trained; they already had the required technology, material and financial resources and a very positive and participative attitude. However, there were also nega-

With respect to certification results at an internal

level, we must point out the generation of a continuous improvement culture. Workers are happy and satisfied with their work, as they can contribute to improving the conditions of their community. Workers feel committed to sustainability and participate in the

CST results	ISO 9001:2000 results
Electronic use of working by processes	Electronic use of matrices
Use of technology in favor of the environment	Design of electronic forms
Rational use of natural, material, technological, financial and human resources	Guides for continuous improvement
Encouraging workers' creativity	Improved, documented controls, with electronic support

Table 9.- Main results of certifications

changing processes oriented towards sustainability, as we were able to verify after interviewing people.

ISO 9001:2000 certification has contributed to a better use of technology, of administrative controls and to the improvement of some decision-making processes. The financial investment has been very high, but the hotel thinks that is going to recover this money in the immediate future. For the moment, it has not been a simple marketing tool, because customers did not require this certification. However, ISO has acted as a driver of the hotel employees' training process. Table 10 shows some of the organizational implications that have been derived as a result of both certifications.

The PLH has not modified its structure and maintains the same organizational chart. The different plans are revised every two years. As we have indicated, organizational structure has not been modified as process management was in place before certification.

Also, both certification processes have contributed to the establishment of a continuous training process, as explicitly stated in the implementation plans.

At a marketing level, CST seems to have contributed to winning over new customers. One explanation could lie in the fact that CST certificate has been considered as a key criterion for national and foreigner customers when they selected their hotel; customers wanted to know if the hotel had the "leaf stamp" which symbolizes sustainable tourism.

Another remarkable result of the certification processes has to do with their financial impact. The study of PLH has shown that the financial results of the firm have improved after the achievement of both certificates. Possible explanations to this fact could be that the demand has increased after the achievement of the cer-

tificates and also that operations have become easier for employees thanks to the establishment of work procedures and processes (formalization) and the acquisition of the essential technology what could have contributed to an increase in employees' productivity.

These results commented above need further empirical research. Our study only has revealed a possible (hypothetical) relationship between the attainment of both certificates and the increase in demand, in productivity levels and an improvement in the financial situation of the firm. However, our study does not allow us to conclude anything about the possible causality of these relationships. Future research avenues arise to this respect.

Conclusions

The case of PLH has illustrated that CST and ISO 9001:2000 certifications may be complementary and, as a result, generate organizational improvements both internally and externally.

The implementation and certification of the CST standard at the PLH was explained by the decision of this firm to focus its strategy on the needs and expectations of its main market, that is, people looking for ecotourism. This initiative was coherent with PLH's mission and vision. On the other hand, the certification based on the ISO 9001:2000 standard came to PLH as a way of supporting the international reputation of the company and a competitive strategy based on differentiation through quality and ecotourism.

The combination of both initiatives gave as a result a complementary effect on the PLH. As stated above, the CST standard contributed to improve the firm from an external perspective. The CST certificate facilitated the achievement of a better image and reputation on the part of the hotel and contributed to modify the behavior and attitude of employees in line with the respect to the environment and care about natural resources. The

CST	ISO 9001:2000
Changes in tourists' perception	Cost management
Sustainability culture	Customer oriented culture
Strengthening of training plans in different areas	Staff training

Table 10.- Organizational implications of ISO 9001:2000 & CST certifications

ISO 9001 certification led the firm to set into practice internal changes (increase of formalization, formulation of explicit goals and policies, establishment of metrics and indicators, etc.) that generated, as a consequence, the improvement of the levels of productivity, efficiency, and customer satisfaction.

Thus, the application of both standards by the PLH has contributed to the achievement of positive organizational results. Also, the implementation of the ISO 9001:2000 standard was facilitated by the existence of some organizational practices that were adopted due to the CST requirements. Therefore, we may state that the CST standard turned out to be a fundamental facilitator for the implementation of the ISO 9001 standard by the PLH.

This work tries to represent a first effort in the study of the complementariness of these two standards by the tourist sector. From this viewpoint, this paper may be a starting point for academicians interested in the study of the phenomenon analyzed in this paper (complementariness of CST and ISO 9001 standards). Also, practitioners and businessmen could find in this paper evidence that supports the complementariness of both standards by an organization of the tourist sector. This fact may be especially significant for firms that compete in the ecotourism sector.

As this paper constitutes a first attempt to study the complementariness of CST and ISO 9001 standards, some limitations may be raised. The novelty of the topic studied here has made us have difficulties on finding specific academic literature to found our theoretical framework. We hope our study may contribute to fill in this gap.

Also, the empirical part of the study is based on a single case study; hence, the results presented here cannot be generalized to a broader context. However, the aim of a single case study is not statistical generalization as Yin (1989) states, but the in-depth analysis of a phenomenon in its real context.

Some future research lines would have to do with overcoming some of the limitations of the study. To this respect, this research could be further developed with the study of more cases to try to identify patterns. In so doing, we could establish solid propositions that could be tested in future investigations. Also, some relationships derived from our current descriptive research could be analyzed in greater detail with the application of a broader methodology. For instance, the link between the application of both standards and the improvement of organizational performance would need further research through the application of a quantitative study.

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Note

1 Though "there is no generally accepted understanding of their precise meaning and a definitional approach appears problematic" (Pforr, 2001: 68), ecotourism and sustainable tourism represent different concepts and ideas. However, a more refined perspective on the topic suggests that ecotourism can be understood as the intersection of nature-based tourism and sustainable tourism (Fennell, 1999; Wearing and Neil, 1999). Ecotourism implies the development of sustainable tourism in natural areas, embracing in this way the values and principles of sustainability that have to do with balancing economic, ecological and social aspects as an integrated whole (Pforr, 2001). Therefore, ecotourism could be considered as a particular way of sustainable tourism; but recognizing the difference between both concepts (the latter more comprehensive and generic), in this paper we are going to consider them entailing the same idea.