

Net Positive Hospitality Podcast transcript

Driving Net Positive in European Hospitality: a Conversation with HOTREC

7th July 2025

Becca (Podcast host) 00:09

Welcome to the net positive hospitality podcast, brought to you by the World sustainable Hospitality Alliance,

Ibrahim William (Orascom Hotels Management) 00:21

One of the greatest initiatives is utilising the natural resources available in our environment, particularly the sun and air.

Becca (Podcast host) 00:30

We hear much about how new technologies will be the solution to making industries net positive, but in this episode, you'll hear about a very simple initiative which can be harnessed easily. Listen out for our new feature, 'Seeing is Believing', where we hear from people on the ground in hospitality who are making tangible changes, but first we're going behind the scenes at HOTREC, which convened earlier this year. HOTREC is the association of hotels, restaurants and cafes in Europe. It represents the hospitality industry to EU institutions, promotes knowledge sharing and best practices and acts as a platform of expertise. The Alliance's CEO, Glenn Mandziuk, met up with the HOTREC President at its convention in Oslo. We hear now why it's so important to get SMEs on board with driving Net Positive Hospitality, the importance of training and what we owe to the next generation.

Glenn Mandziuk (the Alliance) 01:19

Exciting to be here in Oslo at the HOTREC General Assembly. And I have the distinguished honour to be here with the Chair of HOTREC, Alex Vassilikos, and also chair of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, Chamber of Hotels in Greece. And you know, it's a big honour to have this conversation about what you're seeing within HOTREC and the whole European movement on sustainability. What is your take on the conversations happening with the members of HOTREC and the combination of what's happening here in Europe on sustainability, in your view?

Alexandros Vassilikos (HOTREC) 02:00

First of all, Glenn, the honour is all mine, and thank you for your intervention. Today, we got a lot of positive feedback on what you're doing, and it's impressive what you have achieved globally. To answer your question, I think that the first thing that we see in Europe is that there is a very strong

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will from the industry to lead in this green transition. Of course, it's not an easy path. There are a lot of different things that impact this, and one of this is legislation. The other is collaboration with local governments, with national governments. There is a lot of things on the table. There is also a matter of size. You not mostly, but you deal a lot with big groups that are very well structured, that have mainly big hotels and follow KPIs and know what they're doing, and they have the brands helping, helping them with guidelines. When we talk about the hoteliers and restaurateurs of Europe, you're talking about micro enterprises. We like to call them SMEs, but they're they're smaller than SMEs, so you're talking about the family business in the French Alps or in a Greek island or in the middle of Ireland. So for them, it's not as easy maybe, to have access to the information as it would be for someone who is bigger or someone who is branded or affiliated. So this is where HOTREC steps in, international associations, you saw as well today that there are many things going on in many countries. There is a strong will from the national associations to help these hoteliers, these restaurateurs, to make this transition and to make it in a feasible way, and to make it in a financially sustainable way as well, because this is what we have to account for, this as well, and our job as HOTREC is to make sure that no one is left behind when legislation at European level is made and that these very small companies are taken into account.

Glenn Mandziuk (the Alliance) 04:15

Yeah absolutely. And to your point, it is an industry of SMEs, and so if we don't engage them in the way they want to be and need to be engaged, we lose them. And I think we talked a lot about it today. I think with so many acronyms and things are being thrown at these guys, and how could they expect the industry to truly get behind this without a framework that is clear and connected, and it sounds like not only here at HOTREC, but also within your space in in Greece, you're taking a real strong leadership approach.

Alexandros Vassilikos (HOTREC) 04:46

Yes, we're trying to to take a bit of a different approach. We've been working a lot as the as a chamber of hotels with the Chamber of engineers. We we've had the working groups for the past two years. Years, and we actually just passed the legislation from the Ministry of Tourism, where we are aiming to have a compulsory transition for all hotels of Greece to a sustainability classification. We will become the first country, to my knowledge, to have such a classification, and we are now discussing with the government, we will be presenting within the next few weeks, the specificities of the programme. What I can tell you is that we are based on four main pillars today - the water management, the energy efficiency, there is a very big part about training as well, which includes training of owners, training of employees, but also training of visitors. And we have also our fourth pillar, which is the waste management. So this is phase one, where we deal with the environmental sustainability, and we will get into phase two and three, on S and G, on social and governance in the next two phases. But it is, it is a very big project that requires a horizontal collaboration between the states, between banks, between the stakeholders, the hoteliers, between private companies that enter the recycling cycles. It's a very big ecosystem, so we try to put all this together and create something that will make sense and that will give us the opportunity as a country to step forward.

Glenn Mandziuk (the Alliance) 06:40

It's outstanding. And you know, given your experience on this, and certainly Greece's leadership, it's clear. Do you see other regions of Europe taking a real leadership approach on sustainability? I know we heard some, even today, and some of the presentations, which was really exciting in your experience, are you seeing that starting to really...?

Alexandros Vassilikos (HOTREC) 07:00

Absolutely, you know, Glenn, it's very interesting to see within the HOTREC family so many, so many different things happening in so many different places. And when, when you look at Europe, obviously, if you zoom out and you see the specificities and the differences between many countries. So and this accounts for also the different way that they approach things. So obviously, the Nordic countries to start, since we're here, we see a lot of things happening here with sustainability classification, and we could say that there are leaders in energy efficiency as well. There's there's some magnificent hotels that we have. I've had the honour to visit as well. But it doesn't stop there. We have a lot of countries that have moved forward - Austria, Slovenia. They have all the strong local initiatives, and they support the systems that we have, Germany also has ESG tools that were presented today in order to help hotels assess and find their way into a more sustainable future. So I think what we're trying to do at HOTREC is take all these and bring them together as a knowledge in Brussels, to see what is happening, to help all these small hotels within the framework of legislation, and make sure that all this makes sense at the end, taking into account the very big differences and specificities of different members As National Association, but also members, members in their respective countries,

Glenn Mandziuk (the Alliance) 08:44

No, and I think that's the real power of HOTREC. What I witnessed here firsthand is to see everybody openly sharing their ideas and thoughts within the framework. That's the only way we can advance as a collective and absolutely and what I also saw today, which was really powerful, is your team. They're really working with the EU, very closely engaged on various legislation, and being actively engaged at the table. Can you just give me some insights or share with the audience some of that?

Alexandros Vassilikos (HOTREC) 09:11

Yes, we're, we have a very strong team and a very qualitative team and a very diverse team as well. In Brussels, we're very lucky about this. You know, it's not easy to run an organisation by far. So we have a Director General, Marie Audren, who is running the office, and we have, like I said, a fantastic team with very specialised people that are very engaged in the discussions and different legislations that are going on and as we are in Europe, you know that we don't lack legislations and legislation projects. But this is, I think this is also, this is also the beauty of what we do, because it is, it is essential to bring. This knowledge to Brussels to make sure that a legislation that would otherwise be felt or seen as very fair, if we do not give them the insights of what it means, like I said before, for a small farm in the middle of Ireland, or for a small family business in a Greek island. And to be very clear, we were talking about companies. Many times that we saw hotel with eight rooms, and it's the Mother, the Father and the daughter running the hotel. So when they hear about green claims, you need to explain to them what the green claim is. On the other hand, what is very interesting to see is that within their own way of running the business, many times you are

surprised by the sustainability that they follow on their own, without getting any guidelines, whether it's using local recipes or supporting local culture, and these are things that are in the DNA in many, many regions of Europe. So it's a two way road. We need to bring the knowledge to Brussels, and we need to pass the knowledge of the legislation that is produced to Brussels, also to the members.

Glenn Mandziuk (the Alliance) 11:18

Exactly, you know, it's, it's a powerful mechanism. Otherwise, everybody's done it for themselves, and they can't get through the the to your point, green claims, even from a large company perspective, it's very complicated, and so having it at this 'me' level, it's just beyond them. Do you see the current regulations helping or hindering sustainability in the in European context at the moment?

Alexandros Vassilikos (HOTREC) 11:43

Well, I think that there's been a lot of good work done in the right direction, for sure, again, it's not always easy and it's not always easy to implement, but I do believe that we have played our part in this being a filter, one way or another, going both ways, sometimes showing with our finger people who, in our opinion, are doing green washing, whether it's platforms that offer kinds of harmonisation standards without checking, without on site, checks without nothing. So we need to make sure that the same rules apply for everyone. But I would say that Europe is trying. Europe is trying hard to set up the legislation the way it should be there. There is a lot of projects that are running right now, in which we play an important part. And the EU platform on food waste, there are a lot of things going on. We're also active in the myriad project and the transition pathway for tourism in general, is something that you know. There is no one size fits all. And there is nothing static. There is nothing that you will decide today and will follow you for 10 years. It needs to be dynamic. It needs to be rediscussed. It needs to be put on the table over and over again because we're in a world that evolves very fast, and things that we believed yesterday are maybe not on the table today and will definitely not be on the table tomorrow. So all these are evolving. And this is why it's it's a very lively group and what we do, will keep on evolving as well.

Glenn Mandziuk (the Alliance) 13:39

Well, you know you're coming at your your leadership here at HOTREC, Chair of the Board and and clearly you have a deep commitment to sustainability. You've you've exuded that, not only from in this organisation, but obviously we are leadership and in Greece itself, what's inspired you personally, to show that leadership in this space, and what is really driving you right now?

Alexandros Vassilikos (HOTREC) 14:04

Very frankly, I believe that this generation hitting 50 in a few months, and the one before probably failed in managing the planet resources, in doing the right choices. And my personal driver is very sincerely looking at my kids. And I believe that when you lead an industry, I'll start with Greece, with with 10,000 hotels, you need a roadmap, and your roadmap doesn't specially contain politics. It does need to be financially sustainable for your members, like I said, but at the end of the road, there is only one thing on the table. Is, what do you deliver to your children? And for me, if we are to evolve, and if we are to evolve right, there is only one metric for this is to deliver to the next

generation something better than what you got from the previous generation. So I would say this is definitely my personal drive. And I believe that this is also the same thing at European level. At European level we have today, short of 2 million companies in HOTREC represented and about 11 million employees. So we are a medium sized country of Europe. It's huge, and it might sound a bit romantic, but if, if everyone does this in their own field, I'm sure that we can deliver something much better to the next generation.

Glenn Mandziuk (the Alliance) 15:50

Well said. And you know, if you're looking five to 10 years from now, within HOTREC, what does sustainability look like? You know, for the European context, you've just described your vision, to a degree, in terms of the, you know, making sure the next generation. But what does the operation look like for when it comes to sustainability within the industry and within HOTREC itself?

Alexandros Vassilikos (HOTREC) 16:15

Well, there are many facets to this. Glenn, first of all, I think because you touch upon this, and it's very interesting to look at strategy, I think it's very important that that we recognise our industry for what it really is. And I say this anywhere I am. I remember saying it in the Italian Parliament, and getting quite a reaction on over this. Hoteliers and restaurateurs, we're not here to make beds and serve food. This is not what we do. And if we look at ourselves like this, then we need to take a different look at ourselves. And if others look at our at us, and mainly lawmakers as this, then they need to take a closer look as well. We must not forget that we have huge regions in Europe that are almost totally dependent on tourism and with no other way to survive. So this needs to be sustained. This needs to be done in an equilibrated way in order to make sure that this will go on for the next generations. And if we look 10 years down the road, I think that we can transform our industry. It's an industry that's been here for quite a few years and I think that it has also a great future ahead. We just need to continue doing what we do. Do it better. Do it closer to the trends of today, and learn how to evolve as the world evolves. We've done it in the past. We've done it, and we've shown our ability to adapt, and we've shown it not so far back with COVID, it was a huge change. It was a scenario that wasn't written anywhere you mentioned before in our private conversation, insurance companies - you have people that are paid to make bad scenario. This scenario didn't exist anywhere. But although, if I take you back to those days, we heard all sorts of things, people will never travel again. We will never see tourism as it was. It will mass tourism will disappear. Tourists will walk on ceilings and not on floor. We heard all kinds of things business travel is dying, and that's it. And obviously nobody knew, so it's fair to try and project in the future, but what we saw is that it went the other way. People travel more people have realised that they won't experience, that they will, they will, they will keep money for this. And we are also at generational change. We see the new generation not keeping money and not investing money in ownership. You can start with simple things like bikes or cars that are not owned but shared, and move up to something that was a characteristic of the previous generation, or like real estate. The previous generation would enter life and take a loan to buy real estate and run after the loan for 20 or 30 years. This is not something the new generation is doing. Therefore, you have an available income that is spent otherwise, if you add to this the possibilities that are given today, of work from home, of working from anywhere, things that didn't exist 10/20, years ago, or at least at this scale. So I do think that if we read the situation right, we do have a bright future.

Glenn Mandziuk (the Alliance) 20:05

Yeah. Now, really big honour again, to share your knowledge and insights. As an alliance, we're very keen and obviously honoured to be looking at our partnership with HOTREC. Your message here today lines up beautifully with our vision around net positive hospitality and that message of what generational thinking needs to happen within the industry and our role as a sector in the industry, it's more than serving a customer. Yes, that's the cornerstone of our work, but there's a bigger role to play in the destination, in the community and being seen as sort of that lighthouse, and it's a really great opportunity to see two big organisations work together to tackle this at scale. So looking forward to more conversations with you as the days and months and years go on.

Alexandros Vassilikos (HOTREC) 20:55

Same with me Glenn, the honour was all mine. And again, congratulations on the work we're doing. And I think it's only obvious why we agree on so many things. So thank you very much.

Becca (Podcast host) 21:05

And now let's hear how one man is driving change at an Orascom hotel in Egypt.

Ibrahim William (Orascom Hotels Management) 21:11

My name is Ibrahim William. I am the area director of housekeeping and laundry operation and Orascom Hotel Management. This in Egypt three years ago. Now, do we start to implement some some initiatives related to the sustainability and the environmental as well. We have implemented more than one initiative in our hotel operation which had a significant impact in many aspects our commitment to environmental sustainability and cost saving remain very strong. One of the greatest initiatives is utilising the natural resources available in our environment, particularly the sun and air. As our country enjoys the sunny weather almost throughout the entire year, we use this resource to dry all hotel beach towers instead of relying on traditional laundry drying machines. Some of our benefits behind if you allow me to highlight the benefits of implementing this initiative in our Orascom Hotel Management. Number one, reduce utility consumption, such as electricity and view. Number two, lower operational expenses. Number three, decreased wear and tear on drying equipment. Number four, extended life span of the equipment itself. Number five, improved working condition. Number six, enhanced sustainability profile for the entire organisation. Last thing, this project not only support our financial goals, but also aligns with our commitment to environmental responsibility, as well as contributing to greener and more efficient operations, the cost for drying one kilogramme of the beach tower or swimming pool towel using the traditional normal dryer machine is costing us here in Egypt, like 1.7 Egyptian pound with an average daily load of 4500 kilogramme a daily. This result is saving of 7650 Egyptian pound per day. Over months, this translate to saving of approximately 230,000 Egyptian pound. This means that the saving over the year will exceed 2 million Egyptian pound especially during the summer months, when the natural drying condition are at their best. The second initiative that has also been implemented in Orascom Hotels is that discontinuation of non woven laundry bags, which we have in all our guest rooms. You know that every guest room have a laundry bag for the guests to be used. This laundry bag is manufactured from non woven material. This we stopped totally in our hotels, and instead of that, we are recycling the out of order bed sheets, which our hotel tailors transform into new bags with stylish and cool design. Each bag features a message that says,

yesterday I was a bed sheet, and today I am a laundry bag. Most of our guests take it as a souvenir with them.

Becca (Podcast host) 24:47

You are hearing from Ibrahim, William area, Director of housekeeping and laundry operations at Orascom Hotels Management - Alguna Hotels. Listen out for our next episode, where we'll be delving into the importance of communicating sustainability to hotel guests.