

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ON ECOLOGICAL CERTIFICATION OF HOTEL SERVICES

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Abstract: This paper refers to the need and opportunity for environmental certification of hotel services in the context where the implementation of ISO 14001 lead to higher occupancy, room rates, and market share. . To highlight the benefits of the ecolabel, the paper presents the case of Spain, one of the countries with the most ecological standards implemented.

Keywords: sustainable development, hotel management, ecolabel.

1. Introduction

Currently the society is going through a period marked by major changes due to global environmental issues and environmental pressures, health concerns, etc.

In the current global economic environment the hotel industry (Moscardo, 2008) is one of the most important economic activities due to its effects on regional development (Holjevac, 2003).

In this respect, studies carried out by WTO (World Tourism Organization) indicate an increasing number of tourists concerned about environmental issues and good quality services.

The specialized literature is replete with studies (Goodman, 2000; Bonilla, 2008; Zhang, Joglekar and Verma, 2010) on the impact assessment of practices that allow hotels to become more environmentally sustainable.

The main source of competitive advantage for tourism companies nowadays is the good quality products and services and their ability to obtain ecologic certification. Therefore, hotels have to determine the most effective way to promote their green status (Lee, Hsu, Han and Kim, 2010).

The need and opportunity for environmental certification of hotel services is highlighted by a well-researched study - ”*Consumer Demand and Operator Support for Socially and Environmentally Responsible Tourism*” – which reveals that 69% of Dutch tourists, staying in hotels Green Key Eco-Label certified, mentions they would be willing to pay more to benefit from facilities that have implemented an ecolabel. At the same time, 86% - of Dutch tourists - would prefer a star clasification system that combines the ecologic performance and quality of service. The same specialist, reveals that over 62% of Italian tourists and 42% of German tourists consider that ecologic performance is a key factor for a successful vacation. Moreover, 90% of the Italian tourists are in favor of an ecolabeling (Chafe, 2005).

Similarly, the world’s largest travel site – TripAdvisor –, announced its eco-travel survey of more than 2,100 U.S. respondents. According to the survey, 23 percent of respondents have consciously made an eco-friendly travel choice in the past year, and 85 percent said doing so made them feel more positive about their trip (comScore Media Metrix for TripAdvisor Sites)

According to some specialists (Melynk, Sroufe and Calantone, 2002; Mensah, 2006; Rodríguez-Antón, Alonso-Almeida, Celemín and Rubio, 2012; Hsieh, 2012) the ecological certification is gradually becoming a common approach for hotels to demonstrate their commitment and focus to sustainabilitysystem of hotel business.

Considering these aspects, we can say that in the hospitality industry, characterized by increasingly fierce competition, obtaining performance and excellence is reduced to consumer needs through the development and ownership of quality goods and services. In this context, the hotel management must endeavor to incorporate the required environmental standards into a quality management system.

2. Ecological certification of hotel services

At international level, are known many points of view on the importance of environmental certification of hotel services, but the most relevant is that of the American “Green”Hotel Association, which stated that: “green hotels are environmentally friendly properties whose managers are eager to institute programs that save water, save energy, and reduce solid waste while saving money.”

The actuality of the research topic is based on the European Union adoption of a set of measures intended to increase the weight of renewable energies by minimum 20% up to 2020 and to reduce the energy consumption by 20% compared to the current figures.

Thus, according to European Environment Agency – EEA – at the level of hundreds of tourist accommodation units in Central and Western Europe, there is an average of water consumption for an occupied room of 394 liters, as against an average of the highest performance 25% of the business in the analyzed domain of 213 liters (EEA, 2007). Thus, ecological certification provides hotels the opportunity to reduce the resources consumption without affecting the quality of services provided, by implementing new technologies with financial and technical assistance provided by various institutions.

In the hotel industry, environmental requirements cover issues such as waste reduction, energy saving and reduction of water consumption.

Certification is defined as a voluntary process which assesses, audits and provide written assurance that a facility, a product, process or service reach specific standards. Is offered a commercial logo for those who meet or exceed basic standards (Honey, 2002). Thus, the ecolabel is designed to determine the managers of the various hotel establishments to provide services with low impact on the environment and to help consumers to identify them.

In this direction, the main initiatives in the domain of ecologic certification of hotel business are synthesized in the table no. 1

Table no.1 Voluntary environment tools applied to the hotel industry

Tools	Purpose	Examples
Codes of conduct	In order to show observance of the basic principles by a sustainable and environment friendly business	Agenda 21 for the tourism and travels industry; WTTC environment Guidebook
Best environment practice in this area	In order to take actual steps for improving the company’s ecologic performance	Electricity and water saving approaches; diminishing the quantity of waste and its adequate management
Ecolabels	In order to ensure the ecologic performance of business in close connection to the set out criteria and for informing the client	European ecolabel, Green Globe 21, Öko-Proof-Betrieb, Spanish ecolabeling systems

Environment Management Systems (EMSs)	In order to guide the company's environment performance and for its continuous improvement in close connection to the planned strategy	ISO 14001; European Regulation EMAS
Ecologic performance indicators	In order to set out and communicate the company's ecologic performance	Total electricity and water consumption; resulting quantities of waste per type

Source: Ayuso, S., 2006. Adoption of Voluntary Environmental Tools for Sustainable Tourism: Analysing the Experience of Spanish Hotels. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, p. 209

Worldwide, ISO 14001 is the most frequently used environmental management standard, because it provides the hotel managers the opportunity to improve the sustainability of their operations while analyzing measures for environmental sustainability (Zhang, Joglekar and Verma, 2010).

ISO 14001 was developed in 1996 and its aim is to enable a hotel to identify and control the environmental impact of its products, processes, and services and also to improve its environmental performance (Segarra-Oña, Peiró-Signes and Verma, 2011).

In this respect, we can say that in general ecological standards, particularly ISO 14001, allow on the one hand improving the environmental performance of hotel units, and on the other hand improving economic performance by reducing the costs of providing hotel services

According to some studies (Bonilla, 2008), Spain and Italy are the countries with the highest number of ISO 14001 certifications in the services sector.

In this context, to highlight the need and opportunity for environmental certification of hotel services in the following paragraphs will be presented the case of Spain as an example of best practice.

Spain is the second largest tourism earner worldwide and the first in Europe (US\$56 billion), while ranking fourth in the world by arrivals – 58 million (*UNWTO Tourism Highlights*, 2013).

Thus, table no.2 reveals the classification of hotels – in 2008– according to type (city, beach, rural) and size.

Table no.2 Certification status of hotels according to type and size

	City hotels	Beach hotels	Rural hotels
Without ISO 14001	800	814	394
Fewer than 50 employees	659	578	377
50 to 249 employees	128	194	17
250 employees or more	13	42	0
With ISO 14001	27 (3.4%)	45 (5.5%)	36 (9.2%)
Fewer than 50 employees	13	24	36

50 to 249 employees	7	18	0
250 employees or more	7	3	0
Total	827	859	430

Source: IHOBE and SABI databases

Also, in a recent study – “*Environmental management certification (ISO14001): Effect on hotel guest reviews*” – were compared the Spanish hotels – with 5, 4, or 3 stars (corresponding to luxury, upscale, and midscale) – with ISO 14001 and without ISO 14001 certification to assess the impact of the ecolabel on economic performance (see table no.3)

Table no.3 Certification status of hotels by star rating

	5-Star Hotels	4-Star Hotels	3-Star Hotels
Without ISO 14001	231	1895	2371
With ISO 14001	29	215	70
Total	260	2110	2441

Source: Segarra-Oña María-del-Val, *et al.*,”*Environmental management certification (ISO14001): Effect on hotel guest reviews*”, Cornell Hospitality Report, Vol.14, No.8 March 2014, Angel Peiró-Signes, Ph.D., Rohit Verma,

The study reveals that 5 –star hotels do not gain distinctive competency in their guests’ estimation when they hold the ISO 14001 certification, nor do the middle scale hotels (3 stars) receive a benefit from certification. But, the 4-star hotels do get important benefits from the client point of view when the hotel is environmentally certified (Segarra-Oña María-del-Val, *et al.*, 2014).

This can be explained by the fact that on the one hand the tourists who use 5 star hotels have luxury amenities as motivation, and on the other hand tourists who choose midscale hotels generally have average incomes and are not willing to pay extra for an eco-label.

According to specialists (Segarra-Oña María-del-Val, *et al.*, 2014) hotels with ISO14001 certification receive higher customer ratings compared to the hotels without environmental certification and an unequal influence on the customers’ rating of service quality aspects can be observed in hotels environmentally certified through the ISO14001 standard. Thus, ISO14001 certification contributes to value creation and it’s a measure of management performance.

In these circumstances, we can say that the implementation of ISO 14001 or any ecolabel allows the management of a hotel to gain a competitive edge in the market over similar non-certified properties

Also, the ISO 14001 standard provides assurance to company management and external stakeholders, that environmental impact is being measured and improved (ISO Central Secretariat, 2009).

An environmental management system provides a company with an information system that not only reduces contamination but also helps to improve corporate results (Russo, and Fouts, 1997; Melnyk, Sroufe and Calantone, 2002).

Regarding Romania, in 2013 there were only three ecologically certified accommodations, namely: Saturn Hotel of Saturn hotelul Saturn din stațiunea omonimă –

certified in 2008 –; hotelul Crowne Plaza Hotel of of Bucharest – certified in 2009 – and Piatra Soimului Villa of Sinaia – certified 2011.

ISO 14001 as an environmental management tool contributes to value creation in the hotel industry by improving business results.

3. Conclusions

Changes in the world identify the ecological certification as a major source of surplus value. Therefore, by implementing ISO 14001 hotels are improving their environmental performance as a result of limiting the use of substances with negative effects on water, air, soil and thus obtained a distinctive asset that leads them to a competitive advantage.

Thus, the ecolabel brings tour-operators many benefits, including: enhances the confidence in the hotel; ensure the quality of services provided to tourists; protects the environment, and not least improves the reputation of the hotel on market profile.

ISO 14001 can contribute to the value added creation of the hotels, by improving housekeeping accuracy, hotel comfort, hotel services, and increase customer satisfaction.

The ecolabel can be an advantage for a hotel's image because approaching business profitability by reducing the environmental impact is the key to the sustainable development of a tourist accommodation unit.

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