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PRO-ECOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES OF SLOVAK HOTELS IN THE OPINION OF THEIR EMPLOYEES AND CONSUMERS

DZIAŁANIA ŚRODOWISKOWE SŁOWACKICH HOTELI W OPINII ICH PRACOWNIKÓW I KONSUMENTÓW

DOI: 10.15611/nit.2018.3.02
JEL Classification: O13, P18

Summary: The aim of the research was to identify pro-ecological activities of Slovak hotels in the opinion of their employees and consumers. Two questionnaires were created, one was sent to 400 hotels and the other one to 105 respondents. The most common pro-ecological activities introduced by hotels were: energy saving bulbs, energy efficient appliances, waste separation and recycling, and light motion sensors. In terms of packaging of the hotel cosmetics, half of the hotels used disposable mini-packs, and the other half dispensers for soap and shampoo. Over half of hotels did not offer meals prepared from organic foods in their hotel restaurant. Only two hotels rewarded their clients who care for the environment. One hotel offered discounts on accommodation and the second one offered a higher number of points on the loyalty card. 42.1% hotels had plans related to environmental protection (e.g. expand waste sorting, recycle PET bottles, and increase the share of segregated waste).

Keywords: pro-ecological activities, Slovak hotels, customers, workers.

Streszczenie: Celem badań było zidentyfikowanie proekologicznych działań słowackich hoteli w opinii ich pracowników i konsumentów. Opracowano dwa kwestionariusze ankiety, które wysłano do 400 hoteli i 105 respondentów. Do najczęstszych działań proekologicznych realizowanych przez hotele należały: wykorzystanie żarówek energooszczędnych, urządzeń energooszczędnych, segregacja odpadów i recykling oraz czujniki ruchu. Jeśli chodzi o opakowania kosmetyków hotelowych, to połowa hoteli korzystała z jednorazowych minipakietów, a druga połowa korzystała z dozowników mydeł i szamponów. Ponad połowa hoteli nie

proponowała klientom żywności ekologicznej w hotelowej restauracji. Tylko dwa hotele nagradzały swoich klientów za to, że dbają o środowisko. Jeden hotel oferował zniżki na zakwaterowanie, a drugi hotel oferował większą liczbę punktów na karcie lojalnościowej. 42,1% hoteli miało plany związane z ochroną środowiska (np. rozszerzenie sortowania odpadów, recykling butelek PET, zwiększenie udziału segregowanych odpadów).

Słowa kluczowe: działania proekologiczne hoteli, słowackie hotele, konsumenci, pracownicy.

1. Introduction

Hotels are a major energy and water intensive sector in tourism, because they consume enormous amount of energy and resources (e.g. water, lighting, and many disposable products) in their daily operations, which has posed a great challenge to the environment [Verma, Chandra, 2017; Bohdanowicz 2005; Wang et al. 2017]. Nowadays, there has been increasing public concern about environmental issues and consumers are more environmentally conscious than in the past decades [Han et al. 2009]. Many consumers are in favour of green consumption and regard it as an effective way to protect the environment [Juvan, Dolnicar 2017; Chen, Chang, 2012]. Many hotels adopt green practices and develop environmental programs in their hotels to attract consumers and gain a competitive market position [Cerutti et al. 2016; Yadav, Pathak 2016]. According to the Green Hotel Association from the USA, green hotels are environmentally-friendly properties whose managers are eager to institute programs that save water, save energy and reduce solid waste. Green hotels are tagged with an eco-friendly label for saving water, saving energy, reducing solid waste, recycling, and reusing durable service items to protect the earth [Lee et al. 2010; Kushwaha, Sharma 2016].

Green hotels are the future trend for consumers to reduce pollution, emissions in the tourism and hospitality industries [Siti-Nabiha et al. 2014]. According to Wyatt [2016], an eco-friendly hotel should have six key tools to save the environment and to be part of sustainable tourism: 1) sustainable food source – a way of preparing dishes and menus in hotel restaurants made from organic food from organic farming, sustainable energy source – every hotel should have a sustainable energy source as hotels are among the most power demanding buildings. The hotels most often use solar panels that are energy efficient and save the money of a hotel and guests. Energy produced by solar panels is mainly used for light, water heating, and the like, 3) sustainable cleaning methods – hotels should use environmentally friendly cleaners, 100% recycled eco-toilet paper, soap dispensers and shower gels or shampoo should be installed in rooms. Other measures include a shower timer and a solar dryer, 4) hotels should, in addition to using recycled materials, introduce recycling techniques, 5) hotels should provide their guests with greener transport options, bicycles, buses, trains and the like. To promote green transport, it is also appropriate to have, for example, charging station for electromobiles, or offer various

discounts or accommodation benefits for guests who use green transport, 6) hotels should be open to new opportunities for environmental protection and sustainability. Management and staff should constantly be educated and interested in news in ecology, sustainability and ecotourism, and present their findings further to hotel visitors.

The BIO HOTELS association is the largest association of eco-friendly hotels in Europe covering bio hotels. It embraces nearly 100 bio hotels in seven European countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Greece and Slovenia) offering organic holiday, sustainable conference or green meeting and ecologically-oriented service for business travellers. Sustainable economy, buying locally and eco-friendly energy and waste cycles are obligatory for all organic hoteliers. BIO HOTELS was the first hotel group to undergo a certification for eco certified hotels. Therefore, the constant improvement of carbon footprint is the hoteliers declared common goal [BIO HOTELS 2018]. Standards in all areas are as follows: 100% organic foods and products in the organic restaurants, energy standards through the eco hotels certification, high food and non-food standards for greater sustainability and eco-friendliness, use of organic cosmetics and natural cleaning products, purchase of green electricity and paper from recycled sources or sustainably managed forests [BIO HOTELS 2018].

Slovak hotels are not members of the European BIO HOTELS Association. Under Slovak conditions, there is a Decree of Ministry of Economy of Slovak Republic 277/2008 on the categorization and classification of accommodation facilities, which defines types of hotels. However, there is no description of the environmental requirements for hotels or eco-hotels. It is up to the hotel's management to decide on taking environmental measures and get the label of an "environmentally friendly" hotel. To 31th March, there were just two hotels with ecolabel in Slovakia (Hotel Dália **** in Košice, and Hotel Bojnický Vínny Dom/Bojnice wine house **** in Bojnice). The main objective of the authoresses' research was to identify pro-ecological activities of Slovak hotels in the opinion of their employees and consumers.

2. Methodology

2.1. Hotels

Forty-four hotels from 400 questioned hotels took part in the survey. Participating hotels were from all eight Slovak regions. Most hotels were from Bratislavský region (20.5%) and Žilinský region (18.2%), followed by Banskobystrický region (15.9%), Trnavský region (13.6%) and Prešovský region (13.6%). From the Košický region and Trenčiansky region 4 hotels (9.1%) and 3 hotels (6.8%) were involved in the survey. The lowest participation of hotels in the research was from the Nitriansky region (1 hotel – 2.3%). Of the 44 participating hotels, the highest number had three

stars (45.5%), four stars (38.6%) and two stars (13.6%). Only one hotel (2.3%) was one star and none participating hotel had five stars. The hotels the questionnaires were sent to, were from nine categories of the hotel classification according to Decree of Ministry of Economy of Slovak Republic 277/2008 on the categorization and classification of accommodation facilities, which establishes the classification characteristics of accommodation establishments in their categorization and classes. We have also contacted a hotel type hotel and boarding house with a wellness area. Hotels had the largest representation in our survey (50%).

Wellness hotels and congress hotels represented (15.9%) and (13.6%) of all hotels taking part in the research, respectively. The next category were garni hotels (6.8%), apartment hotels and pension/boarding houses which had a representation of two facilities (4.5%). Spa hotels and boutique hotels were represented by one facility each (2.3%). None of the hotels were in the mountain hotel, motel, and hotel categories. In the survey, mostly small hotels with a capacity of 10 to 100 rooms took part (84.1%). Medium hotels with a capacity of 101 to 250 rooms were represented by (11.4%) and the least numerous hotel facilities were (4.5%) guesthouses with a capacity of up to 10 rooms. Of the participating hotels, up to 56.8% belonged to the Association of Hotels and Restaurants in Slovakia.

The results were obtained by using an electronic questionnaire containing 22 questions. Only partial research results are described in this paper. Questions in the questionnaire related to: a) pro-ecological activities for environmental protection introduced in hotels, b) use of organic products/devices which have minimal impact on the environment in the accommodation section of the hotel, c) hotel cosmetics packaging, d) the use of organic foods in a hotel restaurant and the use of ecological food packaging, e) interest in cooperating with producers of organic foods, suppliers of ecological products and local farmers, f) plans related to environmental protection. We were also interested whether the hotels offer any benefits to their customers who try to save the environment (for example, when they come by bike) and whether they have any plans and visions for environmental protection in the future. The questionnaire survey was conducted from 1 to 31 March 2018. The questionnaires were distributed to the hotel email addresses, which we obtained from the internet portal www.zoznam.sk. We contacted 400 hotels, of which 44 filled in the questionnaires.

2.2. Respondents

One hundred and five respondents participated in the survey, including 61% women and 39% men. Most of them (73.3%) were from 19 to 30 years old. Twelve respondents (11.4%) were from 31 to 45 years old and eleven respondents (10.5%) were from 46 to 60 years old. Over 61 years of age were 5 people (4.8%).

Respondents from all eight Slovak regions participated in the survey. Most respondents came from the Bansko-Bystrický (29.5%) and Košický (24.8%) regions.

The rest of the respondents came from the Žilinský region (9.5%), the Prešovský region (8.6%), and 8 respondents (7.6%) came from three regions (Bratislavský, Nitriansky and Trenčiansky). The least respondents (4.8%) came from the Trnavský region. Most participants (74.3%) of the survey had a university degree and 24.8% of respondents had a secondary education. Only one respondent (0.9%) had basic education.

The questionnaire for respondents contained 15 closed questions. The content of the questionnaire consisted of four socio-demographic questions, by which the characteristics of respondents (gender, age, place of residence and education) were surveyed. In this article, the answers of respondents only on selected issues are introduced, relating to:

- criteria which they take into account when choosing a hotel,
- the types of environmental activities encountered by them when they visited hotels,
- meals prepared from organic foods offered in a hotel restaurant,
- buying meals prepared from organic foods in a hotel restaurant,
- accommodation in a certified eco-friendly hotel.

Consumer research was carried out during the period from 2 to 31 March 2018.

3. Results

3.1. Environmental activities of Slovak hotels in the opinion of hotel employees

Hotels and restaurants in Slovakia can become a member of the Union of Hotels and Restaurants of the Slovak Republic. It is a voluntary, interest, non-political and professional organization. The aim of the union is to protect the collective interests of the members against the state administration and other institutions, to strengthen the professionalism and prestige of the members, to work with tourism authorities in the state administration regarding their public opinion and opinions on tourism, hotel industry and gastronomy. The association's aim is to ensure professional growth of its entrepreneurship level and increase the quality of services provided in tourism, hotel industry and gastronomy [Union of Hotels... 2018a] through its activities. Environmental activities include engaging in the Green Management initiative organized by the International Hotels and Restaurants Association (IH&RA). This initiative is carried out under the auspices of Prince Charles of Wales and aims to improve the environment through the activities of the hotel industry. This is in particular to reduce the consumption of all types of energy, the use of technologies that lead to reduced environmental burden, waste reduction and lower emissions.

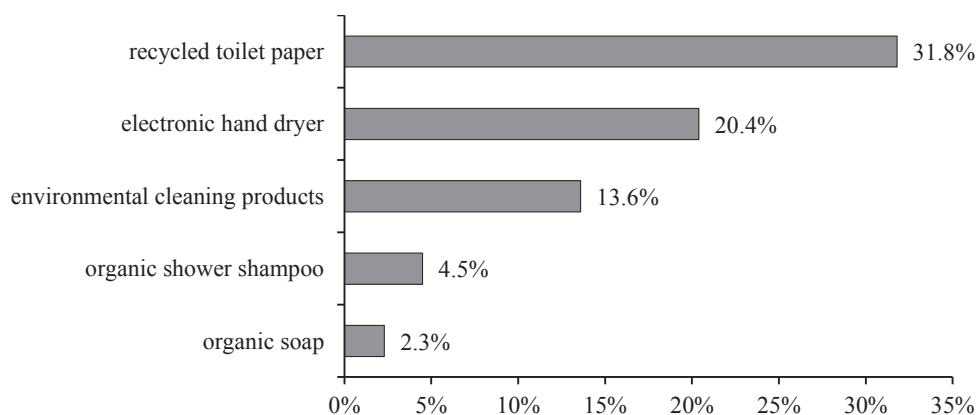
Environmentally friendly activities under the Association of Hotels and Restaurants of the SR [Union of Hotels... 2018b] are: a) the use of cleaners, b) the use of recycled paper, c) the use of large packaging, recyclable and returnable packaging, d) sorting and recycling of waste, e) switching off appliances that do not need to be operated, use of low-power technologies, g) occupancy control, use of bulbs with extended life, installation of flushing devices with limiter, etc. Hotel

guests can contribute to the protection of the environment too, for example through the restriction of frequent washing of towels and bed linen. It is also about leaving the towel on the shelf when a guest gives a sign that there is no need to replace the towel and the staff will only replace it after the guest leaves it on the floor. The “Please change my bed linen” tag gives a guest the option not to change the daily bed linen on the guest’s long stay.

In our research we wanted to find out what environmental measures hotels introduced for the protection of the environment.

As an eco-friendly environmental measure most hotels (84.1%) introduced low-energy saving bulbs and appliances in energy class A or higher. More than three-quarters of hotels did waste separation and recycling (79.5%) and applied light motion sensors (63.6%). Double flush toilets were used in 40.9% hotels and heating control in every room was available in 36.4% hotels. Solar panels were used in every fourth hotel (25%). In our research, there were also hotels that grew their own crops, breed livestock (15.9%), captured and used rainwater for watering (11.4%). Three hotels (6.8%) composted biowaste and two (4.5%) declared their ecological focus in promotional materials. Only one hotel (2.3%) had a green roof, one (2.3%) had green living wall and one (2.3%) had little heat pumps for heat generation.

One hotel does not implement any activities related to environmental protection. Further we investigated the use of organic products in the accommodation part of the hotel. Half of the hotels (50%) did not use any organic products in the hotel’s accommodation, and the other hotels used at least one of the following categories of organic products: recycled toilet paper, electronic hand dryer, organic cleaners, organic shower shampoo and organic soap. Figure 1 shows the use of organic products or devices, which have low impact on the environment in the accommodation part of the hotel.



*The answers do not add up to 100%, because the respondents could indicate several answers.

Fig. 1. Use of organic products in the accommodation part of the hotel

Source: own research.

Hotels used disposable mini-packages for hotel cosmetics or had dispensers installed. Almost half of the hotels (47.7%) used disposable mini-packages for hotel cosmetics and 47.7% used dispensers. Only 4.6% hotels used disposable mini packages as well as dispensers for hotel cosmetics.

One of the measures to protect the environment is to offer customers food made from organic raw materials and products. The authoresses wanted to identify the use of organic foods for the preparation of meals in the hotel restaurant. One third of the hotels (36.4%) responded positively to the question. Most often the hotels use organic foods such as strawberries, carrots, cabbage and potatoes, as well as meat in their restaurants. They buy vegetables and fruit from nearby farmers and meat from local producers. One hotel provides guests with own beef and lamb as well as with milk and honey products. More than half of the hotels (63.6%) admitted they did not offer their customers meals prepared from the organic food, either because of costs or unavailability (the supplier does not have organic food or is not interested in it).

Today's trend is that businesses, food trucks or organic restaurants that offer organic meals to consumers also offer such meals in ecological packaging or pack the rest of unconsumed meals into such packaging. In the research, only 18.2% hotels used ecological food packaging. Figure 2 shows the interest of the hotels to have organic food and ecological products from suppliers.

From the Figure 2 we can see that 45% of the hotels have not decided yet to buy organic products from producers and suppliers.

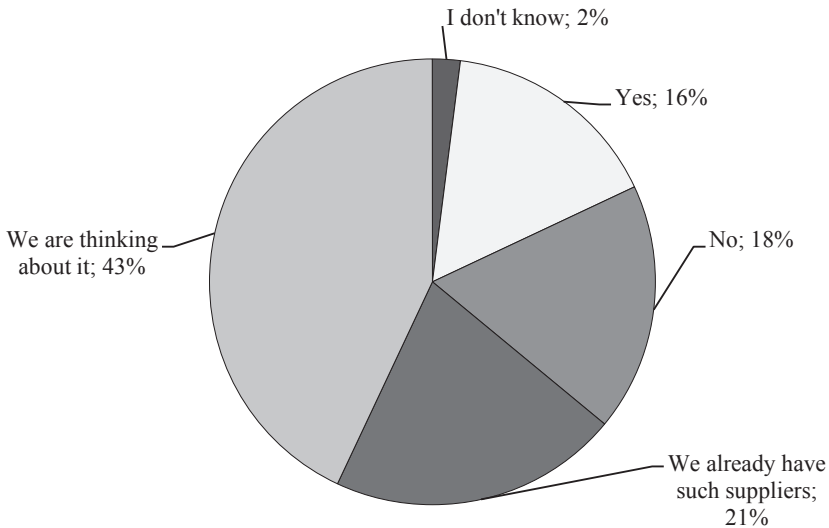


Fig. 2. The hotel's interest in ecological suppliers

Source: own research.

The authoresses wanted to find out which hotels offer some benefits to their customers who try to save the environment (for example, when they get there on a bicycle), and whether the hotels have any plans and visions associated with the protection of the environment. Only two hotels (4.5%) have offered some benefits to environmentally friendly customers. One hotel responded that they offered discounts on accommodation for environmental protection. Another hotel offered a higher number of points on the loyalty card for environmental protection, and another replied that this is an interesting idea.

The authoresses investigated hotels' plans and visions for their environment protection in the future. Over half of them (57.9%) admitted that they either did not have plans and visions, or they were not sure about them. The remaining hotels (42.1%), if their financial situation allows it, want to expand waste sorting, recycle PET bottles, increase the share of separated waste, grow their own herbs and comply with all environmental standards and regulations.

In order to encourage cooperation between Slovak organic food producers, suppliers of ecological products and hotels, the authoress suggest creating a website linking organic farmers, producers and suppliers of organic products with hotels. The website should be simple, clear and should ensure rapid co-operation between producers and hotels. Any organic farmer, organic food producer or organic products producer and the hotels that would be interested in working through the website would have to register on it. Registration would be subject to registration fees depending on the type of individuals. The fees for using the website would be paid on a yearly basis and would be used to run it. The website should be owned and managed by the organic farming association EKOTREND Slovakia. After signing in to the portal, the hotel could choose a supplier of organic food or organic products. The products could be selected by the following filters: localization, b) product type. According to the first criterion (localization) – a map of Slovakia would show a hotel, indicating the location of the hotel as well as the position of all producers of organic farming and organic products. The hotel could choose the closest suppliers of organic products. After selecting suitable suppliers, a hotel would send them an order which either they would approve, or communicate any changes. Upon confirmation of an order, a binding reservation, payment and delivery of goods would take place. According to the second supplier search criteria (product type) – hotels could find products in an online catalogue offered by organic producers. After selecting products, the hotel needs, the suppliers who would offer the products would appear on this website together with information about the distance from the hotel, the prices and the available quantity of goods. After the supplier's selection, subsequent steps would be taken as in the previous option – order, confirmation, booking, payment and delivery. The hotel could publish on the website the lists of food and organic products that it would need for its operation. On the basis of this list, the hotel could get the messages from the organic producers who would have the products on offer and subsequently agree to sell them.

Organic foods producers and suppliers of ecological products would have the opportunity to publish their offer on the website, which then could be ordered by hotels for their operation. In their offer they would define the type of product, its available quantity, price, and also the period when the products could be delivered. In addition to the published offer, organic producers could contact hotels based on specified hotel requirements.

3.2. Environmental activities of Slovak hotels in the opinion of consumers

The first question the authoresses asked respondents concerned criteria that are important for them when choosing a hotel. In this question, respondents could identify more than one answer. They most often chose hotels' by references (hotel ratings) (68.6%). Other criteria were price (62.9%), availability and location (60%). Hotel certificates and awards were important for (12.4%) respondents. Only eight respondents (7.6%) answered that the hotel's environmental activities were the major criteria when choosing a hotel.

Asking the next question, the authoresses wanted to know what hotel's environmental activities respondents had noticed in the hotels. On this issue, respondents could also identify more than one answer. The most common environmental activity which respondents stated was a light motion sensor (72.4%). Others were: soap and shampoo dispensers (68.6%) and an electronic hand dryer (58.1%). Exchange of towels only when a guest leaves them on the floor was chosen by 52.4% of respondents and bins for waste separation were indicated by 48.6%. The other respondents (41.9%) stated individually regulated heating system in their room, solar panels built into the hotel (29.5%), organic food offered by the hotel restaurant (27.6%). Regarding hotels' bathrooms, 20% of the respondents had recycled toilet paper in their hotel bathroom and 13.3% organic soap and shampoo. Only 8.6% of the respondents had a built-in timer in the shower in the hotel bathrooms.

Some hotels offer in their restaurant meals prepared from organic foods. In the research more than one-third of respondents (37.1%) saw such an offer in a hotel restaurant.

In the last question we asked respondents how many of them were already accommodated in certificated eco-friendly hotels. Only 15.4% of respondents gave an affirmative answer.

4. Conclusion

The main objective of our research was to identify pro-ecological activities of Slovak hotels in the opinion of their employees and consumers.

Among the most common pro-ecological activities introduced by Slovak hotels were: energy saving bulbs, energy efficient appliances, waste separation and

recycling, and light motion sensors. Over half of the hotels do not use organic foods in their hotel restaurants. The hotels' most frequent reasons why they did not do it are high prices and poor availability. More than three-quarters of hotels do not use ecological food packaging. Only two hotels have offered their customers, who try to save the environment, some benefits. Nearly half of the hotels are thinking about taking cooperation with the supplies of ecological products and local farmers over the next five years.

The most common criteria according to which consumers chose hotels were their references, price, availability and location. Hotel certificates and awards were important only for every tenth respondent. For only eight percent of them, hotels' environmental activities were the major criteria to choose a place to stay.

In order to support the production and sale of organic food and organic products for hotel needs in Slovakia, the authoresses recommend starting the cooperation between The Organic Farming Association EKOTREND in Slovakia and The Union of Hotels and Restaurants of the Slovak Republic. A tool to promote cooperation would be a website linking organic farmers, producers and suppliers of organic products with hotels. Slovak organic farmers, producers and suppliers of organic products would publish their offer on it, but they would also address hotels nearby. Hotels would search for suppliers of organic food and organic products according to the distance or type of goods.

Acknowledgement

The paper is the output of the project VEGA 1/0543/18 – The Importance of Product Design in Consumer Decision-Making and Perspectives to Increase the Impact of Design on Creating Competitive Position of Companies Operating in the Slovak Republic. The project was granted by Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

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