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Uptake of resource efficiency measures among European small and medium-sized accommodation and food service providers

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ABSTRACT

Increasing environmental performance in tourism is of critical importance. Supporting accommodation and food providers in the implementation of resource efficiency measures helps reduce utility costs and leads to a range of other benefits. A subset of the Flash Eurobarometer data (N = 601) is used to investigate resource efficiency measures now and in the future, including barriers and drivers, and future support required. This research concludes that small and medium-sized Western accommodation and food service providers are highly engaged in resource efficiency, and, given appropriate support measures, are likely to continue investing in measures that further increase resources efficiency.

1. Introduction

The tourism industry, and its key sub-sectors of tourist accommodation and food services, is an important user of resources, such as energy, water and materials (Becken, 2014; Gössling, 2002; McLennan, Becken, & Stinson, 2015). Accommodation providers, in particular, have a high environmental footprint. Based on 2005 data, it has been estimated that accommodation generates 21% of tourism's total greenhouse gas emissions (Scott et al., 2008). In a context of global environment change and increasing concern about the planet's ability to satisfy resource needs, the global tourism industry is increasingly interested in enhancing resource efficiency (Hathroubi, Peypoch, & Robinot, 2014; Mattera & Melgarejo, 2012; Nikolaou, Vitouladitis, & Tsagarakis, 2012). Accommodation and hospitality businesses spend up to 10% of their operational budget on energy and water alone (Becken, 2013; Bohdanowicz & Martinac, 2007) and, in combination with rising utility costs and carbon prices, investments into resource efficiency provide a measurable financial return. The Green Hospitality Programme in Ireland, for example, resulted in an average annual saving of €30,000 for members due to improved waste management, reduced energy and water use, and through more efficient purchasing (Green Hospitality Programme, 2012).

In addition to the key motivator of reducing operating costs (Becken, 2013; Blanco, Rey-Maquieira, & Lozano, 2009; Bohdanowicz, 2006), environmental initiatives have been linked to strong environmental values by individual managers or corporations (Dief & Font, 2010; Garay & Font, 2011). Carasuk, Becken, and Hughey (2015) found that altruistic (as opposed to economic) motivations of environmentally certified tourism businesses in New Zealand led to the greatest commitment and investment into these initiatives. Benefits go beyond improved business performance and productivity of hotels (Molina-Azorin, Claver-Cortes, Pereira-Moliner, & Tari, 2009), and include better compliance with legislator requirements (Morrow & Rondinelli, 2002), improved image and positioning in the market (e.g. through certification schemes), and increased staff loyalty and retention (Chan & Wong, 2006; Molina-Azorin et al., 2009). Benefits of investing in resource efficiency reflect those made in business cases for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) more broadly (Coles, Fenclova, & Dinan, 2013; Levy & Park, 2011).

Tracking progress amongst accommodation and food providers and support needed to encourage uptake of resource efficiency measures is important to further increase adoption rates over time. The aim of the present paper, therefore, is to gain insight into the

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types of measures that accommodation and food providers invest in. Specifically, data from the Flash Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2013) on small and medium sized (SME) companies are used to investigate the following research questions:

(1) What measures do small and medium-sized accommodation and food service providers in Europe and the USA implement to increase resources efficiency – now and in the future?
(2) How satisfied are they with their investment into resource efficiency, and is satisfaction associated with higher levels of future intended uptake?
(3) What support can be offered to stimulate future implementation of resource efficiency measures?

Results contribute to an increased understanding of drivers and barriers of adopting resource efficiency measures. As such, the findings are of both theoretical importance and practical value as they point to approaches policy makers could take to encourage the adoption of resource efficiency measures by accommodation and food service providers. In addition, this research illustrates how additional and sector-specific analysis of large secondary databases can generate new academic insights and add value to existing investments (i.e. the Eurobarometer). Such an approach is beneficial for the knowledge domain of tourism which is 'captured' in other databases, for example on investment, events or transport.

2. Method

Secondary data from European countries and the USA, collected for the Flash Eurobarometer in September 2013 were used. Eligible companies (for more detail see European Commission, 2013) were called by phone and the general manager, financial officer or owner was interviewed. Businesses were identified from an international business directory in addition to information from local sources. Quotas were applied to both company size and sector (retail, services, industry and manufacturing). The answers reflect self-reported behaviour; accuracy information (e.g. an external audit of implemented energy savings measures) is not available.

A subsample of 5.4% (727 respondents) containing tourism businesses (accommodation and food service providers[2]) was selected. Of those, all businesses which also provided a response to the question "*Overall, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the return on the investments you have made on resource efficiency*?" were included, leading to a final sample of 601 businesses. As a consequence of the selection of a small subsample of businesses operating in tourism, it cannot be ensured that the sample analysed here is representative of all small and medium-sized accommodation and food providers in Europe and the USA. The findings are still of value because they paint a general picture of uptake and preference for certain resources efficiency measures over other. The analyses based on the association of uptake and future uptake intention with satisfaction does not require a representative sample.

A total of 38 countries were represented, with eighty-three percent of the businesses employing less than 50 employees (Table 1). Smaller size is also reflected in turnover in the year before the survey was conducted: 19% of those who provided an answer to this question had a turnover of less than 100,000 Euro, and only two percent had a turnover of more than ten million. Fifteen percent of companies have been operating for up to 10 years, 31% have been in business between 10 and 20 years and the remainder have operated for over 20 years. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics.

[2] Including: Hotels and similar accommodation, Holiday and other short-stay accommodation, Camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks, Other accommodation, Food and beverage service activities, Restaurants and mobile food service activities, Event catering and other food service activities, Event catering activities, Other food service activities, Beverage serving activities.

3. Results

3.1. Implemented measures

The majority of businesses (96% of the sample) stated that they had invested in resource efficiency measures. Fig. 1 illustrates which measures were taken by these businesses, as well as which measures they are intending to take in the future in addition to existing ones. As can be seen, measures aimed at saving energy have the highest adoption rate, followed by water saving measures, waste reduction, saving materials and recycling. Intentions for future measures follow similar patterns, with the exception of investments into renewable energy that companies plan to increase over the next two years.

Looking at response options chosen by respondents when asked what the main reasons were for taking resource efficiency action, the highest agreement level is achieved for "environment is one of the top priorities of your company", followed by cost savings, financial and fiscal incentives. Demand from customers is mentioned only by about one fifth of businesses. Lower agreement levels than consumer demand are expressed for "creation of a competitive advantage or business opportunities", "anticipation of future changes in legislation", "anticipation of future professional or product standards" and "catching up with main competitors". Multiple answers to this question were allowed. The latter three reasons tend to be agreed on by the same businesses as does the first set of listed reasons.

In terms of the extent of investment, about one third of businesses invested less than one percent of annual turnover, another third between 1 and 5% of annual turnover, about one tenth between 6 and 10% and less than five percent invested 11% or more of turnover (19% did not provide a response). There were no statistically significant differences for number of employees. The vast majority of businesses (70% of the sample) relied on their own financial resources; about one fifth relied on external support to implement efficiency measures. For some SMEs, there was a clear financial return from resource efficiency investments: more than half state that resource efficiency investment has decreased production cost. Fig. 2 shows that positive financial outcomes were particularly achieved by the larger businesses.

3.2. Satisfaction with investment into resource efficiency

The vast majority of businesses were satisfied with the return on resource efficiency investment (ROI). Less than one fifth reported that they were not satisfied (note that original four response options were collapsed into 'satisfied' [N = 509] and 'not satisfied' [N = 92]). Importantly, satisfaction with ROI was associated with intentions to further invest in resource efficiency in the future, with the exception of renewable energy which was not linked to satisfaction (Table 2).

Because of the link between satisfaction and future investment, it is beneficial to explore what factors are associated with high levels of satisfaction related to resource efficiency initiatives. For example, and not surprisingly, reductions in overall production costs as a result of improved resource efficiency are positively related to satisfaction levels ($X^2 = 22.295$, df = 5, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, businesses appeared more satisfied with their investment into resource efficiency when the company's turnover