



Environmental awareness and initiatives in the Swedish and Polish hotel industries—survey results

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Abstract

Despite its importance, environmental stewardship is not always the top priority in the hotel industry in Europe. This study investigates the influence of the geo-political, economic and socio-cultural context of a country on the environmental attitudes and pro-ecological initiatives incorporated in this sector. To illustrate the differences, hotels in Sweden and Poland were targeted and a total of 349 hoteliers participated in an e-mail-based survey. The study reveals that hotel operators generally recognize the need for environmental protection and are involved in a number of activities. The economic situation and pro-environmental efforts initiated by the government were found to have an impact on certain aspects of hoteliers' attitudes and actions. The survey has further indicated the two major directions that need to be followed when introducing environmental sustainability into the hotel industry. The first involves incorporating responsible technical and behavioural practices in the sector. The second highlights the necessity of initiating greater demand for “green” practices from the customers.

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1. Introduction

Conventional tourism is often associated with the availability of a clean natural environment, while all sectors of this global industry create pressure on the environment. The hotel industry, due to its very specific function, operating characteristics and services provided, consumes substantial quantities of energy, water and non-durable products. The resulting environmental impacts of hotel facilities are thus characteristically greater than those caused by other types of buildings of similar size (Rada, 1996).

In recognition of environmental degradation, governments, along with the green movement within the hotel and tourism industry, and travellers, have become increasingly aware of the need for more effective measures to protect the environment. In order to achieve noticeable improvement, hotel managers and operators must be willing to act in an environmentally responsible manner. They also need to have adequate knowledge of the environmental issues pertinent to their activities, and sufficient funds to implement state-of-the-art environmentally sound practices.

In this respect, a hypothesis was put forward stating that environmental attitudes of hoteliers in different geo-political locations are expected to vary. In regions where preserving high environmental quality has long received considerable political and financial support, such as the Scandinavian countries, the general public and industry representatives are expected to be involved in environmental practices. By contrast, in the countries of the former Eastern Block (Central and Eastern Europe), which faced many economic and socio-political problems after the system change, environmental issues have only recently gained the attention of the authorities. Generally, hoteliers from this region are thus likely to be less concerned about the protection of nature per se, except for economic or legal reasons. The aim of the study reported in this article was to examine the empirical evidence relating to the above hypothesis.

To the best of the author's knowledge, few studies have focused on ecological initiatives within the hotel industry (IHEI, 1993; IH&RA et al., 1995; Stabler and Goodall, 1997; Kulesza, 1999; Horwath International and Smith Travel Research, 1999; CREM and CH2M-HILL, 2000; Despretz, 2001; Genot et al., 2001; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2001; APAT, 2002; IHEI, 2002; Bohdanowicz, 2003; European Commission, 2003). Only a few of the above applications present the analysis of environmental attitudes of hoteliers, while virtually none of them have investigated regional variations based on the geo-political situation.

An attempt was thus made here to study the level of environmental knowledge and awareness among Swedish and Polish hotel managers. The prevalence of ecological initiatives in daily operations was examined to evaluate the potential impact on the operations of individual establishments of national sustainability policies and the general level of environmental awareness in the country. Finally, the incentives that would encourage hoteliers to pursue environmentally oriented initiatives at their hotels were identified. The results were analysed in the context of socio-cultural differences, as well as diversified economic situation in the countries investigated.

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