

Implementation of the Eco-label for Tourist Accommodation Units in Arad

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Abstract

This study examines tourist accommodation managers' attitude towards implementing the eco-labeling scheme; and, also, the degree of awareness regarding the necessity of directing businesses towards sustainable development by adopting the following: limited water and energy consumption, reduced waste production, the use of renewable resources and low-environmental impact substances, the promotion of the environmental protection education.

Keywords: eco-friendly products, eco-label, environmental criteria, tourist accommodations

Introduction

Legal imperatives regarding environmental protection and, also, the financial leverage, made available for the functioning of environmentally compatible economic activities have brought about the launch of eco-friendly products and services as alternatives to conventional products.

Despite all of this, in the present, tourist services in Arad are trying to reach the minimum EU standards. The fluctuating quality of the services and poor personnel training are the main current issues in this sector.

Material and Methods

The research was made in August 2012, on a sample of 36 tourist accommodation units; the research instrument used being the questionnaire. The purpose of this direct selective research is to find out if tourist accommodation managers from Arad are willing to implement the eco-label for their services.

The objectives of this research are:

- identifying managers' knowledge regarding the EU eco-label
- identifying managers' knowledge regarding the criteria for obtaining the EU eco-label
- identifying managers' willingness to implement EU eco-label quality systems
- identifying the degree of environmental protection enacted by the accommodation units

In order to get the data, the direct method was used, where the interview operator presented the respondents, the questionnaire.

Literature review

An eco-friendly product is „that product which can satisfy consumer needs and wants and, at the same time, harmonizing their short, middle and long term interests”(Iosif et al. 1999, p.225) or „that product or service whose environmental and societal performance is, generally, significantly better than their conventional alternatives”(Pettie Ken, 1992, p.175).

„The EU Ecolabel is a graphic symbol and/or descriptive text applied to a product or package, in a brochure or another informative document which comes with the product and offers the needed information regarding the environmental criteria of the products or services”.

Lehtonen (1997) suggest that the purpose Ecolabel is “...to raise consumer awareness about the environmental effects of products, to inform consumers about the environmental characteristics of a product and to promote the adoption of more environmentally sound production methods and technologies”.

The ideal solution, which is at the managers' disposal, is the introduction of eco-labeled tourist accommodation services in the touristic circuit. Sheth and Parvatiyar, cited in Polonsky and Mintu-Wimsatt (1995, pp.11-14) considered that directing companies' activities towards sustainable development assumes the assimilation of certain

commitments to sustainable development from top managers down to the last employee. Thus, by running this research, I found necessary to apply a set of questions regarding personnel training and preparation as well.

Even no human activity can be completely environmentally friendly; there is always a possibility to reduce the environmental effects of certain products or services. The EU eco-labeling system is part of the policy on sustainable production and consumption, which has as main objective the reduction of the negative impacts of consumption and production on the environment, on health, on the climate and on natural resources.

Thus, the eco-labeling scheme has been created along with environmental and performance criteria which underline the evaluation of the touristic products and services. According to CE no.66/2010, when there is intent to start the eco-labeling process, tourist accommodation facilities must comply with the following criteria:

- limited energy and water consumption
- waste reduction
- use of renewable resources and low-environmental impact products
- promoting environmental protection education.

The sums needed to implement the eco-labeling scheme for touristic accommodations are rather high and not in hand for all touristic accommodations, reflected in the small number of eco-labeled facilities. At a national level, there are only four eco-labeled facilities, up to August 2012 (The Saturn Hotel in Saturn resort, Crowne Plaza Hotel in Bucharest, Vega Hotel and Piatra Șoimului Villa in Mamaia) (Green Report, 2012; <http://www.ecomagazin.ro/pensiuni-certificate-ecologic/>).

The facilities' effort towards implementing the eco-labeling scheme is remarkable and it must be said that clients appreciate the efforts.

Also, implementing the ISO 9001:2001 and ISO 14001:2005 offers clients safety and comfort, it improves their experience and it improves the image of the facility that uses these standards, both among existing clients and potential clients. Satisfying the needs and expectations of ever more fastidious clients will ensure the long-term success of the facilities.

Results and Discussion

After running the study based on a questionnaire measuring the degree of implementation of the eco-labeling scheme among tourist accommodation facilities in Arad, the following results were obtained:

- of the total of 36 facilities, 72% are aware of the EU eco-label and 28% are not. We can say that, even though the promotion of the eco-label has been going on for years, the eco-label is not yet very well known to all managers; this could be the result of insufficient promotion or inadequate use of promotion techniques.

- only 46% are aware of the environmental criteria used by the eco-labeling scheme for tourist accommodations.

- none of the facilities were eco-labeled, only the Phoenix Hotel of Arad had made inquiries for eco-labeling

- managers' degree of understanding regarding the role of the eco-label can generally be seen as favorable. The statements *The eco-label is useful for the environment* and *The eco-label offers clients accommodation which is beneficial for their health* got favorable feedback (with a mean of 1.58 and 1.55), over the general score of 1,33. Nevertheless, the statements *The eco-label's purpose is to repay tourists that respect the environment* and *The costs of the facility will fall after implementing the eco-label* scored under the mean score (with a mean of 1.16 and of 1.06), thus being necessary an improvement of these aspects in the opinion of the managers, especially among those that want to direct their activity towards sustainable development.

- regarding the energy use, 28% have high-efficiency appliances, 32% have proper thermal isolation, 58% collect data regarding energy consumption, 17% have lights and heating that switch automatically, 8% don't meet any environmental criteria and 12% use renewable energy.

- regarding the water use, 38% use low-water-consumption dishwashing and washing machines and toilets, 54% change the sheets and towels properly, 48% reduce the flow of water from taps and showers and 7% treat waste water correctly.

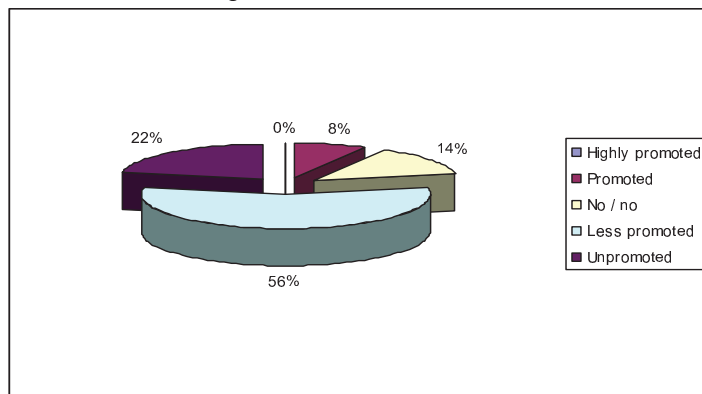
- regarding personnel training, 35% are trained regarding use and maintenance of equipment, 31% use correct dosages of detergents and cleaning products, 17% are trained regarding environmental protection issues, 12% have implemented an efficient energy and waste management and 5% do not meet any of the before mentioned.

- regarding the communication activities, 18% give clients information on events and local news regarding the environment, 21% inform clients regarding the environmental protection measures taken during their accommodation, 15% inform clients on their low energy and water consumption management, 5% inform clients on their waste separation activities, 18% inform clients regarding the use of public transportation and 23% do not give clients any kind of information.

- regarding the managers' opinions upon the degree of awareness of the EU eco-label among accommodation services providers, this study has shown that the eco-label is not well promoted, only 8% consider it to be well promoted.

Chart no. 1

Opinions regarding the promotion of the EU eco-label among the accommodation services providers



Source: Own interpretation upon the results of the study

- regarding the intention to implement the eco-label in the future, 76% of the managers say that they are willing to adopt the labeling scheme, 13% are not sure and 11% are not interested in adopting the scheme.

Conclusion

An efficient management in tourist accommodation facilities must reduce energy and resource consumption. In the future, many facilities could adopt the eco-label if top managers would become aware of the benefits of implementing it. Despite the fact that implementing

the EU eco-label implies rather large investments in photovoltaic energy production systems, in renewable thermic energy production systems, like heat pumps and solar panels, in selective waste collection, all reflecting eventually the reduction of costs and ensuring a sustainable growth economically and ecologically.

To benefit from the eco-label, on the one hand there must be a reduction in the inputs, in the process of acquisition by minimizing the use of materials, energy consumption, water consumption etc., and on the other hand a reduction in the outputs, reducing waste and residue disposal.

Despite the fact that in Arad there is no eco-labeled accommodation facility, among managers of such facilities there is willingness for environmental protection and for the protection of the clients' health. The Phoenix Hotel will implement the eco-label no later than next year. It is remarkable the fact that 76% of the managers of the accommodation facilities are willing to implement the eco-labeling scheme.

Upon these considerations, I think it is necessary to adopt viable laws regarding the establishment of economic mechanisms in order to stimulate the adoption of the eco-label thus promoting and developing sustainable tourism on a local and national level. Also, it is necessary to strongly promote the eco-label and the criteria's for obtaining it, and also the benefits that come from implementing it, both on the staff and the consumers.

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