

SUSTAINABLE HOTELS – ECO-CERTIFICATION ACCORDING TO EU FLOWER, NORDIC SWAN AND THE POLISH HOTEL ASSOCIATION

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Abstract

Over their lifetime (including construction, operation, maintenance, and eventually demolition), buildings require appreciable amounts of energy, water and many other resources. The built environment is undoubtedly the origin of a considerable portion of the overall air, water and soil pollution, as well as waste generation in our society.

Hotel buildings, due to their very specific and unique function and operational patterns, generally have a much larger ecological impact than other commercial buildings of similar size. At the same time, the well-being and development of the tourism and the hotel industry, relies heavily on the availability of a clean, natural environment. It is crucial for the sustainability of ecological systems, as well as business operations to ensure that hotel facilities are designed, constructed, operated and refurbished in a manner that is least harmful to the environment. If the environment is part of your business, protecting the environment means protecting your business.

For many years, the hotel industry was reluctant to acknowledge any significant influence on the natural surroundings. Recently, however, attitudes have started to change. In order to help hoteliers incorporate more environmentally sound practices into daily operations, branch associations, various NGOs, academic communities and hotel companies continue to develop guidelines and manuals. Industry self-regulation, in the form of certification and labelling schemes, has proved to be a valuable additional tool. Numerous certification and labelling schemes are offered internationally, nationally or locally by industrial organisations, as well as by governmental and non-governmental institutions (EU Flower, Nordic Swan, Green Globe 21, Green Leaf, The Green Key, and others).

This paper will focus on the criteria and requirements developed for the EU Flower and Nordic Swan ecolabels, as well as those prepared by the Polish Hotel Association for the EKO HOTEL label. The mandatory and optional criteria listed in the documents will be presented, analysed and compared, followed by a brief summary of the schemes' current status, as well as suggestions on how similar policies/projects could be launched in other countries.

Keywords: hotels, ecolabels, criteria, EU Flower, Nordic Swan, EKO HOTEL

1. Introduction

Over the years, a number of documents aimed at incorporating environmental and socio-cultural responsibility into tourism business practice have been published. Among the most significant are the 1995 “Lanzarote Charter for Sustainable Tourism” (issued jointly by the World Tourism Organisation, the United Nations Environmental Programme, UNESCO and the Commission of European Communities), and “Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry: Towards Environmentally-Friendly Sustainable Development” (launched in 1996 as a result of a co-operation between the World Travel and Tourism Council, World Tourism Organisation and the Earth Council). The mere existence of these documents, however, cannot initiate and sustain the significant processes of change needed in the travel industry in order to achieve greater environmental responsibility. Proper implementation tools need to be developed, and strategies need to be elaborated to assist the industry in willingly embarking on a course of change.

The primary instruments of action include the enforcement of binding legal regulations (health and safety requirements, planning and building regulations, regulations on water, waste and emissions), environmental taxes (on the use of energy and water), as well as voluntary standards.

Industry self-regulation has recently been gaining more and more attention, and has demonstrated to be convincingly successful. The most significant types of self-regulation include codes of conduct and various certification schemes (awards and labels). Environmental certification schemes are a fairly new concept in the business world. The first ecolabels originated in Europe and appeared in the travel and tourism industry in the mid-1980s. Their number and diversity has significantly increased during the 1990s. Currently, over 100 ecolabelling and certification schemes are available for tourism and the hospitality industry worldwide [1, 2]. Europe alone has almost 50 labelling schemes [3].

The primary objective of ecolabels and other recognition schemes is to stimulate environmental concern both from the perspective of the producer as well as the consumer, by providing reliable environmental information to the consumer and thereby influencing his/her preference and choice when acquiring goods and services. Ecolabelling may further improve the product image and sales. Indirectly, ecolabels may have an innovative effect, by stimulating the development of new products and practices in the industry. Their main function is to assure commitment to continuous improvement and to provide sound motivation for introducing new technological solutions.

The focus of different certification schemes may be regional, national or international, and ecolabels may be awarded for a single product, service, or a group of services. Certification schemes focused on accommodation facilities include HVS EcoServices Ecotel (worldwide), Green Leaf (Thailand), Green Key (Denmark), Nordic Swan (Scandinavia), EU Flower (European Union), and others. Despite existing differences, certification schemes have many common components, including voluntary enrolment, utilization of easily recognizable logos, required certification criteria (some of which may even be more stringent than existing regulations), documented commitment by companies to pursue sustainable practices, compliance assessment and auditing requirements (preferably performed by independent bodies, such as accredited organizations), as well as membership and fees [4].

2. The development of labels

2.1 Nordic Swan

Among the three labels for the tourism accommodation facilities considered in this paper, the Nordic Swan may be referred to as a veteran. In 1989, the Nordic Council of Ministers adopted a measure of implementing a voluntary ecolabelling scheme in the Nordic countries, and in 1999 the first criteria document for hotel facilities was produced [5]. Eversince, the criteria were revised and extended to include different types of hotels, including youth hostels. The second criteria document is valid from October 3, 2002 until September 30, 2006 [6].

2.2 EU Flower

Following repeated requests for a single, universal and commonly recognized European label, the European "Eco-Label Award Scheme" was adopted by environmental ministers in December 1991, and set up under the Council Regulation (EEC) 880/92 of 23 March 1992. It came into force in October 1992. In April 2003, directives for the EU Flower label for tourist accommodation were established and a criteria document was published ("*Commission Decision of 14 April 2003 establishing the ecological criteria for the award of the Community ecolabel to tourist accommodation service*" – 2003/287/EC) [7]. The criteria specified by the Decision of European Commission 2003/287/EC are valid between May 1, 2003 and April 30, 2007. If the revised criteria are not adopted on April 30, 2007, the current Decision should apply until April 30, 2008.

2.3 EKO HOTEL

In response to requests by the Polish hotel sector, the Polish Hotel Association – PHA (Polskie Zrzeszenie Hoteli) decided in 2003 to investigate the issue of environmental protection in the hotel sector. Approximately 500 hotels are to be targeted by a questionnaire survey. Based on the outcome of the study, PHA is planning to establish criteria for its own ecolabel for hotel accommodation – EKO HOTEL [8].

Similar, questionnaire-based surveys were earlier performed by Kulesza in 1999 [9], and by Bohdanowicz in 2002 [10, 11]. Unfortunately, neither of these studies were supported by PHA, and response rates were typically low (123 participating facilities in the study by Kulesza among 1700 hotels targeted, and 124 participants in the study by Bohdanowicz of 942 targeted).

Unfortunately, the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Social Policy decided not to support the PHA initiative financially, thereby causing a delay in the project [12]. The authors will nevertheless discuss the specifics of the Polish labelling scheme, as well as the practicability of this certificate in Polish conditions.

3. Costs

Application and annual fees for the Nordic Swan vary among countries. The relevant costs in Denmark, Finland and Sweden are compared in Table 1 [13, 14, 15, 16]. Application fees vary from approximately € 460 in Denmark to € 2440 in Finland, while the annual fees varied between 0.2% (in Finland) to 0.4% (in Denmark) of the annual company turnover (for the product/service in question). Extension and renewal fees are also compared.

Table 1. Nordic Swan fees [13, 14, 15, 16]

| Country | Application fee | Annual fee | Extension or renewal fee |
|---------|------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Denmark | € 460 (DKK 3500) | 0.4% of annual turnover, max. € 32 700 (DKK 250 000) | € 460 (DKK 3500) |
| Finland | € 2000 + 440 (VAT) | 0.2% of annual turnover, min. € 675 + 149 (VAT), max. € 34 000 + 7480 | € 1000 + 220 (VAT) |
| Sweden | € 1950 (SEK 18 000) | 0.3% of annual turnover, min. € 970 (SEK 9000), max. € 37 800 (SEK 350 000) | € 970 (SEK 9000) |

In the EU Flower scheme, applications and annual fees are regulated by Decisions of European Commission 2000/728/EC and 2003/287/EC [7, 17]. Basic application fees are in the range of € 300 to € 1300, with possible reductions of between 25% (for small and medium size enterprises - SME) to 75% (for micro-enterprises and mountain huts). These fees cover verification and certificate issuing costs. The annual fee is based on the annual volume of sales, but cannot be lower than € 100. It is calculated as 0.15% of 50% of the annual volume of sales. SME can apply for annual fee reductions of up to 25%, while facilities already certified with ISO 14001 or EMAS can have the fee reduced by 15%.

The Polish Hotel Association initially planned to award EKO HOTEL certification to 10 facilities free of charge during the first year of the scheme. In case of a successful acceptance of the scheme, relevant fees would have been established for subsequent use (while application fees of € 600-800 were envisioned, no concrete information on the actual annual fee amounts could be obtained from PHA) [18].

4. Criteria and procedure

Two of the labels have criteria classified as mandatory and optional, i.e. as so-called point requirements (Table 2). So far, a number of areas of concern for the EKO HOTEL scheme have been identified but no criteria document has yet been established.

Application/certification procedures for all three labels are similar. Generally, hotels contemplating certification should first contact the cognizant authority responsible for certification in order to obtain information on application procedure and labelling criteria. After all of the necessary documents have been collected by the hotel management, a team from the cognizant authority inspects the appropriateness and correctness of all documents, and performs an independent hotel audit (in the case of EU Flower and Swan). Once all of the documents are approved and the application fee is paid, the facility is awarded a label. The certificate is valid within the time period stated, and if desired, can be prolonged following an external audit.

Table 2. Division of criteria [6, 7]

| Criteria | Nordic Swan | EU Flower |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| Mandatory | 21 – 24* + 12** | 37 |
| Optional | 58 – 76*** | 47**** |

* depending on the type of facility and services offered (kitchen/restaurant, conference department, pool, garden)

** requirements in the area of environmental management

*** a minimum of 65% of all point requirements, and 60% of the point requirements within the area of operation and maintenance must be met

**** total of 72.5 credits, with a minimum of 16.5-19.5 credits having to be attained, depending on the type of facilities and services offered (kitchen/restaurant, fitness facilities, green areas – 1 point for each area)

4.1 Nordic Swan

In addition to a set of mandatory requirements, the Nordic Swan scheme identifies four basic limit values, two of which need to be fulfilled by a hotel in order to be certified. Each limit value is divided into three distinctive sub-levels, depending on the annual facility turnover, size and the facilities offered, as well as climatic location [6]:

- Energy consumption (limit of 235 – 460 kWh/m²);
- Water consumption (limit of 200 – 300 litres per guest-night);
- Active chemical-technical content (limit of 25 – 35 grams/guest-night);
- Volume of unsorted waste (limit of 0.5 – 1.5 kg/guest-night).

These limit values make the Nordic Swan certificate unique among the labels investigated, as well as among other certificates on the market.

The Nordic Swan criteria are divided into departmental sub-classes: operation and maintenance; consumables; fixtures, fittings and equipment and other equipment; guest rooms; kitchen and dining room; cleaning and laundry; waste; and transport.

The Nordic Swan criteria are very specific in identifying materials that can be used on the premises. For instance, the facility has to operate on a CFC-free basis, and without the use of any active chlorine compounds. Newly purchased products cannot contain PVC (polyvinyl chloride), or be treated with brominated or chlorinated flame retardants. At least 90% of chemical products used must consist of easily degradable tensides. The water supply and wastewater management of a facility must comply with national and local laws, and all new toilets are required to use no more than 6 litres of water per flush. The facility is responsible for the sorting of waste and hazardous waste into at least 4 fractions at source, ensuring hazardous waste disposal in the best possible way from an environmental point of view, as well as maintaining information on how ordinary waste is being processed. No disposable articles, portion packaging or small packets are allowed in guest rooms or on the breakfast buffet (with the exception of toothpicks, napkins and teabags), and at least 60% of rooms are required to be smoke free. The vehicle fleet must be regularly inspected and serviced. Moreover, 30% of the suppliers are required to make their regular deliveries using renewable packaging.

Mandatory environmental management criteria include the company compliance with relevant environmental legislation, possession of environmental policy and action plan for constant performance improvement, as well as regular staff training in environment- and Swan-related issues. In addition, the facility is required to have documented routines for “green” purchasing, technical services, management of chemicals and continuous monitoring of compliance with limit values. Information regarding pro-ecological initiatives at the hotel and the compliance with Nordic Swan certification requirements must be readily accessible to hotel guests. Environmental requirements are required to be followed up annually using a Nordic

Ecolabelling checklist, which must be signed by the person responsible for the Swan licence and returned to the relevant ecolabelling secretariat.

Among optional criteria, points are awarded for the use of non-fossil and non-nuclear energy sources for electricity generation and heating purposes (depending on the percentage share), efficiency of systems and existing controls. The use of ecolabelled consumables, detergents, fittings, fixtures, equipment and food is strongly encouraged. The criteria document further requires automatic dosage of chemicals, as well as the reuse or recycling of consumed fixtures, fittings and equipment. Points can be achieved for renewably powered vehicles, as well as bicycles available to guests. Information about public transport to/from the hotel should be made available to guests, together with commuter transportation. Extra points are granted if the hotel passes more than two mandatory limit values.

Not all requirements listed in the Nordic Swan criteria document have been presented above, instead, an overview of the areas of concern has been made.

4.2 EU Flower

EU Flower criteria are divided into broader categories relevant to management, the utilization of energy, water, waste and chemicals, and a set of other issues.

Due to a much broader regional scope of EU Flower, as compared to Nordic Swan, different market conditions need to be considered. As regards the utilization of renewable energy, waste sorting and recycling, or the use of disposable items, the EU Flower scheme states that particular criteria need to be fulfilled, *local conditions permitting*. In case of inability to comply with specific requirements, an explanatory document needs to be submitted by a qualified local authority.

Directive 2003/287/EC specifies the minimum efficiency ratings of boilers, air conditioners, and light bulbs to be purchased within the period of validity of an ecolabel, as well as the proportion of energy-efficient lighting to be achieved one year after the adoption of the labelling scheme. The directive further specifies the maximum allowed sulphur content of fuels used in facilities (0.2%), as well as the maximum allowable water flows from taps and showers (12 litres/minute). The EU flower label requires hotels to ensure proper treatment of wastewater, as well as separation and proper handling of waste (hazardous and municipal). Most of the remaining mandatory criteria deal with behavioural issues, including requirements to display information encouraging water and energy preservation in hotel rooms and public areas, information on possible public transport options, as well as the provision in guest rooms of adequate receptacles for waste sorting. Hotel personnel should be trained in enforcing environmental measures at their facility as well as in performing regular inspections of systems and ensuring their maintenance. Tourist accommodation facilities should, further insure that data on the consumption of water, energy and chemicals, as well as the volume of waste generated is monitored and evaluated. This information should be made available annually to the relevant ecolabelling secretariat.

The EU Flower provides optional criteria concerning the on-site installation of renewable energy systems or heat pumps, the utilization of energy-efficient systems and equipment, adequate controls, as well as the incorporation of bioclimatic architectural design. Further criteria relate to the use of water-conserving equipment, low-flow faucets and toilets, water-flow control systems, as well as the utilization of rain and recycled water. Additional criteria concern the use of chemicals, ecolabelled detergents, paints and varnishes, as well as organic gardening procedures. Composting, as well as the reuse or donation of used textiles and furniture are encouraged, while disposable and single dose packaging (where allowed) is strongly discouraged. The scheme gives explicit preference to the utilization of eco-labelled durable goods, paper products, refillable soft drinks bottles, local food products and organic foods. Extra credits are awarded for EMAS registration or ISO certification of the facility or its suppliers, the installation of additional energy and water meters, as well as the provision to

guests of environmental questionnaires. Additional credits can be earned for environmental initiatives not covered by the Directive or by the possession of a national or regional ISO Type I ecolabel.

While being far from complete, the above list, aims at providing a representative overview of the broadness and the depth of the issues included in the criteria document.

4.3 EKO HOTEL

As mentioned earlier, the criteria document for the EKO HOTEL scheme is intended to be developed after the completion of an investigation of the current state of environmental protection in hotels in Poland. However, the Polish Hotel Association (PHA) has already identified a number of criteria for assessing hotel performance. These include wastewater management; waste management; water supply and conservation, energy supply and conservation, environmental management, noise protection in hotels and their immediate surroundings, green areas, building materials and architecture, initiatives for the natural environment, the siting of hotels and their surroundings, the quality of hotel-owned/-managed beaches, water-levels in aquifers tapped, as well as information about environmental protection in hotels. The final set of criteria will be further developed based on international standards and Environmental Management System concepts.

5. Market penetration

To date, 90 hotel facilities have been certified with the Nordic Swan label in Scandinavia [19]. This number will increase, as all Scandic Hotels in Sweden are currently being certified. In addition, all 18 Norwegian Scandic hotels are expected to be Swan-labelled by the end of 2005 [20]. So far, two Norwegian hotels have already been certified [19].

The EU Flower has been awarded to nine hotels (Hotel Florian in Austria, Sunwing Resort Kallithea in Greece, as well as Gala Mountain Resort Hotel & Chalets and Park Hotell in Norway, and 5 hotels in the Netherlands). A number of other hotels are in the process of applying for certification [21].

Originally, 10 hotels were to be awarded the EKO HOTEL label in October 2004 during the Tour Salon and Hotel Market Fair in Poznań. However, due to cutbacks in funding, the future of the label is uncertain.

6. Barriers

Despite the benefits offered by environmental labels, their market penetration is still extremely limited. In Europe only 1% of all accommodation facilities are ecolabelled [22]. This is due to a number of factors, undoubtedly including the large number of labelling schemes, which cause appreciable confusion among customers and industry professionals. It is expected, however, that attitudes may change, once the EU Flower scheme will have become available to hoteliers all over Europe. While some labels, such as the Nordic Swan and EU Flower, are widely recognized by the public, it is not uncommon for hotel management to ignore the existence of such schemes. It is frequently claimed that application procedures are too costly, complex and time consuming, and that certification eventually results in very limited economic benefits [23]. Other common complaints relate to the complexity of technical measures and procedures required, as well as the disruption of regular operational procedures caused by their implementation. Ironically, it is not uncommon for certification requirements to be in direct opposition to local or national laws, rendering compliance impossible.

By contrast, the environmental coordinator of the Sunwing Resort Kallithea in Greece, an EU Flower certified facility, stated that 42 points were easily achieved at the resort by meeting voluntary criteria (whereas only 19 points were required) [24]. A similar opinion was expressed by a Scandic representative, stating that Nordic-Swan-labelled facilities would easily comply with EU Flower criteria, should they decide to apply for the label [25]. He further believed that even those Scandic hotels that are not yet Swan-labelled should be able to comply with EU Flower criteria. It is worth mentioning that Scandic has been involved with environmental issues for over a decade now, and is recognized as an environmental pioneer and leader in this domain.

Several European studies [23] indicate that a segment of hoteliers believe that the enforcement of laws and local standards (e.g. those concerning waste-separation) is an efficient tool in bringing about environmental responsibility. The same studies show that some hoteliers perceive the concept of efficient equipment as being equivalent to “new” equipment, and eco-certified products and appliances as being those branded by manufacturers with names containing the terms “eco-” or “bio-“ (irrespective of certification by cognizant authorities).

Environmentally certified establishments undoubtedly need to be promoted and marketed more efficiently. Ecolabelled facilities should be promoted in hotel catalogues / directories, city guides as well as by booking and travel agencies. Such initiatives would, for example, be appreciated by 12 million German travellers as indicated by the 2000 FEMATOUR study [26].

A number of customer surveys reveal that some travellers believe ecolabelled services to be more expensive and not worth paying for [1]. Other studies show that travellers would be willing to pay more for the privilege of staying in ecolabelled facilities [10, 27].

7. Opportunities – social reception

Recent studies have shown that the environmental awareness in Europe is continuously increasing [26]. Although environmental concerns still have little influence on the choice of tourist accommodation, it is likely that the proportion of “green” hotel customers will increase in the coming years.

A survey carried out in 2002 by Small Luxury Hotels of the World for the International Hotel Environment Initiative revealed that 54% of American, 60% of Australian and 87% of British travellers would prefer to stay at environmentally friendly / eco-certified facilities during their travels (given the location of the facility was acceptable, the level of service high, and the price reasonable) [28]. Approximately 40% of Europeans in the Ecotrans e.V. study [29], and almost 60% of the respondents in an investigation performed in 2003 among the customers of four Finnish and Swedish hotels shared the same opinion [10]. According to an investigation performed on the German market and published in *German Reiseanalyse 2002*, 25 million Germans believed it to be important to stay at environmentally friendly hotels [22].

Middle-aged and highly educated Scandinavian business and conference travellers, seemed more inclined to chose eco-accommodation during their travel [10]. This rhymes well with the findings of the American Travel Industry Association and the National Geographic Society *Geotourism Study*, which identified eight types of travellers within the American society [30]. Three of the sub-groups, GeoSavvys, Urban Sophisticates and Good Citizens are believed to be most prone to opt for eco-travel. These groups typically consist of middle-aged individuals with a higher education, representing 55.1 million Americans, i.e. more than 30% of the entire travelling American public [30].

Other studies revealed that 30% of all British adults [27], and 20% of Scandinavian hotel guests interviewed [10], were willing to pay more for a stay at an eco-certified facility. Based on the data available it may be difficult to judge how representative these figures are of all European travellers. Nevertheless, it appears reasonable to expect that hotel customers will increasingly demand “green alternatives” in the future, and that this will motivate hoteliers to gradually become more environmentally responsible.

8. Benefits

In an initial phase, eco-labelling criteria can actually be used as guidelines for how to improve the environmental performance of a hotel facility, without having to apply for certification *per se*. When a sufficient amount of improvements is achieved it is always possible to apply for formal certification.

Ecolabels may have a positive influence on hotel staff, which is significant, considering the relatively high personnel turnover in the tourism industry. In addition to improved working conditions, resulting from compliance with certification requirements, ecolabelling was found to increase productivity. A higher degree of identification with the ecolabelled workplaces was further found to contribute to lower staff-turnover. Scandic team members are typically very proud of the environmental achievements in their facilities and are highly aware of the fact that they have contributed significantly in the process [11].

As regards the economic aspects of environmental certification, it is important to emphasize that environmental responsibility and higher profitability clearly need not be mutually exclusive. On the contrary, there exist a number of convincing examples of facilities where proactive environmental management, including lower water consumption, waste-water treatment, lower energy consumption and a variety of other measures were successfully combined with increased profits [10].

The hotel industry is highly competitive, and substantial effort is invested in business profiling and conquering increasingly specialized market niches (as can be seen from the increasing number of boutique hotels). Eco-labelling has the potential of becoming a valuable tool in this context. While it need not at all be more costly to operate a facility in an environmentally responsible way, evidence exists that some travellers would actually be willing to pay a premium for the privilege of staying in a “green” facility. Irrespective of whether this is based on genuine environmental concern, or on sheer trendiness, this still remains a potentially untapped marketing asset.

As usual, early users are likely to reap the largest share of the economic and other benefits.

9. Conclusion

Hoteliers are increasingly encouraged to incorporate environmentally sound practices into their daily hotel operations. Industry self-regulation in the form of eco-certification and ecolabelling has demonstrated to be successful, and has led to the creation of almost 50 labels for tourist accommodation in Europe alone. Some labels remain of local importance, while others, including the Nordic Swan, have become widely recognised (on the Scandinavian and European markets).

In order to help both hoteliers and tourists in their decision making process, the EU Flower ecolabelling scheme has been extended to include tourist accommodation services located throughout EU member states, and some neighbouring countries.

The availability of a single ecolabel on the European level need not result in the discontinuation of all previously developed certification schemes. Some labels may be gradually withdrawn, primarily those with a short life span, limited product scope and area range, while other labels, widely recognized and with criteria more strict than the EU Flower are destined to remain. The Nordic Swan ecolabel belongs to the second category, being recognized by 91% of the population in Sweden, 85% in Norway, 75% in Finland, 56% in Denmark and 52% in Iceland [6]. Due to the fact that the Scandinavian countries are generally more environmentally oriented than the rest of Europe, the criteria of the Swan label are more specific and frequently much stricter than those specified by the EU Flower. Relinquishing this label would in many ways amount to an environmental setback. Nordic-Swan-labelled hotels are likely to not apply for EU Flower certification, unless this would be pursued for

pure marketing reasons, as indicated by Siw Sandnes at the Park Hotell in Norway [31]. The Park Hotell received the Swan label in 2001, and renewed its certification in 2003. Management at this facility, however, believe that the Swan label is less known in the rest of Europe than in Scandinavia, and that being EU-Flower-certified would afford them recognition beyond Scandinavia. In the Nordic countries, the EU-Flower-certification could be employed as the first step in complying with Nordic Swan criteria.

The authors believe that an independent labelling scheme for Polish hotels is not likely to be useful. As members of the European Union, Polish hoteliers are entitled to apply for EU Flower certification, a labelling scheme recognized throughout Europe. As to marketing potential, being recognized and duly appreciated is crucial in today's business. While visitors from France, Italy or Finland cannot be expected to distinguish between local or national labels existing in different European countries, they are likely to recognize the EU Flower. Funds allocated for the development of the EKO HOTEL certification scheme should rather be used for nationally promoting EU Flower certification, as well as for establishing the necessary educational, training and institutional framework.

An investigation of the state of environmental protection in Polish hotels should nevertheless be performed. Also, a Competent Body responsible for EU Flower certification in Poland should be designated as soon as possible. The Polish national certification system has traditionally been harmonized with the European system, and the most recent certification criteria are based on EU Flower requirements [32]. However, until adequate legislation is adopted and a Competent Body established, Polish authorities will not be able to practice EU Flower certification. So far, no promotional campaigns have been launched in the country, and, only a single press release concerning hotel certification has appeared in national industry journals [33, 34, 35].

All stakeholders concerned should join in the effort of promoting the EU Flower certification scheme, preparing the ground for its adoption by all EU member states, assisting producers and service providers in qualifying for the label, and contributing to greater environmental responsibility in the industry throughout Europe.

If the environment is part of your business, protecting the environment means protecting your business.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge financial assistance from Energimyndigheten (The Swedish Energy Agency) for supporting a doctoral research project in progress at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, Sweden.

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