



KTH Energy Technology, Sustainable Building Systems Group
Stockholm 2003

A Study of Environmental Impacts, Environmental Awareness and Pro-Ecological Initiatives in the Hotel Industry

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Abstract

Throughout the millennia commercial lodging establishments have evolved to what is today known as the hospitality industry. Hotels constitute one of the main, and still expanding, pillars of this sector and are highly unique among other commercial buildings. They are designed to provide comfort and services twenty-four/seven. The success of tourism, and indirectly the hotel industry, largely depends on the availability of a clean natural environment. At the same time, the environment is the major recipient of negative impacts created by the construction and operation of hotel facilities. For many years, the industry was very reluctant to admit its influence on the natural surroundings, but recently attitudes have started to change.

An e-mail based survey of environmental attitudes has been performed among more than 4000 European hoteliers, yielding 610 responses. A similar questionnaire has further been distributed among the guests of chosen hotels resulting in 141 answers from four Scandinavian hotels. Surveys revealed that both European hoteliers and Scandinavian hotel guests perceive the environment as an important factor in the development and success of tourism. Hoteliers are typically aware that their facilities influence the natural surroundings, a view shared also by hotel patrons, although the magnitude of the impacts is often underestimated. Hotel managers and staff do have a certain (though varying) level of environmental knowledge and are generally aware of measures that can be taken towards greater environmental responsibility.

Despite the fear shared by many hoteliers, that environmental practices may negatively affect customer comfort and satisfaction, more than 75% of hotel guests interviewed expressed their support and willingness to participate in many such initiatives. As hotel patrons are gradually demanding "green alternatives", hoteliers are becoming increasingly motivated and willing to take steps towards greater environmental responsibility. Almost 25% of hotel guests interviewed declared their willingness to pay more for accommodation in an eco-certified facility.

More than 70% of hotels investigated have already introduced pro-ecological initiatives, primarily in the areas of energy and water conservation, as well as responsible waste management. The areas targeted are typically those, which can yield company benefits in a relatively short time.

The results of the survey confirmed that the possibility of a significant decrease of the operational costs, and the existence of an obvious and continuous customer demand, may likely prompt hoteliers to respond with greater environmental responsibility.

There is undoubtedly a great need for enhancing of education and environmental awareness among hotel representatives and the general public. Given its profile the hotel industry can indisputably become a significant venue of such education by communicating its environmental commitment to customers and inter-related industries.

Keywords: hotels, environmental impacts, mitigation measures, survey, hoteliers, hotel customers, environmental attitudes, environmental awareness, pro-ecological activities, incentives.



Project financed by Energimyndigheten (Swedish Energy Agency)

Trita REFR Rep No. 03/40

ISSN 1102-0245

ISRN KTH/REFR/R-03/40-SE

ISBN 91-7283-617-2

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