

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY. CASE STUDY: THE HOTELS FROM TRANSYLVANIA.

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ABSTRACT

Change is the only certainty in tourism. In the century that brings to the fore the high-tech, mankind is changing. The hotel has ceased to be a simple building, it is a reflection of the time and space in which is situated, the image of the local culture and civilization and respect for the nature. What are hoteliers doing today for tomorrow's tourism when the human being became the victim of its own progress and the economic development clearly provides a better life for the present generation, but it can represent a constraint for the future?

Keywords: change, future, progress, development, constraint, hotel.

INTRODUCTION

The sustainable development – a controversial subject – is being approached since 1972 when during the conference in Stockholm it became clear the urge to find solutions to matters that lead to the environmental degradation (Breabăn, 2009). The International Union for Preservation of Nature will promote this concept with special focus on preservation. The World Commission on the Environment and Development released in 1987 the Brundtland Report that defines for the first time the sustainable development concept: “a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (*The National Strategy for Sustainable Development*, 2008). The sustainability matter as a must in finding solutions to the environmental lack of balance will be largely debated during a series of notable conferences on this subject, such as the conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At a global level it became obvious, as far back as 1997, the fact that embracing a sustainable thinking is a must in the tourism field as well. Hence, it has been published the Agenda 21 Tourism that emphasizes the importance of adopting several measures in view of a more efficient use of electricity, water resources and solid waste management, teaching programs, respectively awareness raising on sustainability's importance and training the employees (*The National Strategy for Sustainable Development*, 2008). The accommodation establishments, as a whole, represent the greatest part in the tourism's field with a remarkable impact on the environment. ” According to estimations, an average hotel releases between 160 and 200 kg of CO₂ per square meter of room floor area per year and water consumption per guest per night is between 170 and 440 l in the average five-star hotel. On average, hotels produce 1 kg of waste per guest per night” (Sloan, Legrand and Chen 2009:2). In the context of a continuous process that involves adopting and assimilating the new trends imposed on the hotel market,

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that also involves reconditioning and resizing them according to the touristic supply and demand, the aim is to reach the highest level of profit.

The present study's purpose is to highlight the methods employed by 74 Transylvanian hotels – out of a total of 117 classified hotels, respectively reclassified in 2011 (Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, 2011) – to support the sustainable development and to consider this condition when it comes to future investments. Out of the 74 accommodation establishments, only two hotels are affiliated to an international hotel chain, other two are associated to a national hotel chain and the other seventy hotels are independent units. The objective of the study focuses on the importance to embrace the sustainable development concept according to the renewable resources potential in Transylvania.

SUSTAINABILITY AND THE TRANSYLVANIAN HOTELS

The touristic development policy, as strategy of optimization of the geographical area, aims on one hand to capitalize the natural and anthropic resources already existing in a certain area and on the other hand contributes to a balanced regional development through economical growth and stimulation of the sustainable development (Ciangă and Dezsi, 2007). The main goal of the touristic development process aims not only to reach a complete and balanced integration of the touristic activities in the economical and social development of a certain territory, but also to an equitable relation between environment and communities (Ciangă and Dezsi, 2007).

“The hotel is a touristic accommodation structure arranged in buildings or in buildings sections that offers to the tourists: rooms, one room apartments and apartments properly equipped. It also provides the tourists with specific services, receives them in a reception lobby at the front desk and in certain cases it disposes of a restaurant” (Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, Order 1051/03.03.2011). Given its touristic establishment status it is included in the basic touristic offer, together with the touristic natural and anthropic potential of the area and the transportation infrastructure, permitting the settling of the tourists. On the other hand, the hotel as part of the touristic development in a territorial unit, must adapt to the increasing number of tourists, to their profile's change, to the country's economical development respectively to the economical development of the region where the hotel is located, to the tourism's development at national and regional level and it must not cause any damage to the respective area through an inappropriate use of resources. The hotels are significant consumers of water and energy, but they're also big producers of solid waste. Typical processes in the activity of a hotel such as: heating, air ventilation, lighting, food refrigerating and cooking, both chemical wash and cleaning, etc. require great electricity and water consumption. The substances used to maintain a high degree of hygiene in such touristic establishments, but also the ones used for the building's periodical restoration works can be toxic, therefore chemical pollutants are being released in the atmosphere. In order to keep up with the new trends on this competitive market, the hotels are equipped with spas, pools, conference rooms, etc.; this only increase electricity and water consumption. At the same time, the great amounts of solid waste produced especially by the Housekeeping Department and by the Restaurant & Bar Department, but also by the constant waste of old equipments (furniture, home electronics) that cannot always be reused, have a serious negative impact on the environment. The sustainability in the hotel market has been defined as follows: “Hospitality industry, development and management that meets the need of today's guests, hoteliers and stakeholders without compromising the ability of future guests, hoteliers and stakeholders to enjoy the benefits from the same services, products and experiences” (Legrand & Sloan, 2010). The tourism industry is estimated to be responsible for 5% of the world's CO₂ gas emissions. The hotel sector represents 1% of all CO₂ gas emissions (Legrand & Sloan, 2011). A responsible attitude in the hospitality industry is defined by a balanced relation between resources use, technological predilection and placing investments.

In the case of the studied sample it's important to mention that out of 74 hotels, 49 perform restoration works every year while 23 units are restored once every two to five years, one unit is restored once every six to ten years and another unit is restored once every ten years. The main departments that benefit of the restoration works are: the Accommodation Department (in 72 hotels), the Restaurant & Bar Department (in 17 hotels), Reception (in 10 hotels) and Kitchen (in 1 hotel). The restoration process means: painting (for 74 hotels), interior design (for 29 hotels), fixing and checking the electrical and sanitary

installations (for 60 hotels), improving the interior and exterior insulation (for 4 hotels) and in one single hotel there are also made other kinds of works, that were not specified. Checking the electrical and sanitary installations happens on a weekly basis in 43 hotels and once per month in 31 hotels out of the above mentioned total. The presented information emphasizes the fact that from the total number of the studied hotels, only 66% perform restoration works yearly. The Accommodation Department represents a priority in what regards such works. Painting is the most popular way to recondition, while the interior and exterior insulation improving works are made in only 4 hotels out of 74 hotels. While 58% verifies the electrical and sanitary installations once a week, 42% does it only once a month.

There are few conditions that have to be fulfilled in order to adopt a sustainable development; one of the most important is the moderate use of natural resources: water, thermal and electrical energy, waste management and replacing the conventional resources by renewable ones. The moderate consumption aims to an economical, social and environmental efficiency so that not only the present generations can satisfy their needs, but also the future generations can be able to benefit from these resources. The European Union expressed its request concerning Romania – in 2008 through a package of directives by the European Commission, known as “Energy-Climate Change” – to increase up to 20% the energy efficiency, to reduce with 20% the GHG and reach a value of 20% in the use of renewable energy sources until 2020, considering as reference the year 1990 (European Commission, 2008). It is imperative to adopt practices for the optimization of the limited energy resources consumption. Therefore, not only there have to exist legal and political basis, but also energy management by investing in improving the equipments that function on energy and implementing various technologies for energy recovery.

THE GREEN HOTEL

Hotels can contribute, through their positioning, through architecture and utility to embellish the landscape. But by adopting an inappropriate architecture and structure and by neglecting the façade, the same accommodation establishment can damage the area where it is situated. The touristic units that fulfill several criteria through which they show their concern for the environment and for the responsible management of the energy resources, led to the emergence of a new kind of establishment: the green hotel. This concept appeared thanks to the hotel operators awareness to save the resources, and the impact that their improper management can have on their own lives. The concept of green hotel is placed somewhere between the responsibility and respect towards nature and the need of the hotel owner to save his business. The sustainability in the hotels industry is assured by a responsible use of water and energy resources, by contributing to actions that help preserve the environment, by training the hotel staff so they understand the importance to preserve the environment and teach them how to adopt the proper behavior, but most of all by involving the local communities and using local materials. In Romania there were developed several programs for green hotels certification. These programs provide the hotels with the needed assistance and offer solutions and counseling for expenses monitoring, for water and energy consumption, for adopting means to preserve and recycle, for interior design and eco friendly furniture, for the services offered to the guests, for training their staff, etc. In order to implement the green hotel concept within an accommodation unit it is absolutely necessary to optimize the building's energy performance (Romania Green Building Council, n.d.) by using the passive solar energy, the natural illumination, natural fanning, certain eco friendly materials that register low emissions of volatile organic compounds, reducing the water consumption and collecting rainwater, separating the waste, storing and recycling materials, using the existing local materials and using A class energy electronics; the energy for the heating system can be produced by using solar panels or photovoltaic cells and the roofs can be covered with vegetation which helps improve the urban environment. This kind of roofs absorbs CO₂, has a pleasant visual impact and keeps the air fresh. The cooling systems can be based on temperature conversion that will reduce the energy consumption up to 90%. The exterior walls have to be insulated with natural materials and the eco friendly paint will also act as a thermal insulation increasing with up to 10% its efficiency (Romania Green Building Council, n.d.).

The hotel managers interviewed within this study declared their equal interest in saving the energy resources out of respect for nature but also in reducing their utilities expenses (See fig.1) that can reach a value between 10-35% of the hotel expenses per year.

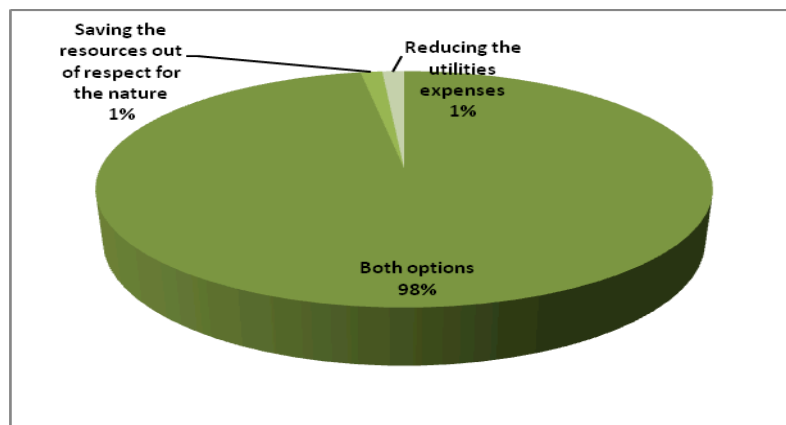


Figure 1. Supporting the sustainable development within the hotels in Transylvania.

From the studied sample none of the hotel units is eco certificated. Only 4 units out of a total of 74 applied so far an Environment Management System, 38 hotel owners intend to adopt such a system and 36 of them have no intention to implement an Environment Management System.

SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH GREEN ENERGY

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development was elaborated in Romania in 2008 as an obligation as the country became a UE member starting with the 1st of January, 2007. The sustainable development became one of the EU political goals starting in 1997 when it was stipulated in the Maastricht Treaty (*The National Strategy for Sustainable Development*, 2008). At national and regional level there emerged non-governmental organizations, political parties concerned with ecological matters, environmental institutions such as the Ministry of Environment in 1990, Parliamentary Committees, but also the first legislative documents on this matter – Act no. 137/1995 and Act no. 220/2008 (updated through O.G. no. 29/2010 and O.G. no. 88/2011) – that sustain energy production from renewable energy sources.

Between 2011-2021 when the Green Certificates are to be implemented, Romania will have to pay an amount of 41,5 billion Lei for the “green energy” (Măgureanu & Zaharia, 2011). The Green Certificate represents securities with a value between 27 and 55 euro per Mwh produced through the five types of green energy: wind energy, solar energy, hydropower, geothermal energy and biomass energy (Măgureanu & Zaharia, 2011). The Green Certificates as a subvention from the Government not only contribute to promote the sustainable development, but also contribute to change the companies attitude, so that the transition to a sustainable development economy becomes a reality. The solution lies in employing the renewable resources that were probably the first energy used by man. The renewable energy is sustainable thanks to the fact that it reduces CO₂ emissions and therefore limits the climate change, but especially because it doesn't entail any risk of pollution in future.

Romania holds a great potential of renewable energy resources as it has valuable climate conditions. Up to the present the wind energy was the most popular for the investors and was financed with more or less 370 million euro (Zaharia, 2011). Besides the wind energy potential, the solar energy is a very valuable source, taking in consideration that Romania is situated in the B European area, with little solar radiation dissimilarities between its geographical areas. The main power source is the Sun and from there result all the other forms of renewable energy (Baican, 2010).

The region of Transylvania is situated in the yellow area which represents a potential of 1300-1450 Kwh/m²/year (Pavnutescu, 2011). Nevertheless, the information gathered from the hotel managers in this area reveals that only 3 hotel units rely already on a system based on electric energy coming from

renewable resources – solar energy in this case – while the other 71 use exclusively conventional energy resources. 49 hotel owners are willing to invest in a solar energy system and 25 don't even consider this option.

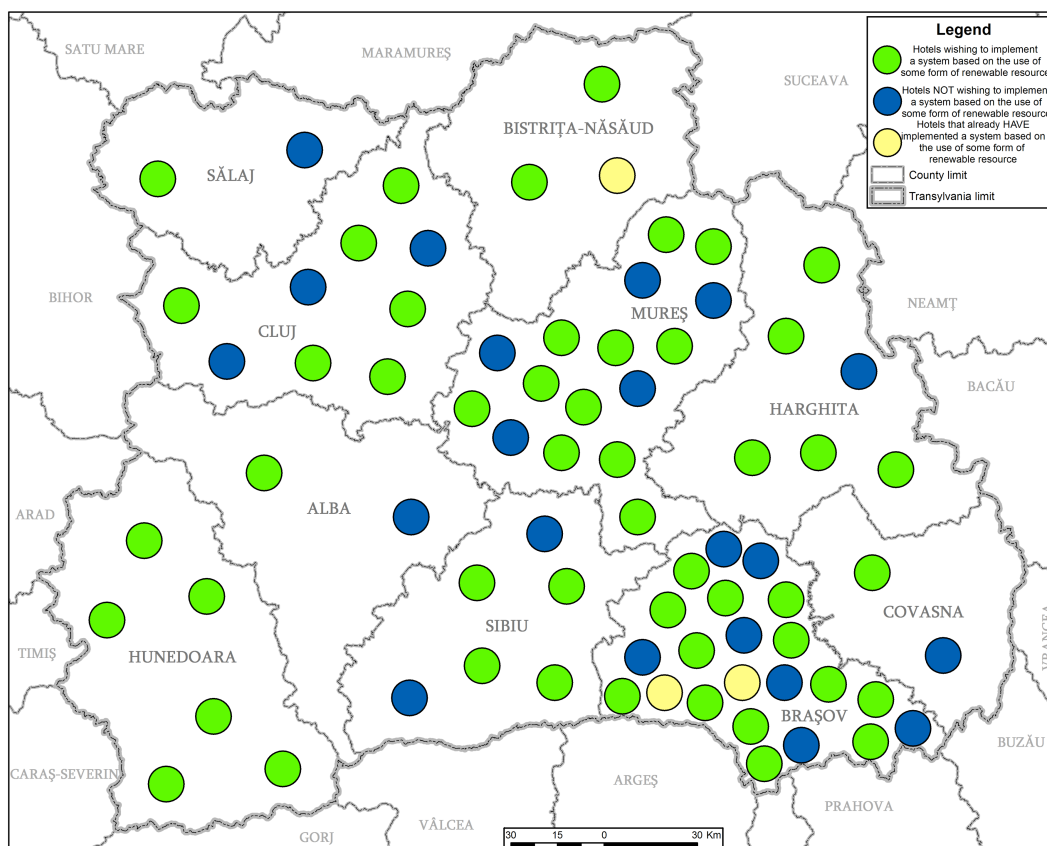


Figure 2. Transylvanian hotels situation regarding the implementation of a system based on energy obtained out of renewable resources.

Figure 2 shows that out of 74 hotel units, 50 plan to invest in a system based on a renewable resource, while 21 hotels don't have any intention in this direction. Just 3 hotels use a solar energy system. It is visible the heterogeneous distribution of the presented hotels within the ten counties. The idea of investing in a renewable energy system is more popular in Brașov county and Mureș county. According to the Transylvanian hotel managers declarations, 60 hotels plan to make this investment within the next five years and only 14 hotel managers are considering it within the next six to ten years.

A sustainable behavior is based on a moderate consumption. Considering that during his holiday the tourist expects the highest quality services, it might happen that he neglects the water and electrical consumption by wasting these resources. One of the reasons that determine the tourist to travel is to find at destination a completely new ambiance different from the one he is used to and that is why the hotels must be imposing from both functional and panoramic points of view and to be completely different from the area where tourists come from. The hotel managers from Transylvania became aware of how important it is to embrace a sustainable behavior within the hotel arrangements and also understood the importance of the training programmes for their personnel. Hence, in 92% of the studied accommodation units the staff is being periodically trained in this direction.

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE?

According to the analysis of the means so to adopt a sustainable development by the hotels in Transylvania (See fig. 3) 38% of the 74 hotels, recycle paper and glass, only 26% make the access in the rooms through access cards, 25% employ domestic waste recycling systems, only 6% employ methods for a more efficient use of electric energy, only 4% increased the efficiency of water consumption and 1% applies other methods than the ones mentioned above.

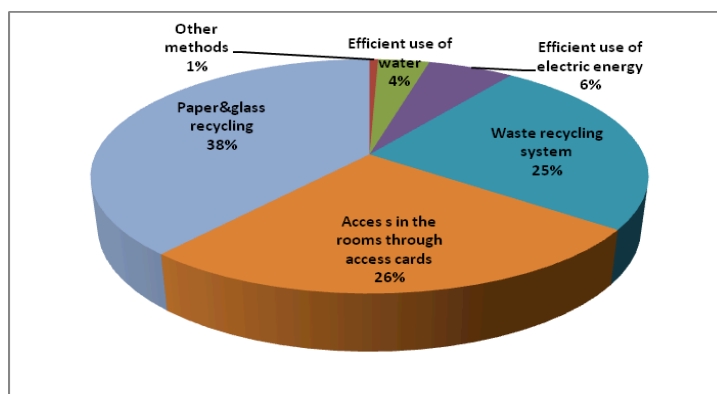


Figure 3. Methods through which the hotels from Transylvania support the sustainable development.

Asked if they organize awareness rising campaigns in order to inform the citizens about saving the non-renewable resources and replacing them (as far as possible) by renewable ones, 73 out of the 74 hoteliers gave a negative answer and only one gave an affirmative answer.

CONCLUSIONS

The most important elements when it comes to tourism development are supply and demand, Government, local authorities, investors in tourism, but also the employees in the tourism field. A sustainable development of the hotel sector assumes first of all a fair and complete evaluation of the hotel offer, but also of the actual and potential demand and establishing an equilibrium between the four systems of focus: economical, human, environmental and technological. Saving the non-renewable resources out of responsibility for the environment and for the future generations mustn't damage the quality of the services that the hotel provides. The main benefits for the hotels that promote the sustainable development are:

- reduced expenses as a consequence to a limited consume of water and electricity;
- the positive appreciation of the clients due to the care that the hotel managers show to significant details and at the same time for the concern towards their clients future;
- gaining the staff's devotion through awareness raising regarding the organizational responsibility;
- a step ahead of the competition.

An energy policy is essential in order to overcome the climate change that endangers our lives. Therefore, replacing the 220/2008 act by the 139/2010 act means creating the legislative context in granting subventions for the ones that wish to invest in systems that employ renewable energy sources.

The great potential that Romania and consequently Transylvania have in exploiting the renewable resources is a remarkable advantage that could bring to Romania an important part on the renewable resources market together with France, Germany and Spain.

When adopting sustainable development strategies on the hotel market section, the main purpose is to create persistent communities aware of how important is the rational use of resources, but also to capitalize the innovating social and ecological potential of the economy, to assure the strategies implementation success and to protect the environment.

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