

Practices and Attitudes to Environmental Management in the Hotel Industry

Evangelos Grigoroudis, Technical University of Crete, Chania, Greece

ABSTRACT

The dynamic presence and intensification of tourism has created several negative environmental impacts and have made it one of the industries with the widest range of environmental pressures, calling for a more sustainable course in the future. In this article, in order to respond to the increasing level of environmental concerns of tourists, as well as to the new economic environment, several initiatives as well as environmental management systems (EMSs) are developed for tourism enterprises. EMS applications offer several benefits to the committed organizations, however, the lack of resources and knowledge often poses difficulties in developing and sustaining international EMS. The tourism industry includes two main activities: housing and transportation. The present article concerns housing and its impact on the environment. It also addresses the factors that influence corporate environmental management by identifying the motives and benefits, as well as the difficulties in improving the environmental performance of hotels. The article focuses on Greece and more specifically on the Region of Crete. The article has been based on a questionnaire survey, while the results and conclusions have been based on statistical analysis of the collected information.

KEYWORDS

Crete, Environmental Management Systems, Hotel Industry, Tourism Business

1. INTRODUCTION

Man as integral part of the ecosystem interacts with and depends on it for the energy sources necessary for life. The developed form of civilization and social organization, however, alters the natural environment and creates a disorder in the natural balance with serious consequences (OECD, 2012). The environmental degradation presents upward trends and is a major concern of modern society. Corporate strategies are also developed to address environmental issues.

Surveys examining the environmental concerns of corporations have overwhelmingly focused on the manufacturing industry (Foster et al., 2000). On the contrary, service companies, the ‘silent environmental destroyers’ (Hutchinson, 1996), have attracted less research attention.

In service industry, the tourism sector is of particular interest as the subject of a survey concerning its environmental management practices, firstly because it has a continuously increasing economic importance (Hunter, 1997; De Rato Figareto, 1999), and secondly because the tourism industry presents a continuously increasing environmental concern (Hunter, 1997).

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Nowadays, tourism is considered as the world's largest industry. It is a complex and multidimensional activity that offers prosperity to the residents of local destinations and contributes to the development of regions and nations. Among others, the tourist activity contributes to direct financial gains, income redistribution and job creation. Sharpley (2009) stresses its significance as a power of social and financial development at local, regional and national level, justifying this way the rapid increase rates of the sector observed in recent years.

In 1950, just 25 million international arrivals were reported, while in 1990, the corresponding figure surpassed 440 million reaching by the end of 2012 the amazing record of 1 billion international tourist arrivals around the world (UNWTO, 2012), without taking into account the internal tourism at global level. The financial significance of the sector becomes also apparent from the fact that, at international level, travel and tourism grew by 3.3% in 2016, generating 7.6 trillion US dollars worldwide, and supported a total of 292 million jobs, which is 1 in 10 of all jobs in the world (WTTC, 2017). In terms of overall performance, the prospects of the sector over the years are rather favorable, as the number of international tourist arrivals around the world is expected to increase by 3.3% on average per annum during 2010-2030 (UNWTO, 2013).

Although it mainly aims at offering services within a good-quality natural and manmade environment, the dynamic presence and intensification of the tourism industry has made it one of the industries with the widest range of environmental pressures. By its nature, the tourist product is linked to the natural and structured environment since its consumption occurs in a place whose characteristics are obviously crucial for its purchase. Consequently, the tourism industry has an obvious and sensible interest in sustainable development, and is thus considered to be more environmentally friendly than other sectors. Nevertheless, its size is such that it has created a negative environmental impact and there is a need for a more sustainable course in the future. In this context, and in order to respond to the increasing level of environmental concerns of tourists as well as to the new economic environment, several initiatives as well as Environmental Management Systems (EMS) are developed in tourism enterprises. Their implementation aims at enhancing the environmental performance of the tourism business, saving financial resources and meeting the needs and concerns of the 'green customers'. Ultimately, such implementations aim at promoting the sustainable development of the tourism sector.

Tourism industry includes mainly two activities: housing and transportation. The present study concerns housing and its impact on the environment. It also addresses the factors that influence corporate environmental management by identifying the motives and benefits, as well as the difficulties in improving the environmental performance of hotels (Andersen, 1997). The study focuses on Greece and more specifically on the Region of Crete where, likewise most tourist destinations around the Mediterranean Sea, the environmental problems are dominant due to a tourism development, which exceeds the available carrying capacity of the area. The study has been based on a questionnaire survey addressed to the environmental or hotel managers of hotels in the considered geographical area. Results and conclusions have been based on statistical analysis of the collected information.

The paper is structured in 4 more sections. Section 2 presents a short literature review regarding benefits from and difficulties in EMS application, while Section 3 presents the undertaken empirical study providing information on the profile of the surveyed sample, the factors that were examined and the results of the analysis of the collected information. Section 4 finally, summarizes the findings of the study and provides some directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, there is an increasing awareness of the numerous environmental problems, and an increasing quest of ways towards environment protection, which make people to change their daily behaviors, even their consumer habits. According to Han et al. (2009), there are several surveys indicating the increasingly responsible attitude of people against environmental issues, while a large

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