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Consumer Attitudes towards Pro-ecological Activities in Accommodation Facilities

ABSTRACT

Objective: The main aim of the article is to analyse the respondents' attitudes towards selected pro-environmental practices of enterprises providing accommodation services and the factors conditioning their involvement in the activities implemented in the facilities.

Methodology: The study is empirical in nature and is based on the results of an empirical survey that was carried out in the period December 2021–April 2022 in Poland. The survey used the diagnostic survey method, and 575 respondents took part in it. The main hypothesis assumes that customers of accommodation facilities appreciate the pro-environmental activities used in them.

Findings: The survey results show that the respondents are sensitive to environmental issues and try to apply in practice the principles leading to environmental protection. They also emphasise that they would be more willing to stay in “green” facilities, although the application of sustainable development principles is not a key factor for them in choosing a facility.

Value Added: The survey of 575 respondents indicated, similar to other studies, a positive attitude towards activities aimed at protecting the environment. At the same time, however, it showed that tourists are not always willing to make sacrifices during their stay related to either their comfort or the price of the service. This fact has practical implications for hotel managers and must be taken into account.

Recommendations: The survey confirmed that consumers have a positive perception of environmental activities in hotels, so activity in this area can be an element of building their competitiveness.

Key words: sustainable consumption, green solutions, tourism, accommodation facilities

JEL codes: L83, Z32, D12

Introduction

The act of following the principles of sustainable development is important and has been advocated in many circles. This approach should also apply to tourism and tourism consumption. The implementation of sustainable tourism and consumption is connected, among other things, with taking responsibility for the environment, which enforces specific actions, behaviour, and attitude on the part of both producers of tourist services and consumers. The process of making tourism more 'eco' should therefore take place on both the demand and supply side. A pro-environmental consumer is also an important condition for the emergence of environmentally friendly products and services. It is not uncommon for such projects to be costly pro-environmental investments resulting in higher service prices. This holds true for, among other things, services provided by accommodation facilities.

Detailed research results are available in other countries, regarding consumer attitudes towards pro-ecological activities in accommodation facilities, which the authors elaborate on in the following literature analysis. In the case of Poland, however, there is still a shortage of such studies on this subject, in particular of a practical nature, which prompted the authors to fill the research gap and conduct research, the results of which are presented in this article.

The main aim of the study is to show the attitude of tourists towards selected pro-environmental practices implemented in accommodation facilities, as well as to show the factors that determine their inclusion in the implemented activities. It also looks at whether the pro-environmental solutions used by businesses make tourists more inclined to stay at such facilities, pay more for accommodation, and remain loyal.

The following research hypothesis was formulated: Customers of accommodation facilities appreciate the pro-environmental activities applied in them. Its positive verification means that activities in this area can be an element of building the competitive advantage of such organizations.

In order to better understand this issue the following structure was adopted: first we present the literature review, then the purpose of the study and the methodology. We present the results in detail and discuss the findings.

The article finishes with our conclusions, including practical recommendations and direction for future research.

Literature analysis

Erdogan and Baris emphasise that it is the hospitality industry in terms of environmental protection that today constitutes one of the most important elements of tourism development (Erdogan & Baris, 2007). Unfortunately not all customers have a positive attitude towards ecological solutions, often of an innovative nature, and are not willing to pay more for them. This has been confirmed by previous studies in the international context from 2007–2014, which indicated both willingness for such actions and lack of acceptance for a higher price for “green” accommodation, despite the customers being aware of the importance of such actions (Lee et al., 2010; Han et al., 2009; Kelly et al., 2007; Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Bereza et al., 2014). Furthermore, research in Poland has shown the reluctance of more than 60% of respondents to pay a higher fee in exchange for pro-environmental activities undertaken by the hotel (Kapera & Wszendybyl-Skulska, 2017). As aforementioned, it is advisable to conduct further research that is aimed at analysing consumers’ pro-environmental attitudes, including tourists’ attitudes towards environmentally friendly solutions implemented by entrepreneurs providing accommodation services. The decision-making process of consumers in the tourism services market is subject to constant modifications resulting from changes in the environment (Żemła, 2010). It can be assumed that customers’ demands related to the environment will grow, and the pro-ecological activities of facilities will intensify as a result. Anticipating and analysing the changes characteristic of tourist demand allows one to react on the supply side, which in turn helps increase the competitiveness of such facilities and the offer of the host regions (Nieżgoda, 2012).

The concept of sustainable development is one of the important conditions for the development of the tourism industry in the modern world (Tzschenke et al., 2004). The implementation of sustainable tourism in practice should be

related to the formation of sustainable consumption and the functioning of tourism entities according to the principles of sustainable development (Institute of Tourism, 2011, p. 21). The concept of sustainable tourism, therefore, aims at shaping new attitudes and behaviours of tourists, with the changes in the life of a tourist being made already at the stage of everyday choices (Hendel, 2016). Sustainable consumption should be aimed at ensuring a righteous life for everyone within the limits of the Earth's abundance (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013, pp. 36–43; Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014, pp. 33–44). Hendel defined the concept of sustainable tourism consumption as the consumption of goods and services based on a conscious and responsible choice that determines the fulfillment of tourists' needs sustainably, i.e., in a way that maintains a state of harmony between the reported needs of tourists and the local community together with the local environment, thus enabling future tourists to fulfill their needs at an equal level. This consumption is inextricably linked to the formation of consumer awareness (Hendel, 2016). There are several areas that sustainable consumption influences, including the ecological environment (Hendel, 2016, p. 14). Ecological consumption, as one of its elements, regards tourists' ecological behaviour and choices during the trip and at the point where tourism services are provided (Dębski & Borkowska-Niszczota, 2020). According to the principles promoted by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sustainable tourism should be characterised by a desire to preserve natural heritage, and biodiversity, conserve cultural heritage and bring socio-economic benefits (UNWTO, 2017). Operating according to the principles of sustainable development provides an opportunity to comply with the environmental legislation, to have good relations with local communities, to gain or improve the "green" image against the competition, to widen the circle of customers, and to gain their loyalty (Prochorowicz, 2015).

Due to the strong impact of tourism on the environment, and consequently due to the acknowledgment of the need to reduce this impact, and more broadly due to the promotion of sustainability in tourism, the above issues are the subject of numerous studies. At the same time, it is strongly emphasised that these topics most strongly concern the accommodation industry (Mousavi et al., 2017). This is due to its intensive development, which consequently

translates into the generation of environmental impacts (da Rosa & Silva, 2017, p. 40). The environmental impact of hotels, as estimated by experts, is 75% associated with excessive consumption (Bohdanowicz, 2006).

At the same time, it is highlighted that accommodation facilities are increasingly taking environmental issues into account, which on one hand is related to pressure from local authorities or consumers and on the other hand may be the result of emerging regulations (Berezan et al., 2014; da Rosa & Silva, 2017, p. 40). There are also other reasons for taking environmental aspects into consideration such as social issues, fear of scarcity of important resources, increased awareness of all stakeholders (including customers), the influence of the media publicising the negative impact of businesses on the environment or the growing role of ethics in investors' activities (Kapera & Wszendybył-Skulska, 2017). Pro-environmental activities in facilities appear at different stages of service provision (Prochorowicz, 2015), and are of different scales and natures. They are often capital-intensive technological solutions that also result in high running costs for running the facility. Actions of an environmental nature are associated with a facility's membership in international hotel systems. Many international hotel systems have developed sustainability plans, and pro-environmental programmes which are increasingly becoming an element of their operation strategy (Kapera & Wszendybył-Skulska, 2017). Unfortunately, in Poland, not all accommodation facilities yet try to act in accordance with recognised international norms and environmental standards or environmental certificates (ISO 14001, EMAS, LEED, BREEM, etc.), owing to, among other things, the fact that meeting standards for pro-environmental activities are not considered in the hotel categorisation process. In Poland, the first hotel complex built according to the strict guidelines of the American certificate (in the international Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design – LEED system) was Baltic Park Molo in Świnoujście, which was built in 2016 (Prochorowicz, 2015).

It is noted that adherence to the principles of sustainable development increases product quality, which affects consumer satisfaction (Edgell, 2006, p. 30). Entrepreneurs build their brands based on associations with ecology (Kapera & Wszendybył-Skulska, 2017). The positive attitude of tourists towards eco-hotels is rather common (Anita et al., 2020) and, as pointed out, visitors are no

longer satisfied with saving energy and changing towels less frequently, they are becoming progressively more demanding in terms of environmental protection (Ogbeide, 2012). It is found that they are aware of the impact of consumption on the environment and, as a result, expect “green consciousness” in the hotels they visit (Yi et al., 2018). R. Eid, G. Agag and Y. Shehavy indicate 3 factors related to ecology: “attitude toward green hotels, perceived behavioural control, sense of obligation, and corporate image are key factors of guests’ intentions to visit green hotels”, which should translate into the willingness of potential tourists to visit the facility. Their research shows the potential benefits of eco-strategy.

In conclusion, it should be emphasised that empirical analyses often confirm consumers’ positive attitudes towards “green” objects (Chen & Tung, 2014; Gao & Mattila, 2014), albeit differentiated e.g., by gender or age (Han et al., 2011; Sidali et al., 2017). There are also studies that show no significant gender differences in environmental attitudes (Chen & Chai, 2010). Unfortunately, Polish studies show that more than half of the overnight guests do not notice the pro-environmental activities at the facility at all. Therefore, according to Kapera and Wszendybyl-Skulska, hotel operators should take this fact into account and look for more effective strategies to inform about the pro-environmental activities carried out, as well as to encourage customers to behave in a way that considers the benefits of the natural environment (Kapera & Wszendybyl-Skulska, 2017).

Research methodology

The article is based on the results of an empirical study using the diagnostic survey method and survey technique. The survey questionnaire was available online and was distributed using online communication tools, especially social media between December 2021 and March 2022 in Poland. When designing the survey, it was assumed that a minimum of 500 fully completed questionnaires would be obtained. This target was met. The analysis was based on 575 correctly completed questionnaires (Table 1). Young people (18–25 years old) predominated among the respondents, constituting almost 60% of the

survey participants. Such a result is probably related to the adopted method of questionnaire distribution, but this fact should be taken into account when drawing conclusions from the obtained materials.

The questionnaire considered: the respondents' attitude towards ecological behaviour and products, their attitude towards selected pro-environmental actions applied by the accommodation facilities, their willingness to pay more for accommodation in facilities applying sustainable development principles in the field of ecology or incentives which would encourage them to support pro-environmental practices in their facilities. Lastly, an answer was sought to the question of whether the respondents would rate facilities which implemented the above solutions higher and whether that fact could be a source of competitive advantage for the facility or enterprise.

Table 1. Demographic data of the respondents and their attitude to ecological behaviour and products

Variables	Total	
	N=575	(%)
Gender		
Female	370	64.4
Male	205	35.6
Age		
18–25	343	59.6
26–35	134	23.3
36 and above	98	17.0
Average annual number of tourist trips		
0–2	246	42,8
3–5	224	39
6 and above	105	18,2
Please, rate your attitude to pro-eco activities and products		
It is important, I always try to act eco;	103	17,9
I try to act eco but do not always succeed	343	59,7
I don't care	101	17,6
I only act eco when it suits my purposes	17	2,9
It's a waste of time	11	1,9
Nationality		
Polish	532	92,5
Others	43	7.5

Source: own study.

Findings

An important element of the analysis was the respondents' assessment of the selected environmental activities that could potentially be carried out in accommodation facilities (Table 2). There is no doubt that the respondents had a good attitude about such possible activities. On the other hand, not all of the indicated activities were rated similarly or were seen as positive. Respondents, using a 1–7 scale (where 1 indicates dissatisfaction with the entity conducting this type of activity and 7 indicates very high satisfaction with the activity in question) were most positive about activities such as: “use of energy-efficient light sources”, “equipping the facility with motion detectors in the corridors” or “garbage sorting”. Solutions such as “the use of soap dispensers instead of disposable soap”, “key card or motion-controlled electricity” and “equipping the facility with solar panels” are also relatively well-rated. At the same time, however, actions such as “limitations on water temperature and its consumption”, “limitations on air-conditioning” or “extended time of use of bed linen”, the views expressed by the respondents were nowhere near as positive. Respondents praising such actions made up the majority albeit by a tiny margin. The survey shows that respondents are more in favour of “changing towels and bed linen only at the request of guests” than extending the time of use of bed linen. It can be concluded from this that the respondents have a positive attitude towards environmentally friendly activities carried out in hotels if they do not negatively affect their comfort of stay. A large group of respondents also expect information in their rooms instructing on environmentally friendly behaviour. They also show a preference for organic food offered in the facilities. It is therefore important that information is provided on site in an accessible and clear manner about the activities carried out at the facility or the dishes served which are based on organically grown products. At the same time, nonetheless, there is a significant group of respondents who are unwilling to make sacrifices for the sake of environmental protection during their stay.

Table 2. Assessment of pro-ecological activities carried out by accommodation facilities

Please rate on a scale of 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 activities in the field of pro-ecological policy of accommodation facilities, where 1 means dissatisfaction with this type of activity by the facility, and 7 – very high satisfaction with conducting a given activity	1 in %	2 in %	3 in %	4 in %	5 in %	6 in %	7 in %
Change of towels and bed linen only on request	11,7	4,2	8,2	12,6	14,8	19,1	29,6
Use of soap dispensers instead of single-use soap	2,4	3,2	5,1	16,2	14,4	25,9	32,8
Key card or motion-controlled electricity	3,5	2,9	5,4	14,1	16,7	23	34,4
Information in the rooms informing about the desired pro-environmental behaviour	5,4	5,2	9,6	19,3	19,1	21,7	19,7
Garbage recycling	2,6	1,9	5,4	12,5	17,1	22,4	38,1
Replacing paper towels with hand dryers	7,8	5,6	8,8	15,5	17,9	18,1	26,3
The use of energy-saving light sources	0,9	2,4	5,2	13,6	14,4	21,9	41,6
Offering organic food	3,1	5,1	10,1	19,5	17,4	21	23,8
Equipping the facility with solar panels	4,3	3,5	5,7	16,7	19,7	20,7	29,4
Equipping the facility with motion sensors in the corridors – automatic shutdown of unnecessary devices	1,6	1,9	5,1	10,6	16,8	22,8	41,2
The use of renewable resources in running a business	1,9	4,3	5,4	17,4	18,4	20,7	31,9
Limitations in air conditioning	4,7	9,0	11,0	18,6	21,4	17,4	17,9
Limitations on water temperature and it's consumption	8,0	10,8	12,5	17,0	19,7	16,3	15,7
Extended time of use of bed linen	15,0	10,3	11,1	19,5	16,5	15,1	12,5

Source: own study.

Table 2 presents the responses of the respondents assessing specific pro-ecological activities that can be carried out in hotel facilities, while Table 3 shows the general attitude of the respondents to the activity of these facilities. This is important because, as indicated earlier, it is the pressure from tourists and their expectations regarding pro-ecological behavior that may be an element of pressure, encouraging hoteliers to introduce environment-friendly actions. The above ratio is generally positive. However, in the case of clearly defined actions, it is not unequivocally positive. In the case of most of the proposed statements, most of the responses were: “I have no opinion” and “rather yes”. Especially the latter option determines the advantage of positive

answers. At the same time, however, these answers are not only positive. While “yes” answers in several cases fluctuated around 20%, “definitely yes” answers scored significantly lower. Another thing worth noticing is the second statement, “I would be prepared to pay more for accommodation in an establishment that uses environmentally friendly behaviour, e.g. in terms of energy saving”. Only in this case were the negative answers slightly outweighed. The answer “rather no” received more than 22%, which means 2 percentage points more than the answer “rather yes”. Such a result confirms the earlier statement about the respondents’ scepticism towards the environmentally friendly solutions by lodging entities – a kind of scepticism that is related to the costs. It is encouraging that a large group of respondents would be more likely to stay in an establishment applying environmentally-friendly solutions and that such measures would have a positive impact on the assessment of these entities and a higher level of customer satisfaction. This also demonstrates the need to provide customers with information on the environmental nature of the entity; such information can be easily accessed before the customer makes a decision and purchases a room.

Table 3. Respondents’ attitude to accommodation facilities using pro-ecological solutions

Please take your stand to the following statements	Definitely no in %	No in %	Rather no in %	I have no opinion in %	Rather yes in %	Yes in %	Definitely yes in %
I would like to stay in an accommodation facility that introduces pro-ecological solutions, e.g. energy saving	3,0	2,9	6,6	24,9	28,0	22,8	11,8
I would be ready to pay more for an overnight stay in a facility that uses pro-ecological behaviour, e.g. in the field of energy saving	8,3	9,0	22,1	23,8	20,3	11,6	4,9

Please take your stand to the following statements	Definitely no in %	No in %	Rather no in %	I have no opinion in %	Rather yes in %	Yes in %	Definitely yes in %
The use of pro-ecological solutions by the accommodation facility would have a positive impact on my assessment of the facility and satisfaction with the stay	3,7	4,3	9,6	21,4	30,3	19,7	11,0
The use of pro-ecological solutions by the accommodation facility would have a positive impact on my loyalty to the facility	4,9	7,5	11,5	24,2	26,4	17,3	8,2
When I spend the night away from home, I worry less about saving energy and water	7,0	6,6	13,8	20,1	24,2	18,6	9,7

Source: own study.

An important question to which answers were sought is “how to encourage tourists to engage in pro-environmental activities in lodging entities?”. The answers obtained indicate quite clearly that the best motivator would benefit from a financial nature, discounts, rewards, or bonus points in the loyalty program. These are certainly costly solutions for the accommodation facilities. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that thanks to several pro-environmental measures, e.g., energy-efficient light sources or restrictions on the use of air-conditioning, the entities have the possibility to make some savings and could share these benefits with customers. The indications for the last statement are also positive. Many respondents declare that, regardless of the rewards, they are using and will continue to use environmentally friendly solutions. Additionally, for a large group, pro-environmental issues are not indifferent, and the various tools or incentives introduced to influence positive pro-environmental behaviour are important. Even simple gadgets or material rewards can constitute an impulse for the guest to get involved in the entity’s environmental activities.

Table 4. Assessment of motivators for joining pro-ecological practice in accommodation facilities

Would the below mentioned rewards encourage you to join pro-ecological practice in accommodation facilities, for example to save water, energy, garbage segregation, etc.	Definitely no in %	No in %	Rather no in %	I have no opinion in %	Rather yes in %	Yes in %	Definitely yes in %
Discounts on accommodation	2,3	1,9	3,7	7,0	28,4	31,3	25,4
Bonus points in the loyalty program (if any)	2,8	5,2	8,9	17,4	24,7	25,4	15,6
Cash reward	2,1	4,2	6,8	18,4	23,3	22,6	22,6
Discounts on services offered at the property	1,7	2,1	4,3	9,0	27,6	30,1	25,2
Simple gadgets, material prizes	3,8	4,7	10,2	18,4	23,8	21,9	17,2
I am indifferent to these issues and I do not see a tool that would influence my behaviour	13,9	12,5	13,9	28,9	11,6	10,6	8,6
I care about the environment and behave pro-ecologically even without additional incentives	3,2	3,0	9,4	20,3	29,2	19,1	15,8

Source: own study.

Discussion and conclusion

Accommodation services are among the key elements of the tourism industry, and the infrastructure related to their provision is constantly developing along with the growth in tourism demand. As a result, the environmental impact of this sector is also increasing. It is indicated that the hospitality industry is one of the key sectors influencing environmental pollution (Wang et al., 2022). For example, British hotels produce 289,700 tonnes of waste per year (Arun et al., 2021). The hotel sector is one of the major energy and water-intensive sectors in the tourism industry (Han et al., 2018). As indicated, the accommodation services sector accounts for 20% of tourism industry emissions. Moreover, the accommodation services sector is the forerunner of CSR activity in tourism (Merli et al., 2019).

The main research hypothesis was that customers of accommodation services appreciate the pro-environmental activities introduced there; therefore pro-environmental activity can be an element of building their competitiveness. The collected and analysed data allow to positively verify the above hypothesis, albeit with some limitations. The participants of the study were generally positive about pro-ecological practices carried out in facilities providing accommodation services. On the contrary, a significant group indicated that they do not want these practices to be associated with a reduction in their comfort of stay or with additional costs (although one should bear in mind the demographic characteristics of the respondents, which has already been pointed out before).

It should be emphasized that the mere fact that consumers have a positive attitude towards facilities that use pro-ecological practices does not necessarily mean that they will be more likely to stay there than in other facilities. As indicated in their response, they often do not want to incur any additional inconvenience related to it. In relation to the above, various types of motivators that could encourage them to do so are the key issue. As the analysis indicated, the strongest motivators are specific and quantifiable rewards for tourists, e.g. discounts on stays. However, these are costly activities for accommodation facilities. On the contrary, it should be remembered that a number of pro-ecological activities, e.g. reducing energy consumption, also generate savings. This fact may even be a potentially stronger motivator for the hotel. The other motivator should be the expectations of tourists and, consequently, building the image of an environmentally friendly facility. Certification of hotels that satisfy environmental and sustainable development standards might be useful in this area (Abdou et al., 2020). It is also worth noting that, as shown by research (see Merli et al., 2019;), meeting the expectations of tourists in terms of pro-ecological solutions is a source of satisfaction for them and, consequently, may build customer loyalty towards the hotel. In turn, the analyses of J. Wang et al. (2018) indicated a positive relationship between the green image of the hotel and consumers' green satisfaction and their green trust, which consequently influences recommendations and positive word-of-mouth marketing.

The results of our research are in line with other analyses. Similarly, it indicates a positive attitude of consumers toward green hotels. At the same time,

however, as emphasized earlier, it points to an important issue that appeared less frequently in other analyses. Tourists are not always so positive about pro-ecological practices if it relates to sacrifices on their part, especially with lowering the comfort of their stay. Therefore, some activities should be introduced in accommodation establishments in a particularly careful manner, and this issue should be subject to further research.

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