

Eco-certification as a tool of sustainable tourism

Ekocertifikace jako nástroj trvale udržitelného cestovního ruchu

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Abstract: This paper deals with problems of sustainable tourism. The goal of this work is to point out the current situation, possibilities and approaches to ecological certification in tourism in the Czech Republic. A survey was conducted among accommodation providers – it was targeted on assessing the level of conversancy with ecolabels that already exist in the Czech Republic as well as in Europe. The results of this survey are included in this paper. Furthermore, the attitudes of providers towards obtaining ecolabels were being found out.

Key words: sustainable tourism, ecocertification, accommodation services

Abstrakt: Příspěvek se zabývá problematikou udržitelného cestovního ruchu. Cílem práce je poukázat na současný stav, možnosti a přístupy k ekologické certifikaci v cestovním ruchu v České republice. Součástí příspěvku jsou i výsledky dotazníkového šetření mezi poskytovateli ubytovacích služeb zaměřeného na zjištění úrovně obeznámenosti s existujícími ekoznačkami jak v České republice, tak v Evropě. Dále byly zjišťovány postoje poskytovatelů k pořízení ekoznačky.

Klíčová slova: trvale udržitelný cestovní ruch, ekocertifikace, ubytovací služby

Tourism industry is ranked as the third in the world as to the height of its turnover, with car and petrol industries being the first and the second. Not only it has become the most dynamically developing industry, but it is also one of the key factors in the development of regions. It appears to be an important contribution especially for the development and employment in the regions where there is a lack of other economic activities.

In connection with the growing importance of tourism in the world economic, the topic of environmental sustainability of tourism is discussed more and more often. As three overall concepts relevant to tourism are considered (Middleton 1998):

– Sustainable tourism means achieving a particular combination of numbers and types of visitors, the cumulative effect of whose the activities at a given destination, together with actions of the servicing businesses, can continue into the foreseeable future without damaging the quality of the environment on which the activities are based.

– For all practical decisions in tourism, environment means the quality of nature resources such as landscape, air, sea water, fresh water, flora and fauna; and the quality of built and cultural resources judged to have intrinsic value and to be worthy conservation.

– Sustainability for tourism requires that the cumulative volume of visitors usage of a destination and the associated activities and impacts of servicing businesses should be managed below the threshold level at which the regenerative resources available locally become incapable of maintain the environment. Regenerative resources are partly natural and partly managed by human interventions.

The balances implied between environmental quality and tourism activity in each of mentioned concepts are never static. They are infinitely sensitive to the influence of human behaviour and management decisions as well as to natural processes of ecology and the emerging science and technology of measuring environmental impacts and responding to them.

Supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, part of the University research project No. VZ 62156 48904 "Czech Economy in a Process of Integration and Globalisation ..."

There are many instruments how to reach such sustainable tourism in the context of the environment, and implementing environmental certification in the form of ecolabels is one of them, especially for tourist accommodation facilities and services, camping sites or destinations.

Many studies show that the potential of ecotourism in Europe has a promising development, considering increasing demands for environmentally friendly accommodation facilities for European tourists on their holiday travels.

Sustainable tourism is generally mentioned on government levels in many materials:

- The programme declaration of the government of the Czech Republic,
- The State Environmental Policy 2004–2010 (published by the Ministry of Environment approved by the Resolution of the Czech Republic government from 17th March 2004 No. 235 about the state environmental policy of the Czech Republic),
- The State Tourism Policy Concept in the Czech Republic.

MATERIALS, METHODS AND OBJECTIVE

In the context of sustainable development, it is essential to understand the importance of the protection of environment with respect to the impacts of tourism on the environment, especially from the view of tourist services providers.

There exist two ways in which accommodation facilities can promote their attitudes towards the environment (Burian 2004):

- The implementation of the Environmental Management System (EMS)
- Optional initiatives

EMS (Environmental Management System)

The system of environmental management focuses on the product of the society, on its proposal, development, production, provision, use and liquidation. These parts of life cycle should damage the environment no more than in compliance with legislation requirements (i.e. laws, regulations). This system is created in compliance with the standard ČSN EN ISO 14001 (Prokeš 2004)

These systems represent an active attitude of a company to monitoring, managing and gradual decreasing impacts of their activities on the environment and so they contribute to the continual improvement of the company's "environmental behaviour". Besides

decreasing negative effects of the company on the environment, which was mentioned above, this can also be seen in a more open communication between the company and its surroundings (Cenia 2005).

Applying the EMS system for the environmental protection means – among other – to apply "the environmental approach" continually in all areas of our activities and to consider this to be a key question of further development of the company, as well as to decrease negative effects of the impacts of our society on the environment permanently – to reduce energetic, material and raw material exactingness of production. This can be done via modernization of production, maximal using, limiting refuse production and pollution, and so the minimization of natural resources exploiting can be assured together with safe disposal of refuse at the places of its collection and manipulation. Furthermore, applying this system means to educate employees continually and purposefully to the protection of environment – to motivate everyone to follow the ecological discipline.

Applying the EMS in the company is fully voluntary and it is solely the company's decision whether it adheres to its implementation or not. If it decides for the first possibility, there are in fact two options how to imply the EMS:

- According to international standards of ISO 14000 (mainly according to the principal standard ISO 14001)
- According to the European EMAS, i. e. The Council Directive (EHS) No. 1836/93 EMAS

The certification EMS according to the standard ČSN EN ISO 14001:97 certifies that the company meets the specified requirements for the system of environmental management (the protection of environment) in its activities.

The standard has been created in a specific way so that it is possible to apply it in all types and sizes of organizations and in various business areas. The main target of this standard is to support the environmental protection and the prevention of pollution. The standard does not state implicit requirements on environmental behaviour of the company, but respecting national and local legislation is in principle demanded.

Under certain circumstances, each organization can influence the environment negatively with its activities, products and services that it provides. The elements of such activities, products and services are defined as environmental aspects. Various "complexity" of managing systems in the particular organizations depends on the character of these

aspects. Naturally, this character is variable. For instance, the aspects in chemical production with outdated technology are of different weight than those in a construction office.

The EMAS, or Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (The system of managing companies and audits from the aspect of the environmental protection), is a system that is applied within the European Union, or the European Economic Zone, as the case may be. It became effective in April 1995 on the basis of the Council Directive (ES) No. 1836/1993. For a complete involvement in the programme of the EMAS and the insertion into a relevant national register, the company should take the following steps:

- To conduct the introductory revision of the environmental conditions which will reveal the company's effects on the environment and its individual elements, the agreement with the legislation concerning the protection of the living as well as working environment, and so on.
- To create the environmental policy.
- To determine targets of the environmental protection and to imply programmes to reach them.
- To apply the EMS.
- To conduct the regular internal or external audits of this system.
- To create a declaration of the conditions of the environment and to have it approved by an independent verifier¹.
- To get registered at the relevant subject.
- To make the declaration of the conditions of the environment accessible to public.

Besides the EMAS, according to which the EMS can be implied in the European Union, the company can also use the international standard ISO 14001 for such an implication. This standard differs from the EMAS especially in the following:

- It does not require initiating².
- It does not specify either the frequency or methodology of conducting audits.
- It does not require publishing and declaring the conditions of the environment.
- It does not require active participation of employees in the application of the EMS, or in the process of improving the company's impacts on the environment, as the case may be.
- It concentrates on the functioning and improvements of the EMS rather than the improvements of the company's effects on the environment.

¹ This must be repeated every 3 years at least.

² However, it is usually conducted in practice.

Optional eco-initiatives of tourism

Optional initiatives of sustainable tourism can be understood as the development and implementation of projects or tools stimulating tourism subjects to increase their environmental and social efficiency beyond the terms of legal regulations in this field.

Three main types of such initiatives can be distinguished:

- Ecolabels – serving for creating the framework and guarantee of customers' choices ("better than").
- Acknowledgements – creating and promoting lists of the best examples of efficiency ("best of").
- Declarations – determining the attitudes of subjects maintaining particular opinions and recognizing particular values ("supporter").

These initiatives were analysed as well as classified in this way by the World Tourism Organization (WTO). In total, 59 ecolabels were selected, 17 initiatives were ranked among acknowledgements and 28 initiatives among declarations. However, only the initiatives used in Europe or worldwide were ranked, and moreover only those still existing.

Ecolabel

It is a voluntary tool of certification and marking the environmental efficiency that is used all over the world. The ecolabel is then a label marking the overall environmental efficiency of a product (goods or services) in a particular category of the product or service with regard to its lifespan. In contrast to "green" symbols or other various sorts of declarations created by producers and service providers, this ecolabel is granted by a third party – in the relation to the particular kinds of goods and services for which environmental criteria are determined independently.

There exist many various obligatory as well as optional labels and declarations evaluating environmental efficiency. The International Standardising Organization (ISO) differentiates three basic types of optional labels and with the term of the ecolabel it in fact terms labels of the type 1 only which - as the only ones – lead to granting the certificate itself.

The standards for 3 types of ecolabels (according to ISO):

- Type 1 – ISO 14001 – voluntary, multicriterial programme based on the existence of a third party

(which is neither producer nor consumer) that grants the appreciation in the form of a licence that authorizes using environmental ecolabels on products (goods and services). These ecolabels then inform about preferences in the areas of environmental policy.

- Type 2 – ISO 14021 – the environmental declaration itself, for instance the declarations of producers or traders (“made of x% recycled materials”).
- Type 3 – ISO 14025 – optional programmes which will provide quantifying environmental ranking of the product and its impact on the environment during its whole life cycle into pre-defined categories stated by a qualified third person. Such impacts are presented in a form that facilitates comparing the products or their parameters (see pages of the Swedish Council of Environmental Management – International Environmental Product Declaration, or for example the BAT – system “best available techniques”).

The Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) ranks the following ecolabels among the main targets:

- the environment protection,
- supporting ecologically oriented innovations,
- awakening clients’ interest in ecological questions of their behaviour.

One of the very important ecolabels is the so-called EU Flower. The EU Flower is in fact an optional tool of European politics in the field of the environment which has already existed since 1992.

The European ecolabel EU Flower is legally regulated by the guideline No. 1980/2000 of the European Parliament and the European Council from 17th July 2000 concerning regulating the common plan for granting ecological labels. The aim of this guideline is to support goods and services disposing the potential to minimize negative impacts on the environment created by their existence itself, in comparison with other products or services of the same or similar character. In this way, it tries to contribute to exploiting natural resources effectively and maintaining a high level of the protection of the environment. One of the key roles of this guideline that came into force on 24th September 2000 is to include goods as well as services under the term of “product” marking the subject of ecological certification.

The life cycle of tourism services is different from the lifecycle observed in the case of goods. It is rather difficult to state impacts of a particular kind of service on the environment. Despite this fact, tendencies have appeared in last three decades to mark services with ecolabels. Accommodation is the first area of

services for which ecological criteria of the EU Flower ecolabelling have been stated. The European ecolabel in the area of accommodation services defines such services as the provision of an overnight stay in the room of an accommodation facility that is equipped adequately for such purposes in the form of a bed minimally which is provided to a tourist as well as a traveller or a lodger.

The document on the web pages of the EU Flower published by authorities of the European Committee in May 2003 describes how a potential applicant for the EU Flower should behave. In the first stage, it is necessary to contact so-called the Competent Body (CB) in the country where the applicant conducts business. The list of these contact places is provided on the web pages of EU Flower. Then, the owner of an accommodation facility himself can prove the attitude of his firm towards the environment in a special test. If he decides to obtain the ecolabel, he has to comply with the access criteria, then the accomplishment is verified by a person authorized by the Competent Body and the ecocertification is paid for. After that the official granting of the EU Flower ecolabel follows and finally the accommodation facility obtains the right to use this label and to include it into its marketing strategy.

The EU Flower is a complex system of ecolabel granting, which is also proved by the fact that the committee stated three phases of providing services by accommodation facilities when different impacts on the environment occur:

- The phase of purchase
- The phase of providing the service itself
- The phase of manipulating with refuse.

For creating the system of the EU Flower label granting itself three main areas were stated; individual criteria of this label are defined for these areas within the accommodation services mentioned above:

- Electricity consumption
- Water consumption
- Refuse production
- Tendency to use renewable resources as well as environmentally friendly substances and materials
- Promoting environmental targets through well selected communication and environmental training.

The goal of the work is to highlight the current situation, possibilities and approaches to ecological certification in tourism in the Czech Republic. For the purpose of determining the current approaches towards the optional initiatives in the field of sustainable tourism from the side of accommodation

services providers, an electronic questionnaire survey was conducted. *Partial targets of this survey aimed to find out:*

- If there is an interest in the question of environmental approach at all.
- If accommodation providers are aware of ecolabels for accommodation services in Europe and the Czech Republic.
- If entrepreneurs know what potential contribution can be reached by obtaining the ecolabel.
- If accommodation providers have noticed guests requiring environmental quality of their accommodation facilities.
- What sum, in case of interest, accommodation providers are willing to invest into the registration as well as into the annual fee.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the situational analysis of the current situation, no intensive system or systematic campaign was found that would inform or promote the idea of sustainable tourism in the Czech Republic. At the same time, no important system or systematic marketing activities concerning sustainable tourism were found, either on the central or on the national levels. The only activities related to the topic of sustainable development of tourism which were discovered were the optional initiatives mentioned above.

The electronic questionnaire survey to determine the current approaches to ecocertification was conducted on 114 units (accommodation providers) in 2006. The selective file was chosen according to quota selection (quota features: the type of the accommodation facility, the size – the number of staff and the number of beds, the locality). The largest group was formed by hotels and boarding houses. The accommodation facilities were almost equally found in the localities of up to 499, 299, 99 999 and over 100 000 inhabitants. Nearly 72% of them were small accommodation facilities with no more than 10 employees. A great part comprised of accommodation facilities with up to 50 beds (almost 65%). The questionnaire was actually sent to 968 providers but the return was only 11.78%. This can also be explained by the lack of knowledge in the area of environmental certification and so by the following concerns to answer.

19.3% of the providers know the ecolabel operating in Europe, while neither the EMAS nor the Rural Tourism Union are ecolabels. ISO is disputable as well – it is a standard, not an ecolabel. Most respondents (80.7%) then do not know the European ecolabel. A great share was formed by respondents knowing the ECEAT ecolabel.

The result was not different for the Czech ecolabel – only 19.3% responders know the ecolabel in the Czech Republic; the ECEAT ecolabel is the most well-known and the Ecologically Friendly Service also appears.

During questioning about the ecolabel benefits, the situation was slightly more positive and even 32.46% respondents replied: “Yes, I know the benefits of environmental certification”. Other respondents answered more or less in the correct way – ecolabel brings benefits for the economics as well as for the environment.

13.16% respondents have already implemented the ecolabel, 12.28% are considering doing this and 74.56% are not interested in it at all. The reasons why they are only thinking about the ecolabel for their accommodation facilities were rather miscellaneous. One respondent does not have enough information about the ecolabel implementation, another one has not complied with the criteria, the next one used the space for expressing his unawareness of the term “environmental” and the following two respondents used the space to express the opinion that the ecolabel is too expensive and so they are not interested in obtaining it.

Exactly 50% respondents are not aware of guests who would require the environmentally friendly approach. The question is why this is so and what is the reason of this. Is it a manager’s ignorance of his client’s wishes and requirements? Should not the ecologically friendly approach be promoted from the other side then – from a hotel manager towards a guest?

51.75% of the respondents are not interested in paying for the registration fee and 49.12% are not interested in paying for the annual fee. All the respondents who would pay 10 000 CZK p.a. for the ecolabel replied that they are not interested in implementing it. The others who would be willing to pay for it selected the possibility of up to 2 000 CZK or 5 000 CZK while the possibilities of up to and above 30 000 CZK were not used at all. Only the ecolabel of the ECEAT would meet these requirements in the conditions existing in the Czech Republic.

CONCLUSION

In Europe, there are many ecolabels in the area of accommodation services and they are based on various systems, their certification concerns various accommodation facilities and they have various promotion campaigns and at the same time various power in the meaning of objects that have already been certified. In the Czech Republic, the private ecolabel ECEAT is

the most well-known (as emerged from the questionnaire survey) that has a well-developed marketing campaign for the already certified facilities.

Within European Union the methodology of the EU Flower was created in 2003. In the Czech Republic, there is no promotion campaign organized for tourism yet in the connection with this ecolabel. The Ministry of Environment, particularly the Cenia agency which centralizes the financial means obtained from the fees for the EU Flower ecocertification, and the EŠS are not yet able to ensure the functioning of this system: the promotion of the ecolabel itself – attracting the candidates for obtaining the ecolabel – the promotion of the certified objects.

This work implies that in the Czech Republic the process of implementing the accessible evaluating and certification systems for tourism (ISO, EMAS, the EU Flower) has been distinctly unsuccessful. The ECEAT is the most widespread ecolabel for accommodation facilities in the Czech Republic. It is also powerful on European market where it has succeeded in persuading 1 312 accommodation units to obtain this ecolabel in 8-year period of its existence. At the same time, the EU Flower has been successful in acquiring 62 sympathizers in 3 years. On Czech market, the ratio is 135 : 1 (ECEAT : EU Flower).

The results of the questionnaire survey confirm that the topic of sustainable tourism is neglected and undervalued in the Czech Republic. This issue is undervalued generally, managements and employees are not informed properly, there are no specific plans existing for implementing ecological measures within hotel industry and at the same time workers are not involved financially to enforce measures for respecting ecological principles.

What was also surprising was the unwillingness of professional associations even to provide the data that would clarify the given issue. The low return of the questionnaires in fact confirms the whole-society scepticism and unwillingness to pursue this issue and, what is more, even to comment on it. This consequently corresponds with the attitudes of hotel managements and their workers towards the problems of enforcing environmental approaches in accommodation services.

The reasons mentioned above imply that it is inevitable to begin creating a complex system of supporting the sustainability of tourism for the Czech Republic. This should be realized considering home as well as foreign obligations of the Czech Republic and also for strengthening the competitiveness of the Czech Republic as a “green” destination on the international market.

Achieving the goals of sustainable development we should have the right mix of private sector initiative, economic tools, incentives and regulations. This means we need new public sector-private sector delivery mechanisms and we must have industry participation in order to translate global principles into local actions.

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Arrived on 11th October 2006

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