

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TOURIST ACCOMMODATION SERVICE PROVIDERS. CASE STUDY: CALARASI, GIURGIU, IALOMITA AND TELEORMAN COUNTIES, ROMANIA

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Abstract

This paper aimed to study several sustainable practices which tourist accommodation establishments can apply to contribute to sustainable development. The application of sustainable practices is essential, as tourist accommodation establishments are very resource-intensive. This paper is based on a quantitative research, and the data has been processed through statistical frequencies. The data were collected through a questionnaire, and the target group was made up of tourist accommodation establishments from four counties of Romania, more specifically Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman. The method through which the results are presented is the graphical method. The obtained results confirmed that the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties are poorly involved in activities aimed at sustainable development.

Key words: *Danube counties, sustainable development, sustainable practices, tourist accommodation establishments*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development represents the best remedy for inefficient consumption of resources, waste of resources, various socio-economic inequalities and for combating the negative impact that some socio-economic activities have on the environment.

Development can only be sustainable when "people become aware that ensuring the satisfaction of present needs must not compromise the satisfaction of the needs of posterity" [1, p. 16]. As a result, sustainable development has its roots in the present and its aspirations and effects in the future. Also, a particularly important aspect is related to the responsibility for sustainable development. Clearly, both individuals and legal entities are responsible for sustainable development. Through their contribution, stakeholders, which include local and central authorities, consumers, companies and society as a whole, can determine whether sustainable development will remain at the theoretical and attractive concept stage [11]. Of course, the responsibility fits on every dimension of sustainable development, namely the economic, environmental, social, cultural,

political, managerial and technological dimensions [1]. Although several dimensions have been listed, only three of them are the main ones, namely the economic, environmental and social dimensions. Regarding tourism, it is considered that the sustainable development of tourism is achieved, among other things, through the efficient consumption of resources [18]. In other words, in order to achieve sustainable development, it is necessary for tourism service providers and tourists to consume resources efficiently.

Tourist accommodation services are provided by tourist accommodation establishments. In Romania, tourist accommodation establishments are of different types, such as: hotel, apartment hotel, motel, hostel, tourist villa, bungalow, tourist cottage, holiday village, camping, tourist stopover, camping cottages, tourist guesthouse, agro-tourism guesthouse, rooms for rent, ships and floating pontoons [16]. In order to support sustainable development, tourist accommodation establishments have at their disposal an international document of a voluntary but very comprehensive nature, namely the ISO 21401 Standard. The title of the standard is Tourism

and Related Services - Sustainability Management System for Accommodation Units - Requirements [10]. The standard includes activities/practices for each main dimension of sustainable development, that tourist accommodation establishments can put into practice, so as to contribute to sustainable development. Another very comprehensive document is the European System of Tourism Indicators. This document includes a series of indicators that directly target tourist accommodation establishments and which measure whether tourist accommodation establishments fit into the sustainable management of the destination [6]. Most of the specialized studies focus on sustainable environmental practices that tourist accommodation establishments can implement. Thus, within tourist accommodation establishments, the most popular sustainable environmental practices are water saving, energy saving and waste management [13]. On the other hand, given that tourist accommodation establishments are legal entities, they can initiate practices related to Corporate Social Responsibility. In one way or another, initiatives related to Corporate Social Responsibility can be considered sustainable practices [12], and among them can be "gender equality, environmental conservation, charitable donations, supporting local traditions and art, waste management and water conservation" [19, p. 1031]. Other basic sustainable practices that tourist accommodation establishments can implement include selective waste collection, efficient use of water and electricity, use of local products and local labor [11]. Divided by the dimensions of sustainable development, the main sustainable practices related to the environmental dimension, that tourist accommodation establishments can implement are the use of renewable energies, efficient use of water and waste recycling; the main sustainable practices related to the social dimension are the fair treatment of employees and the provision of touristic accommodation services to persons with disabilities; the main sustainable practices related to the economic dimension are the use of local labor and the

use of local products [11]. Certainly, there are other studies that refer to sustainable practices in tourist accommodation establishments, most of them targeting the environmental dimension of sustainable development [5, 8, 9, 14, 17]. Given that most specialized studies focus on the environmental dimension of sustainable development regarding tourist accommodation establishments, it should be noted that tourist accommodation establishments can obtain the European Union's Ecological Label, in so far as it complies with the imposed criteria, more precisely 22 covering criteria and 45 optional criteria [7].

The implementation of sustainable practices by tourist accommodation establishments range of advantages, such as positive public appreciation, which could translate into increased demand for the provided tourist services [2], saving energy [3], attracting a category of tourists who are willing to pay more if the accommodation establishments applies sustainable practices [20]. Based on the specialized literature, it can be admitted that among the main sustainable initiatives, which can be implemented by tourist accommodation establishments, can be included the creation of the opportunity for women to work in the field of tourist accommodation services; ensuring ethnic diversity among employees; providing accommodation for disabled tourists; socio-economic support of the local community; protecting the environment. As a result, the present study will analyze the number of female employees in relation to the number of male employees, the gender of manager of tourist accommodation establishments, the ethnicity of the employees, the capacity of tourist accommodation establishments to accommodate disabled tourists, the origin of the employees, the redistribution of the tax for profit within the local community by tourist accommodation establishments, selective waste collection, water saving and the use of alternative energy sources.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this study is to find out if the tourist accommodation establishments in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties support sustainable development through elementary sustainable practices. Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties are located in the south of Romania, they are plain counties and are crossed by the Danube river. These counties of Romania were chosen for the study because they are little analyzed from a tourism point of view in the specialized literature, although they have tourism potential. The study started from the premise that it is necessary for tourist accommodation establishments to support sustainable development, at least in the light of the following sustainable initiatives: ensuring the opportunity for women to work in the field of tourist accommodation services; ensuring ethnic diversity among employees; providing accommodation for disabled tourists; socio-economic support of the local community; protecting the environment. As a result, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How is the number of female employees compared to the number of male employees in the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties?
2. Do women have a chance to hold a management position in the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties?
3. Is there ethnic diversity among the employees of the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties?
4. Do tourists with disabilities have the opportunity to stay in tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties?
5. Do the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties have the majority of employees from the locality where they are located?
6. Do the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties redistribute the profit tax within the local community (hospitals, churches, schools, etc)?
7. Do the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties selectively collect the waste produced by tourists?

8. Do the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties save water?

9. Do the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties use alternative sources of energy?

In the four counties analyzed, the number of tourist accommodation establishments is 103 [15]. The size of the representative sample was established by means of proportional stratified sampling [4]. The sampling resulted in a sample of 81 tourist accommodation establishments. Data from the 81 tourist accommodation establishments were collected through a questionnaire between February and August 2022. The data were analyzed by means of statistical frequencies, and the results are presented by means of the graphic method. The graphs were created using the Microsoft Excel program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The answer to the research question *How is the number of female employees compared to the number of male employees in the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties?* is that in the majority of tourist accommodation units in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties, the number of female employees is higher than the number of male employees (Fig. 1).

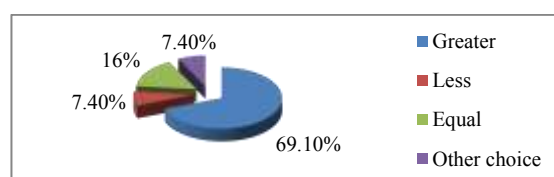


Fig. 1. The number of female employees compared to the number of male employees
Source: Own results.

Thus, the industry of tourist accommodation services in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Telorman counties is specific to women.

The answer to the research question *Are women likely to hold a management position in tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties?* is Yes, as most managers of tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties are females (Fig. 2).

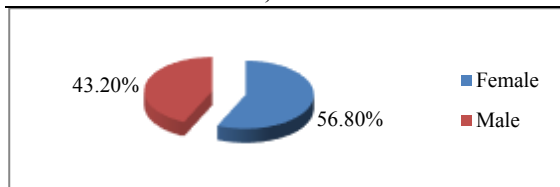


Fig. 2. Gender of the manager
 Source: Own results.

As a result, the tourist accommodation establishments in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties ensure the opportunity for women to work in the field of tourist accommodation services. In other words, it gives them at least the same opportunities as men.

The answer to the research question: Is there ethnic diversity among employees in tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties? is No, because in most tourist accommodation establishments there are only Romanian employees (Fig. 3).

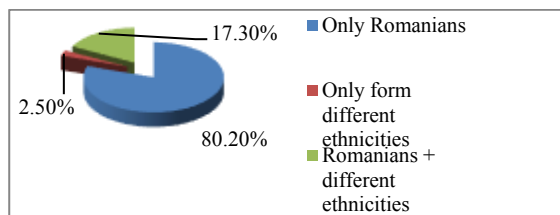


Fig. 3. Ethnicity of employees
 Source: Own results.

As a result, the industry of tourist accommodation services in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties is specific for Romanian employees and less for employees from other ethnicities.

The answer to the research question *Do tourists with disabilities have the opportunity to stay in tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties?* is No, since most of the tourist accommodation establishments in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties do not provide specific facilities to disabled tourists (Fig. 4).

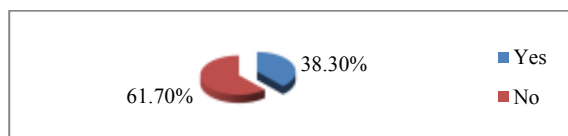


Fig. 4. The ability to make specific facilities available to disabled tourists
 Source: Own results.

As a result, the tourist accommodation establishments in the counties of Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman do not ensure the possibility of accommodation for disabled tourists.

The answer to the research question *Do the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties have majority employees from the locality where they are located?* is No, because in most of the tourist accommodation establishments in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties, the employees come from the locality where the tourist accommodation establishments are located, but also from other localities (Fig. 5).

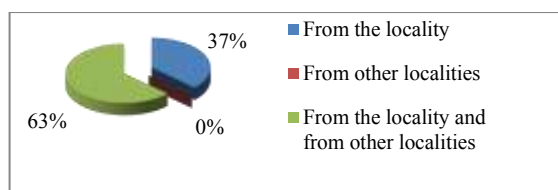


Fig. 5. Origin of employees
 Source: Own results.

The answer to the research question *Do the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties redistribute the profit tax within the local community (hospitals, churches, schools, etc.)?* is No, as most tourist accommodation establishments in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties do not redistribute the profit tax within the local community (Fig. 6).

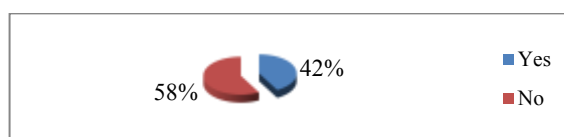


Fig. 6. Redistribution of profit tax within the local community
 Source: Own results.

As a result, based on the analyzed practices, it is found that the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties analyzed provide little support to the local community from a social and economic point of view. The affirmative answer to the research question *Do the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties selectively collect the waste produced by tourists?* is supported by the fact that more than half of the tourist accommodation establishments in

the analyzed counties selectively collect the waste produced by tourists (Fig. 7).

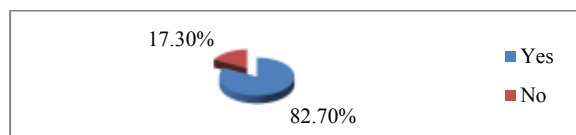


Fig. 7. Selective collection of waste produced by tourists

Source: Own results.

A very large proportion of tourist accommodation establishments selectively collect waste, which means that the managers of tourist accommodation establishments have become aware of the negative impact that waste has on the environment.

The answer to the research question *Do tourist accommodation units in the four counties save water?* is No, since most tourist accommodation establishments in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties do not save water (Fig. 8).

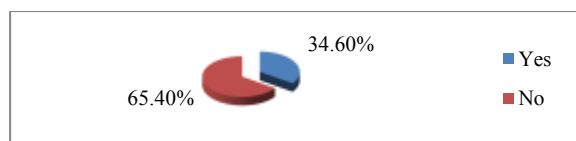


Fig. 8. Saving water

Source: Own results.

This denotes the fact that the managers of tourist accommodation establishments follow the concept that water is a renewable resource, but this concept must not give way to waste and inefficient consumption.

The answer to the research question *Do the tourist accommodation establishments in the four counties use alternative sources of energy?* is No, because most tourist accommodation establishments in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties do not use alternative energy sources (Fig. 9).

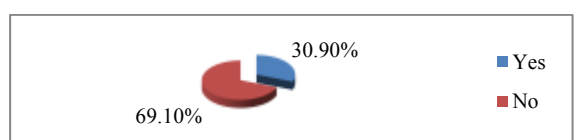


Fig. 9. Use of alternative energy sources

Source: Own results.

This denotes the fact that tourist accommodation establishments are followers of conventional energy sources and pay rather

little attention to alternative energy sources. This can change in the context of an energy crisis, in the sense that due to very high costs, tourist accommodation establishments turn to alternative energy sources.

Failure to apply sustainable practices could bring higher costs to tourist accommodation establishments than if they applied these practices. Consequently, one of the reasons that could lead tourist accommodation establishments to implement sustainable practices could be costs.

CONCLUSIONS

The research has revealed that the field of tourist accommodation services is suitable for women, because the employees in the execution functions, as well as in the management functions, are predominantly female. This shows that gender equality is embraced in one form or another in the tourist accommodation establishments in Calarasi, Giurgiu, Ialomita and Teleorman counties.

On the other hand, considering two other aspects of the social dimension, more precisely the ethnic diversity among employees and the people with disabilities, it is found that these two aspects are impediments for the tourist accommodation establishments in the analyzed counties. As a result, two out of three aspects concerning the social side of sustainable development are not fulfilled, which is why it can be admitted that the tourist accommodation establishments in the analyzed counties are poorly involved in the social side of sustainable development. Also, due to the fact that the tourist accommodation establishments in the analyzed counties do not have the majority of employees from the locality where they are located and do not redistribute the profit tax within the local community, it can be concluded that the involvement in the economic dimension of sustainable development is reduced. Also, it is found that the tourist accommodation establishments in the analyzed counties selectively collect the waste produced by tourists, but they do not save water and do not use alternative energy sources. As a conclusion, the involvement in

the environmental dimension of the sustainable development of tourist accommodation establishments in the analyzed counties is relatively low. Thus, the general involvement of tourist accommodation establishments in the analyzed counties in sustainable development is relatively low.

The limits of the research refer to the number of sustainable practices/initiatives analyzed, in the sense that tourist accommodation units could implement other sustainable practices. This may constitute a new research direction.

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