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THE CHALLENGE OF BEING GREEN - THE MODERN TREND IN THE HOTEL PRODUCT, NEED OR PRESTIGE IN BULGARIA

Ivanka Lulcheva

Agricultural University – Plovdiv, Bulgaria

E-mail: ivanka.lulcheva@yahoo.com

Abstract

The global ecosystem, which includes air, water, soil, habitat of plant and animal species, is daily affected by natural and human factors. Environmental pollution is one of them. It affects people from all over the world equally and will endanger our health if it is not controlled and reduced. This is the reason why countries and international organizations are encouraging industries to make environmental management part of their normal day-to-day operations. There are many industries in the economy that owe their development to natural resources of various kinds, but there seems to be no other industry like tourism that depends so much on the state of nature. All activities in the reception area must comply with the maximum capacity of natural resources to respect the principle of the most economical use of resources. The need for "green" hotels and the sort of requirements a hotel must meet in order to be environmentally friendly; what are its benefits not only for the environment, but also for the economy of the region in which it is located, is now increasingly relevant. Not only eco-organizations, but also many hoteliers and tourists are involved in environmental protection. That is why the future lies in the green hotels. But this alone is not enough, it is necessary to completely change the thinking of tourists, hotel owners and environmental staff and motivate them to follow the developed rules.

The purpose of this article is to identify the need of and provide guidelines for the implementation of sustainable practices for green hospitality in Bulgaria (in Albena Resort, in particular) based on theoretical clarification of the nature of green hotels and analysis of the impact of hotel business on the environment and the established consumer attitudes to green hospitality. The methods used include a review of the specialized literature, an empirical analysis of the information provided by international databases, as well as a survey conducted among users. Based on the analysis of the obtained results, conclusions and recommendations of practical and applied nature have been made.

Keywords: environment, green hotel, attitudes, consumers, sustainable practices.

INTRODUCTION

The green economy is becoming an increasingly important topic in the global development and the development of the European Union. In 2006 the EU renewed its strategy for sustainable development, and in 2009 a package of measures in the field of energy and climate was introduced in accordance with the adopted Europe 2020 Strategy. One of the main topics of Rio + 20

Conference - "The future we want" that took place in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 was "The green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication". In December 2015, after more than two decades of negotiations, governments adopted the first comprehensive agreement to combat climate change during the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris. The new growth strategy aimed at transforming the European Union into a

modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy is the Green Deal, also known as the Green Pact. (<https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019>) This is a set of policies proposed by the European Commission that must make Europe climate-neutral by 2050. All laws are being revised and new ones will be introduced for the circular economy, reducing building consumption, biodiversity, agriculture and innovation. There are a large number of environmental problems that humanity is forced to deal with and look for ways to solve them - the imminent depletion of drinking water on the planet, without residual destruction of waste, removal of radioactive waste from nuclear power plants and other sources of radiation, local and global air pollution, etc. Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) cannot work alone to halt the loss of biodiversity. Policies and regulations that require businesses and consumers to reduce their environmental footprint are important, but not sufficient (Potdar et al., 2016). This is why countries and international organizations are encouraging industries to make environmental management part of their normal day-to-day operations. From a conservation perspective, a major attraction of biodiversity business is the potential to generate new and additional investment in conservation activities. At the same time, some people remain skeptical of the motives of the private sector; while others worry that market-based approaches may distort conservation priorities. (Bishop et al., 2016). There are many industries in the economy that owe their development to natural resources of various kinds, but there seems to be no other industry like tourism that depends so much on the state of nature. The development of tourism is directly dependent on environmental factors and the quality of natural resources (Updated strategy for sustainable development of tourism in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2030). Sustainable tourism aims not only to minimize

the impact on the biological environment, but also to form the views of tourists before and during their trip, as well as to provoke environmentally friendly tourism practices. All activities in the reception area must comply with the maximum capacity of natural resources, i.e. respect the principle of the most economical use of resources.

Tourists are increasingly concerned about nature and this is one of the reasons that forces hoteliers around the world to take measures to protect it. Recent studies show that when choosing a tourist destination and accommodation, it is increasingly important whether the hotel has developed environmental protection program and whether the activities carried out in it are in accordance with the needs of nature. In order to be competitive, they must offer environmentally friendly services and build measures to limit the harmful effects; they must comply with the new requirements and compare the condition of their hotel base with the relevant hotel standards in terms of environmental protection (Asenova & Staneva, 2016).

Due to the later development and acquaintance with the concept of green hospitality in Bulgaria, as well as because of several factors, such as the low level of supervision by the state authorities, the low level of consumer awareness and interest of relevant organizations, there are fewer green hotels in the hotel industry in Bulgaria in comparison with developed countries. Although green development is focused on many industries, the green concept has not spread widely in hotels in the country. In Bulgaria, there are several voluntary certification systems for the sustainable development of tourism enterprises. Some of them belong to larger international certification programs for quality assessment / sustainable development and / or specialized eco-labels (Updated strategy for sustainable development of tourism in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2030). Bulgaria's

external environment is still at the stage of "pollution", and the overall development of green hotels is a long-term process. However, environmental awareness started late and green governance policies are not accurate and adapted for our country; for example, green hotel certificates and ranking standards should refer to existing standards in other countries and summarize Bulgarian standards.

The need for "green" hotels and the requirements a hotel must meet in order to be environmentally friendly; what are its benefits not only for the environment, but also for the economy of the region in which it is located, is increasingly relevant. Not only eco-organizations, but also many hoteliers and tourists are involved in environmental protection. That is why the future lies in the green hotels. But this alone is not enough, it is necessary to completely change the thinking of tourists, hotel owners and environmental staff and motivate them to follow the developed rules.

Consumer trends show a growing general concern about the environment, and an increased tendency to invest in green practices in the hotel industry. Research shows that over 70% of tourists around the world think it is important for hotels to be environmentally friendly and support the local community, and many are willing to pay extra for these things. With the deterioration of the global ecological environment and the growing focus of people on the topic of environmental protection and resources, the strategy for sustainable development of green production and green consumption has received global attention. This has brought various opportunities, such as market space and consumption trends, which are opportunities for the development of green hotels. The question of how to take advantage of the opportunities has an impact on the work and the long-term development of the green hotels in Bulgaria. Bulgarian entrepreneurs in the field of tourism must reorient their policy towards

environmentally friendly production and resource-saving measures to encourage the development of new technologies in waste treatment, water and energy use, harmful emissions, in accordance with the requirements of quality standards. The introduction of sustainable "green" solutions and practices in the hotel industry in Bulgaria is a condition for improving the competitiveness of the hotel industry on both the Bulgarian and international markets. **The purpose** of this article is to identify the need of and provide guidelines for the implementation of sustainable practices for green hospitality in Bulgaria (in particular, Albena Resort) based on theoretical clarification of the nature of green hotels, analysis of the impact of hotel business on the environment and established consumer attitudes to green hospitality.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methods of work used to achieve the goal include a review of the literature on clarifying the essence and content of the "green" hotel concept, empirical analysis of information provided by international and Bulgarian databases, tourist information centers in the studied region, as well as a survey conducted among consumers (in the period 30.06 - 30.11.2020). Based on the synthesis and analysis of the obtained results we have made conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The number of tourists realizing the great importance of environmental issues is constantly growing. As a result, in order to meet the growing demand for "green hotels", the number of eco-entrepreneurial initiatives in the hotel industry is gradually increasing. In the last few years, businesses have been trying to become greener by either participating in certified programs or by maintaining

membership in Green Hotel Associations. Green programs and concepts provide economic and marketing opportunities for hotel companies. They help hotels not only reduce their resource costs, but also stand out in the minds of consumers.

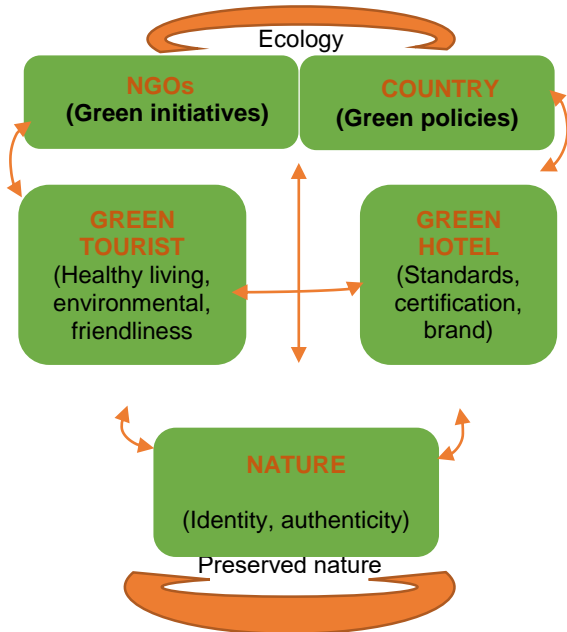


Figure 1. “Green hotel” concept
Source: Developed by the author

Individual organizations, experts and stakeholders make different interpretations of the concept of a green hotel.

Hoteliers in Western European countries have developed systems for assessing the environmental friendliness of the hotel, which determines the level of responsibility for the environment (Stamov & Aleksieva, 2006).

The green hotel usually has to meet the following requirements:

- Dependence on the natural environment;
- Environmental sustainability;
- Proven contribution to the environmental protection;
- Providing training programs in the field of environment;
- Inclusion of cultural considerations;
- Ensuring economic return to the local community.

The Green Hotels Association defines a "green" hotel as an "environmentally friendly facility whose managers are willing to implement programs to save water and energy and reduce solid waste, thus saving money and help protect our planet Earth” (www.greenhotels.com).

Everything stated below about the concept of the "green" hotel is true and reveals its essence:

- A green hotel is one that focuses on the sustainability of its business practices. It differs from other hotels with an emphasis on reducing carbon emissions, water and electricity use, so they try to reduce their impact on the environment as much as possible.

- A green hotel is one that reduces the harmful impact on the environment by reducing its own waste, using less water and energy (Toncheva & Russev, 2017).

- Green hotels, most of them, are built of sustainable or eco-friendly materials and aim to leave a low or zero carbon footprint. They can be located in cities, villages or at places remote from the settlements and they are very similar to eco-hotels.

- A green hotel is a hotel or facility that has made important environmental improvements to its structure to minimize environmental impact.

- Green hotels are environmentally friendly properties whose managers have introduced or are in the process of implementing programs that save water, save energy and reduce solid waste - while saving money - and take care of the environment.

"Green" hotels, as an approach to the positive impact of the hotel industry on the environment aim to:

- Create conditions for the development of sustainable tourism, contributing to the appropriate and controlled use of natural resources, minimizing the harmful effects on the natural environment and preventing risks to the life and health of tourists,

increasing the quality, diversity and uniqueness of the tourist product on the national, regional and local level and promoting the introduction of sustainable practices in tourism.

- Ensure all prerequisites for the sustainable development of tourist resorts and settlements - providing the necessary infrastructure, sufficient in quantity and quality of water, effective mechanisms for waste collection, disposal and / or treatment of waste and wastewater, prevention of excessive and uncontrolled construction, preventing pollution of soils and water sources with solid and liquid waste and air pollution with harmful emissions, pollution of sea beaches and seabed, noise pollution and overall environmental damage, efficient use of the available, natural resources of the tourism industry in the country in accordance with the principles of their protection and restoration, significant reduction of the possible risks associated with the life and health of tourists.

We can summarize the following **definition of a "green" hotel** - a hotel built of sustainable eco materials, which seeks to reduce the harmful impact on the environment, has environmentally friendly management and practices in its activities, strives for controlled and efficient use of natural and anthropogenic resources in accordance with their principles of protection and restoration by offering a competitive and sustainable tourist product.

Although the exact wording of the term "green" hotel has not yet been adopted, we can summarize the distinctive elements of its activity:

- ✓ compliance with the permissible load on the environment, within the limits of which human activity should be adhered to;
- ✓ awareness of the interrelationship between economic activity and the environment;
- ✓ conducting long-term planning and policy, as the sustainable green practice in the hotel industry is a goal that cannot be achieved

immediately;

As there is no international certificate for a "green" hotel, the association for "green" hotels independently issues one, based on its requirements for environmental protection (Marinov, 2011). The requirements are divided into mandatory (37) and optional criteria (47), or a total of 84. The hotel must collect a minimum of 16.5 out of a total of 72 possible points. For energy and water the obligatory criteria are 10, for chemicals - 2, for waste - 5, for management - 8; 17 energy selection criteria (27 in total with the mandatory ones). Below we will present some of the main criteria for "green" hotels. The hotel must meet the criteria not only for the accommodation activity, but also for all other related activities - before and after the accommodation:

1. Staff
2. Water and Energy
3. Recycling and Waste
4. Building Maintenance
5. Food Services
6. Garden
7. Gift Shop
8. Guests and Guest Rooms
9. Purchases

Green hotels need to implement Green Solutions, which are designed to help them reduce their energy/ water consumption and waste and improve their impact on the environment. From the use of intelligent design and innovative systems, every single thing that hotels do to be sustainable can go a long way to protecting our planet. Staying at these hotels means that guests are part of a worldwide effort to protect the environment.

For the development of the ideas for undertaking measures for protection and preservation of the environment, it is necessary to highlight the benefits and harms of the hotel activity on the environment. On this basis, managers formulate their goals and objectives for the implementation of the planned measures to improve the impact of their activities on the

environment. The main goal of every green hotel manager for a successful and marketable hotel product is a clean environment through systems of measures to protect natural resources. The funds that would be invested in the implementation of the tasks have a return in the near future and will ensure the higher competitiveness of these managers in the hotel business. At the same time, the economic power of tourism industry is the main prerequisite for realizing the benefits of protection and development of the natural and cultural environment.

Benefits and harms as a result of the hotel business

Possible negative impact on the environment:

- Changes in the ecosystems when using the land for the development of the super structure of the hotel - very often the expansion of the hotel part is undertaken, related to excavation activities, activities for felling of wood vegetation, etc.; air pollution and noise. Tourism involves a variety of modes of transport and energy production which is an addition to the global harmful deposits of greenhouse gas fumes. In addition, noise pollution from various modes of transport, including entertainment, such as jets, yachts, snowmobiles, etc., disrupts and confuses local wildlife populations;

- Waste, harmful emissions, excessive use of water and energy. Wastewater from hotels, resorts, and other tourist activities;

- Excessive or uneven development of individual regions;

- The use of local construction (exhaustible) materials, which also leads to changes in the ecosystems. For example, the use of stones, gravel and sand from the rivers.

Environmental benefits from the development of the hotel industry:

- Economic benefit and conservation

of resources that in another industry do not have a certain value for the local population and will represent a cost rather than a benefit;

- Natural protection of primary resources and man-made resources for the development of tourism industry due to their long-term use to generate economic results from the revenues that visitors to a destination leave (e.g. the visit of tourists to cultural attractions, nature parks, museum, etc. and the payment of fees allows these sights to be maintained and preserved);

- Opportunities for each business in tourism industry to communicate directly with visitors to the destination regarding the qualities of nature and the environment and thus support the creation of a new environmentally responsible generation;

- Reconstruction and development of the environment and cultural environment with deteriorated qualities from the development of other industries or its practical non-use for the purpose of offering for tourist visits;

- Development of new more favorable economic activities for the local population related to the business activities of tourism industry - agriculture, winemaking, production of eco-products, fishing, various additional services, trade in souvenirs, local crafts, etc. As a result, the living standard of the population in the host destination is improved as new jobs are created;

- Encouraging the development of new technologies in waste treatment, water and energy use, harmful emissions in accordance with the requirements of quality standards.

There are already growing public expectations for social engagement on the part of business. Many hotel owners in Bulgaria find it difficult to see themselves in the role of implementing eco business practices in their activities: they are convinced that it does not actively use the resources of the land, does not produce any of them, but on the contrary – it

leads people to nature, where they enjoy it. But when these people are over 650 million a year and growing from year to year, the imprint of this industry is very serious - the consumption of food, energy, transport to a certain place, all this puts it on the list of destroyers of nature. Precisely because tourism depends entirely on the services provided by nature, it must choose whether to contribute to its degradation or protection.

The development of the tourism sector causes additional burden on the environment in the objects of tourism through the use of transport, water, land, energy, pollution with waste, additional housing for rest. Threats to the environment increase when the tourism activity is concentrated in a relatively short period of the year and in small spaces. The negative effect may be exacerbated if there is a parallel impact on the environment from other economic sectors - agriculture, industry, and fishing or due to the growth of settlements.

The impact of tourism and leisure on the environment is specific and everywhere depends on various factors: type of tourism, size of the area, number of visitors, seasonal concentration of tourists, types of transport used, impact of the local economy, use of resources, waste treatment, quality of management of the tourist activity. Some measures to mitigate its impact on the environment in heavily visited areas (such as parking restrictions) often cause problems to be transferred to other neighboring areas.

Impact of tourism on coastal areas:

- Unplanned construction of hotels and tourist establishments, ignoring the requirements for aesthetics and compliance with the local architecture, which leads to a violation of the general appearance;
- Destruction of plant and animal habitats and reduction of biological diversity;
- Lack of sewerage and wastewater treatment;
- Unsustainable use of natural

resources - overconsumption of drinking water and depletion of the fish population;

- Loading traffic along the coast and exerting pressure to build new roads and parking spaces;
- Changes in local traditions and way of life.

The impact on the environment can be classified into several levels:

- Locally - local people suffer from the lack of resources (drinking water and land), air and water pollution, noise and environmental incidents;
- At the regional level - impacts may include air and water pollution, habitat destruction and biodiversity loss;
- Globally - emissions from transport and deforestation can lead to climate change.

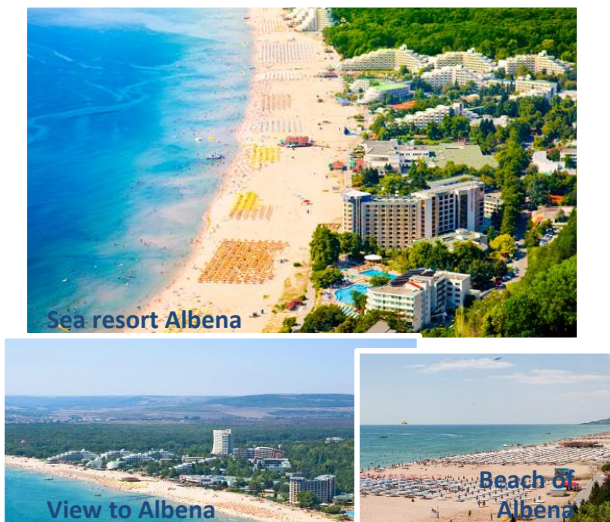
Many seaside resorts, both in Europe and in Bulgaria, suffer from the excessive development of mass tourism. The problems are caused by the mass gathering of a large number of tourists, the construction of new hotels and restaurants, the increase of liquid and solid waste and traffic. Some mitigation can be achieved through the application of zoning and urban planning measures, as well as through the application of the concept of "green" hotels and restaurants.



Picture 1. Map of Bulgaria

Albena Resort, located on the northern

Black Sea coast of Bulgaria, in the Balchik Municipality, is situated 12 km from Balchik and 30 km from Varna. Albena is focused on integrating environmental sustainability into all activities, including architecture and construction, hotel operation and supply. A number of initiatives and practices have been introduced to reduce energy consumption, water consumption and waste, while databases and system monitoring help tracking consumption and monitoring progress towards the set targets.



Picture 2. Sea resort Albena

With the help and collaboration among suppliers, business partners and guests, we work actively to reduce the environmental impact and business risk, focusing on critical areas, including carbon emissions, energy, food and beverages, the quality of the environment inside the hotel, the supply chain, waste and water. The resort is committed to integrating leading environmental practices and principles of sustainable development. One euro from each night is invested in the green fund of Albena resort, which sponsors eco-projects of different nature. Albena is the only Bulgarian resort with its own meteorological station, equipped with measuring equipment for year-round observations of sunshine, ultraviolet radiation, temperature and humidity, sea water temperature, air quality and more.

Energy efficiency and renewable energy sources are a great opportunity for the tourism sector to reduce operating costs, improve economic performance and increase competitiveness (<https://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/projects/sites/iee-projects/files/projects/>).

The hotels in Albena have a total of over 3000 sq.m. solar panels for generating domestic hot water. In addition, an installation for the production of biogas from energy crops and organic waste has been built, which creates clean green energy and high quality fertilizers. The capacity of the resort today is 14,900 beds, distributed in 43 hotel complexes, 4 holiday villages and a campsite with a category of 2 to 4 stars, over 100 restaurants, sports and recreation centers, spa complexes, pharmacies, parking lots, casinos, a post office branch, shops, bazaars, banks and a number of attractions, a congress center. Currently in the resort Albena there are 11 hotels with the status of a "green" hotel included in the RELACS network.

Albena Resort aims at:

- Protection of the unique biodiversity - protection of the biodiversity in the Baltata reserve and the unique natural environment in the complex.
- Cleanliness of the beach and sea water - the beach of Albena is 5-star, a winner of the Blue Flag award for cleanliness of sand and sea water.
- Limiting harmful emissions into the air - restricts car traffic using Eco alternatives for domestic transport - electric bus and escalator.
- Use of mineral water - the water used in the hotels, restaurants and swimming pools of Albena is mineral, hypothermal, with very good indications for arthro-rheumatic and nervous diseases.
- Own Eco production - 50% of the fresh fruits, vegetables, juice and wine offered in the restaurants of Albena come from their own gardens.

Use of renewable energy - the complex has over 3000 sq.m. solar panels used for water heating.

- Waste management - an installation for the production of biogas from organic waste has been built, which creates clean green energy and high quality fertilizers.

- Social responsibility - the regional infrastructure and the well-being of the local population are improved.

- Sports and recreation – the complex offers some of the best opportunities for tennis, football, horseback riding, swimming, hiking and biking tours, beach and water sports, spa, spa and wellness.

- Health and safety - a healthy and safe environment is provided to all guests and employees.

Environmental issues are increasingly engaging the people working in tourism business. They are directly linked to the results of their economic activity, because the damage to nature, which is unfortunately one of the main disadvantages of tourism, raises serious questions about the survival and sustainable development of tourism industry. The idea is that the future of tourism is related to the efforts to preserve the integrity of nature and maintain the ecological balance in the natural environment.

Survey of consumer attitudes

The study was conducted on the basis of the data obtained from the tourist info center in the sea capital of Bulgaria - Varna and from the visitors' center in the resort "Albena".

According to the survey, the positive attitude towards the green hotels is most pronounced among the tourists from France (42.8%) and Germany (36.2%). The results of the study show that sites whose policy is aimed at nature conservation are preferred by the high-income tourists, those with higher education and retirees. 30% of the respondents state that they are looking for distinctive signs or plates pointing that a specific tourist site belongs to an

eco-organization or it is green. 75.6% of the tourists prefer to use environmentally friendly transport. The need for ecological information service for tourists is established. The foreign guests of the resort want the hotels to have advertising and information materials / brochures / guides, about both the local nature and the ecological behavior of the tourists - protection of endangered species, and they prefer souvenirs made of natural materials, but not taken from the wild, according to the research data.

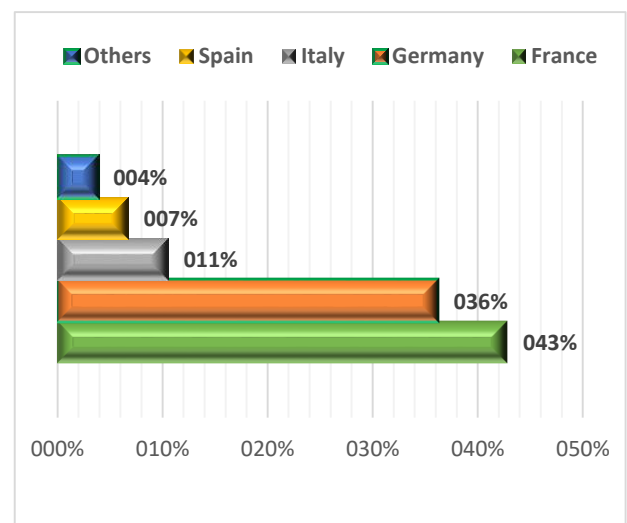


Figure 2. Positive attitude of tourists to green hotels in Albena resort

Source: Developed by the author

56% of the participants in the survey indicate that energy saving is the most important thing for green hotels. Sustainable practices that can be used include the automated switching on / off lighting, providing part of the energy from renewable energy sources, 11% - reduction of water use. 32% believe that waste control is most important, stating that waste management should be understood not only as separate collection, composting or transfer for recycling, but also as planning of the generated waste, for example, by avoiding disposable packaging use.

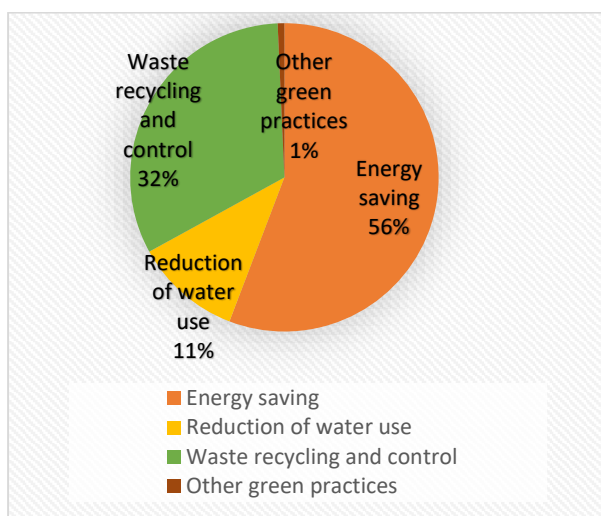


Figure 3. Preferences of tourists in terms of green practices implemented in the hotel
 Source: Developed by the author

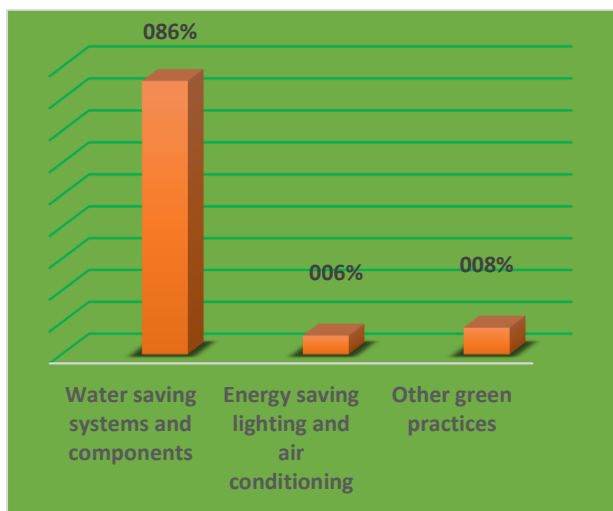


Figure 4. Implemented green practices from the hoteliers in Albena resort
 Source: Developed by the author

However, the concept of green hotels is partly accepted by the local hoteliers. Very few of the hotel sites (5.9%) use water-saving systems and components - faucets with photocells, low-pressure showers, water-saving aerators and others. 85.7% of the local hotels use energy-saving lighting and air conditioning. 8.9% of the sites have implemented in their activity other sustainable green practices such as recycling of waste, landscaping of the areas around the hotel, use of environmentally

friendly transport and others. Most of the accommodation places do not use a system for separate waste collection, there is no information awareness for the guests about the benefits, and there are no special waste bins in the hotel rooms and restaurants.

According to experts, the orientation of the industry to green policy is a more expensive investment, which, however, will pay off many times over. Efficiency increases: use of fewer resources per unit of "product"; reducing waste leads to reduced costs. Millions of tourists are ecologically oriented and are willing to pay more for an eco-holiday. In terms of social benefits, the development of green hotels effectively helps consumers to better understand the concept of environmental protection and create a healthy, safe and ecological environment for consumers; the trust of customers, society and employees increases.

CONCLUSION

Green hotels are models of environmentally friendly hotels that are of great importance to society, business and consumers. As a result, green hotels are attracting more and more business attention and many traditional hotels are expected to become green hotels. The certification of a hotel leads to an increase in its value, its competitiveness and represents an investment in sustainable development.

Hotels should be managed and used in such a way as to minimize their negative impact on the environment. To achieve this, changes are necessary in the adequate management of the whole process. The goal of every owner is to get maximum profit. It is the investment in the new technologies that offers solutions for saving energy/water and waste recycling that will lead to significant cost reductions.

Bulgarian consumers have a wait-and-see attitude towards green hotels. That is, they compare green hotels with traditional hotels, monitor facilities in green hotels, assess whether

this type of hotel can meet their demand and whether it is better than the traditional hotel, and then decide whether to support the development of green hotels. Paying more attention to the concept of convenience rather than protecting the environment limits the development of green hotels.

For the reputation of a hotel, the introduction of green sustainable practices in its activities is conducive to improving its public image and popularity. Bulgaria, as an EU member state, follows a number of European regulations and policies aimed at environmental protection. Green hotel activities allow customers to feel that the hotel is committed to providing quality services while protecting the environment, which can gain the respect and trust of customers by improving its public image and popularity by forming a green brand.

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