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THE IMPORTANCE OF GREEN PROCUREMENT AND RESPONSIBLE ECONOMY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: HOSPITALITY OF SERBIA

Značaj zelene nabavke i odgovorne ekonomije u održivom turističkom razvoju – hotelijerstvo Srbije

Abstract

Green procurement or responsible economy represents a production process which takes into account environmental, economic, social and ethical issues. These would, at the same time, be the basic postulates of sustainable development. The tourism market, whose consumers today have very specific needs, takes part in such a responsible economy. Tourists turn to the environmental forms of tourism. Such forms include activities focused on improvement of the values of environmental elements. This implies the selection of accommodation in environmentally responsible hotels and other facilities, directing of their business operations towards green procurement, eco-labelling and responsible economy in general. This research included the collection of data on responsible economy by surveying 50 hotels situated in Serbia. The hotels which are not sufficiently implementing responsible procurement into their business operate in the Republic of Serbia. Also, only a small number of facilities belonging to the tourism and hospitality industry possess eco-labels as the warranties of green and responsible business. What is significant is the fact that the tendency of environmental awareness to increase and its significance in the economic sphere are present in a great number of hotels in Serbia, which is demonstrated by this paper's research results.

Keywords: *responsible procurement, green economy, eco-labelling, sustainable tourism development.*

Sažetak

Zelena nabavka ili odgovorna ekonomija predstavlja proizvodni proces u okviru kojeg se uzimaju u obzir ekološka, ekonomska, socijalna i etička pitanja. To bi istovremeno bili osnovni postulati održivog razvoja. Turističko tržište, čiji potrošači danas imaju vrlo specifične potrebe, učestvuje u takvoj odgovornoj ekonomiji. Turisti se okreću ekološkim oblicima turizma. Ti oblici uključuju aktivnosti usmerene na poboljšanje vrednosti elemenata životne sredine. To podrazumeva izbor smeštaja u ekološki odgovornim hotelima i drugim objektima, usmeravanje njihovog poslovanja ka zelenim nabavkama, ekološkom etiketiranju i odgovornoj ekonomiji uopšte. Ovo istraživanje je obuhvatilo prikupljanje podataka o odgovornoj ekonomiji od 50 hotela smeštenih u Srbiji. Hoteli koji još uvek nedovoljno implementiraju odgovornu nabavku u svoje poslovanje posluju upravo u Republici Srbiji. Takođe, mali broj objekata koji pripada industriji turizma i ugostiteljstva poseduje ekološke sertifikate kao garancije zelenog i odgovornog poslovanja. Ono što je značajno jeste činjenica da je tendencija povećanja ekološke svesti i njen značaj u ekonomskoj sferi prisutan u velikom broju hotela u Srbiji, a to pokazuju i rezultati istraživanja u ovom radu.

Ključne reči: *odgovorna nabavka, zelena ekonomija, eko-sertifikati, održivi turistički razvoj.*

Introduction

Besides being oriented towards sustainable development, these hotels strive to achieve significant resource savings and reduction of business costs [21], [14]. Green procurement today is the symbol of such a hotel. A great number of facilities of the tourism and hospitality industry in the world market aspires to such a successful working process [2]. Green (responsible) procurement is characterised by the following:

- quality [28];
- energy efficiency;
- exclusion of dangerous substances;
- recycling;
- significant share of organic products [8];
- eco-labels and labelling schemes;
- gradual implementation;
- improvement of supply channels;
- financing of "green" and "eco" funds;
- renewable use of energy and raw materials [50];
- improving national economic [18], etc.

When the term "green economy" is identified with the business operations of certain market subjects, then it can be concluded that certain criteria of sustainable development have been fulfilled [41]. Hotels and other tourism facilities, by carrying out business operations connected to green procurement, represent the significant indicator of sustainable tourism development [13]. The main objectives of sustainable tourism development are achieving ecological, economic and socio-cultural benefits at certain tourist destinations, regions or countries [35].

The first hypothesis in this paper is that hotels in Serbia operate according to green procurement principles. The research will, also, determine the second hypothesis, i.e., whether the hoteliers are environmentally conscious and ready to improve their business operations to support green procurement, eco-labelling, responsible economy and sustainable development. The objective of this paper is to demonstrate that obtained results can represent a significant sample for comparing the business operations in the tourism and hospitality industry in the Republic of Serbia, and have great significance for domestic and foreign tourists coming from the countries of the region,

as well (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and other European and world countries). It follows from all the abovementioned that this research will give results that are significant at the national and international level.

Literature review

In the tourism and hospitality industry, a green economy, responsible procurement and eco-labelling are the important elements of business operations benefiting sustainable development [12]. Environmental awareness regarding the use and procurement of ecological products and services takes an important place in the world economy [46]. Today, tourism is an important economic factor in the green economy [40], and therefore it should be considered as an initiator of green procurement and labelling in the responsible consumption [4]. Green procurement not only encourages the consumption and use of environmentally acceptable products and services on the wider market, but encourages the innovations, introduction and spreading of new and sustainable products, technologies and business models in tourism [11], [45]. Labelling, as the method in tourism, provides the written warranty that hotel or another tourist facility fulfils certain standards satisfying or exceeding the basic classical standards [9]. The most significant activities under the labelling procedure for tourism eco-labelling include application, verification, labelling and marketing [26]. Labelling in tourism, and especially ecotourism achieves a lot of positive effects [16], [37]. Eco-labels are the way to standardise "green" or "eco" products which are to be easily recognised, as such, by the trademark [31]. Since eco-labels have been implemented according to modern programmes, they have had the function of a managerial tool bringing a wide range of benefits [22]. Depending on the perspective, green procurement and eco-labels can also be a marketing tool for hotel companies, a deciding factor for the consumers, but also a voluntary instrument of environmental management for governmental and non-governmental organisations. One of the postulates of green procurement is that achieving business results cannot disregard the constant minimising of environmental impacts [19], [27]. Green procurement

must include green suppliers in its system, in addition to products and consumers [7]. Eco-labelling represents a guide for the consumers, i.e., tourists during decision making regarding spending, helping them to find and recognise responsible service providers, who have harmonised their business operations with sustainable development [17]. Achieving positive ecological, economic and socio-cultural effects represents key principles of sustainable development [42].

Green procurement and eco-labelling at the tourism market are aimed at promoting the concept of business that protects the environment and saves its resources [36]. Besides, tourist companies have to provide significant proof in order to create confidence in their "green" consumers [20]. Tourism development caused diversification of demand, offer and market [48].

Green (responsible) procurement in the hospitality industry and tourism represents a process in which very different and specific decisions are made. During green procurement decision making, ecological, social and ethical principles must be taken into consideration. Green procurement considers the options as regards the following:

- reasons for certain product procurement [30];
- what certain products are made of;
- under what conditions products have been manufactured;
- the way they have been packed;
- who they are intended for;
- the way they will be used;
- the way they will be stored;
- the way they will be disposed of after use [47].

Green procurement decisions can have significant ecological and social effects, especially in the tourism and hospitality sector. Representatives of these sectors are often under pressure of importing a great number of products, including food from far away countries, to fulfil the greater demands of the users. On the other hand, consumers in tourism are precisely interested in green procurement. Tourists are more and more interested in environmentally sustainable products and services which do not affect the environment. Such are the products made of environmentally friendly and biodegradable materials, organic food for the hospitality industry, props, facilities constructed following standards of significant

environmental principles, environmental aspects of transport, activities for environmental protection, etc. Eco-labelling of the responsible economy represents the warranty for green procurement and consumption. That means that hotels implementing green procurement business policy achieve significant business results based on commercial, environmental and social sustainability. At the same time, that is the basic postulate of sustainable tourism development [44].

Very significant international standards for eco-management in the hospitality industry are ISO 14001 and EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) [49]. They are the symbols of eco-production and the sale of goods or services concept [25]. Both are designed for the industry and they extended their activities to the service sector, too, which includes tourism and hospitality. ISO 14001 and EMAS refer to the responsibilities undertaken as part of business operations under environmental concepts [39]. They focus on the following:

- environmental management system;
- defining of sustainable development;
- identification of environmental impacts;
- legal requirements;
- management programmes;
- implementation and application of environmental protection;
- monitoring and corrective measures;
- continuous improvement and assessment of the business by different market subjects [21].

Besides responsible procurement, green consumption also takes a very significant place in hospitality. It is a "new" form of consumption of products that are natural and environmentally friendly. Lately, green consumption has had a significant place in tourism and hospitality [6]. Possession of certificates, obtained by responsible business operators, is the proof of verification that certain company operates under the environmental requirements [32].

In tourism and hospitality, the most significant certificates of green procurement and consumption are as follows:

1) The *Green Globe 21*, established by the World Travel and Tourism Council in 1994 [38]. The original form of Green Globe dates back to the 1992 Summit

of the United Nations dedicated to sustainable development, held in Rio de Janeiro. The Agenda 21 was adopted then, a document considered as the base for the enactment of sustainable development measures around the world [34]. In 1999, the Green Globe 21 was transformed into an independent profit global organisation, and in 2008 it was united with the company Green Globe International from the USA. This certificate operates within the certification standards for 22 production sectors in tourism and hospitality. These include tour operators, travel organisations, hotels and hotel resorts, sports grounds, facilities of MICE tourism, different restaurants and other sectors [26].

2) The *Green Key* is the eco-label for tourist facilities whose business is aimed at contributing to the prevention of climate change and helping sustainable tourism development [23]. It was established in Denmark, in 1994, by HORESTA (Association of the Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Industry in Denmark) [34].

3) The *EU Ecolabel* was established in 1992 to encourage the industrial sector to decrease the environmental impact of the products and services during their life cycle, from the production of raw materials through consumption and use to the final disposal [29]. The EU Ecolabel includes cleaning products, different devices, paper products, textile products, household products and cleaning products for premises, and also, the products directly connected to accommodation services in the hospitality industry [15]. It represents the limit of responsible business as regards the environment [5]. The EU Ecolabel is the label assigned to the products and services fulfilling the high standards of environmental protection, through all stages of their production and consumption cycle. This includes obtaining primary raw material, production, distribution and waste disposal.

4) The *Green Leaf* was introduced by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). Its purpose is the support to businesses in the area of tourism,

together with monitoring environmentally responsible actions. In addition, a certificate in business includes the assistance to consumers during the selection of products in compliance with the set criteria of environmental preservation [38].

5) The *Green Suitcase* was the first in introducing ecotourism in Europe. It is aimed at establishing the standards of environmental protection in tourism centres, accommodation and catering facilities and travel agencies, operating within Europe [9].

Research methodology

Facilities for the provision of accommodation and catering services which do not have certain business certificates and do not implement green procurement sufficiently still operate in the Republic of Serbia. The tendency of improving business to obtain certain certificates of the green economy is getting significantly stronger. The reason for this is the response to the more subtle needs of tourists, who rapidly develop their environmental awareness [24]. Special attention of the industry is directed towards the certification and labelling of food and raw materials [1]. Possession of a certain certificate and implementation of green procurement in business represent the warranty for making a profit [3]. Research data used in this paper were obtained by electronic data collection through an online questionnaire, in which the persons in charge of the hotels responded to the questions asked. The questions referred to the representation of green (responsible) procurement, eco-labelling and green consumption within the business operations. The survey was carried out in 2020. The obtained results were examined and tabulated by applying descriptive data analysis using SPSS software. The differences obtained in certain responses were examined by the one-sample t-test analysis. The existence of variables was examined by the Pearson correlation method, in order to determine if the model of obtained differences was relevant for the result analysis. A number of 50 randomly selected hotels represent a small but significant sample for the analysis of the current state of the hotel market in the Republic of

Serbia. Analysis of the questionnaire responses can help draw conclusions regarding the current state of green procurement, possession of certificates and responsible economy in the hospitality industry of Serbia. Results can also be used for further research studies regarding these areas of the hospitality business.

Results and discussion

All questionnaires were valid and completed properly. The representatives of the hotels were asked to answer questions related to the responsible procurement, possession of certificates, and significance of the green economy in the hotel business operations. The analysis of responses, studies, and the answers of the respondents are ranked with marks 1 or 2, whereby the answer under number 1 refers to the negative statement and the answer under number 2 refers to the positive statement. The structure of the surveyed hotels can be seen in Table 1.

Cities where the hotels are located are the biggest cities in Serbia and they have significant tourist visits. A hotel in Niš with 37 beds has the minimum capacity

among the surveyed hotels, while another selected hotel, also in Niš, has the maximum capacity of 400 beds. All hotels are city type hotels and they are located in central parts of the city.

Respondents were asked nine questions, sent to them by electronic mail, referring to green procurement, labelling and business in accordance with environmental standards. The questions are shown in Table 2.

Structure of the responses as regards the responsible procurement topics is shown in Table 3.

By analysing the responses with expressed differences, it can be concluded that only 17 hotels have the restaurant serving meals prepared with organically-produced food. A total of 26 hotels classify their waste, 24 hotels recycle different raw materials, and 25 hotels use renewable sources of energy. A total of 42 hotels tend to include the procurement of work tools made of eco-materials into their business operations. Only 14 facilities of the total number of the surveyed facilities have certain eco-labels. It should be emphasised that business characterised by the green (responsible) procurement is not connected only to facilities of high categories or greater accommodation

Table 1: Structure of respondents (hotels)

Hotel rating	Frequency	Percent	City	Frequency	Percent
2[*]	9	18	Belgrade	17	34
3[*]	14	28	Kragujevac	7	14
4[*]	18	36	Niš	13	26
5[*]	9	18	Novi Sad	13	26
Total	50	100	Total	50	100
	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. deviation
Hotel rating	50	2	5	3.56	1.013
Beds	8,511	37	400	170.22	104.417

Source: Authors' calculation.

Table 2: Questions from the questionnaire

N	Green procurement topics
n_1	The hotel has a restaurant with organic food
n_2	The hotel tends to procure work tools made of eco-materials
n_3	The hotel classifies the waste
n_4	The hotel recycles different raw materials
n_5	The hotel has eco-labels
n_6	Do you think that possession of eco-labels can help the business be more successful?
n_7	The hotel allocates funds for environmental actions
n_8	The hotel tends to implement green procurement
n_9	The hotel uses renewable sources of energy

capacity. Of 26 hotels which classify their waste, six are 2-star facilities, three are 3-star facilities, eight are 4-star facilities, and nine are 5-star facilities. A similar situation is with hotels that recycle. Using renewable energy sources is a business characteristic of high category hotels.

The obtained results show that the awareness of green procurement, consumption and possession of certain eco-labels is developing in all the surveyed hotels, particularly within the management and business planning. The most important is that all facilities have the business tendency to follow green procurement and green economy. This is indicated by all positive responses to questions n_6, n7 and n8.

A total of six questions with certain differences in given responses can be examined by the one-sample t-test analysis (Table 4).

Based on the results of the one-sample t-test analysis it can be concluded that there are statistically significant differences in six given responses regarding the presence of certain statements within the asked questions.

Those statistically significant differences in six given responses can be examined by the Pearson correlation analysis, which determines whether the model of obtained statistically significant differences relevant for making a

conclusion if the intentions of respondents are directed towards the tendency that all responses are identical to the responses to questions n_6, n_7 and n_8 (Table 5).

Correlation results show that the respondents have a tendency that expressed differences in responses be equal to the responses to questions n_6, n_7 and n_8. Such result shows that a significant number of the total number of the surveyed hotels in the Republic of Serbia still have not fully adjusted their business operations to green (responsible) procurement, eco-labelling and green economy, which would confirm basic postulates of sustainable development. Given that 50 hotel facilities of different capacity and category from the biggest cities of Serbia have been surveyed, it can be assumed that the number of surveyed facilities represents a significant sample for the analysis of business operations of hotel companies in the Republic of Serbia. As the positive responses in statements have been expressed within three questions (n_6, n7 and n_8) the surveyed facilities were asked to answer, it can be concluded that such responsible business operations represent the intentions in the future work of all the surveyed hotels. This has been confirmed by the employed research methods.

Table 3: Responses of the respondents

n	N	Range	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Std. deviation	Variance
n_1	50	1	1	2	67	1.34	.479	.229
n_2	50	1	1	2	92	1.84	.370	.137
n_3	50	1	1	2	76	1.52	.505	.255
n_4	50	1	1	2	74	1.48	.505	.255
n_5	50	1	1	2	64	1.28	.454	.206
n_6	50	0	2	2	100	2.00	.000	.000
n_7	50	0	2	2	100	2.00	.000	.000
n_8	50	0	2	2	100	2.00	.000	.000
n_9	50	1	1	2	75	1.50	.505	.255
Valid N	50							

Source: Authors' calculation.

Table 4: One-sample t-test

n	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
n_1	19.801	49	.000	1.34	1.20	1.48
n_2	35.133	49	.000	1.84	1.73	1.95
n_3	21.297	49	.000	1.52	1.38	1.66
n_4	20.737	49	.000	1.48	1.34	1.62
n_5	19.956	49	.000	1.28	1.15	1.41
n_9	21.000	49	.000	1.50	1.36	1.64

Source: Authors' calculation.

The obtained results are significant for the comparative analysis of business operations in the tourism and hospitality industry in the Republic of Serbia. It can be inferred that the understanding of the green procurement significance is present in the hospitality industry, because such business surely provides a profit [10]. This refers to the data implying that a small number of facilities implement green procurement and have eco-labels. What is important is to observe the intensive increase in environmental awareness of hoteliers. They have intentions to harmonise their business operations in the future with environmentally sustainable business practices and a green economy. The obtained results can have great significance in domestic and foreign tourism. The Republic of Serbia is getting more frequently visited by tourists from the region's countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and other European and world countries, too.

Conclusion

The tourism industry depends on global trends in the tourism market influencing both the type of demanded products and further directions of tourism development. That is why successful businessmen should take

into account the following: increased demand for the preserved natural environment, good traffic connections, infrastructure built in conformity with the environment, as well as the sustainable development of tourist destinations. Such business activity affects the adequate assessment of the market, the proper policy of presence at the market and placement of tourism products. Besides, special care should be taken of the sustainability of the tourism products, too, in the sphere of the eco-destination existence. Such tourism products must fulfil the needs of tourists, the local community and tour operators, as well. Tourism products, conceived in such a way, can make a profit for tourist companies regarding the market demands.

Ethical consumerism has widely been present in the world and it is manifested through the ethical selection of products. The tourism industry, basically, has the economic aspects of business, which should be observed from different points of view during green procurement and creating of tourism eco-product. It is obvious that big companies which do not take care of the green economy are starting to lose clients, who even boycott the products of the companies which do not show sufficient ethical awareness of green procurement. When it comes to tourism, the great demand for responsible tourism all

Table 5: The Pearson correlation

		n_1	n_2	n_3	n_4	n_5	n_9
n_1	Pearson correlation	1	0.083	0.014	0.325*	0.211	0.296*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.567	0.926	0.021	0.142	0.037
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
n_2	Pearson correlation	0.083	1	0.017	0.310*	0.029	0.109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.567		0.904	0.028	0.841	0.451
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
n_3	Pearson correlation	0.014	0.017	1	0.042	0.064	-0.160
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.926	0.904		0.774	0.658	0.267
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
n_4	Pearson correlation	0.325*	0.310*	0.042	1	0.203	0.801**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.021	0.028	0.774		0.157	0.000
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
n_5	Pearson correlation	0.211	0.029	0.064	0.203	1	0.178
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.142	0.841	0.658	0.157		0.216
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50
n_9	Pearson correlation	0.296*	0.109	-0.160	0.801**	0.178	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.037	0.451	0.267	0.000	0.216	
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: Authors' calculation.

around the world is obvious. That is why the use of green procurement in tourism is inevitable.

This research has dealt with the problems of domestic hotels, and not hotels as parts of major hotel chains, with desire to get a real insight into the hospitality industry in Serbia and its participation in green, i.e., responsible procurement. The obtained results, representing the beginning of a comprehensive research of the entire hospitality industry, show both the positive and negative elements of business operations of this part of the tourism market. It is obvious that hospitality and catering facilities, which do not have certain business certificates and do not implement green procurement sufficiently, still operate in the Republic of Serbia. That means that the first hypothesis in this paper is partially confirmed. The deficiencies in the work of a part of the hospitality industry in Serbia are manifested through the insufficient use of organic products as well as insufficient use of eco-materials. Besides, the problem of waste recycling, sorting of packaging, use of alternative sources of energy are some of the problems the hospitality industry in Serbia is faced with. This must change if we want to be the country desirable for tourist visits, because tourism is not an isolated activity. It is the activity which, first of all, demands the synergy of resources, eco-procurements, as well as environmental postulates in its development. The tendency of improving tourism industry business operations to obtain certain certificates of the green economy has been getting significantly stronger in the last few years.

The obtained research results in this paper show that the awareness of green procurement, consumption and possession of certain eco-labels is developing in all surveyed hotels, more precisely within the management and business planning. The most important is that all facilities have the business tendency to pursue green procurement and green economy. This confirms the second hypothesis of this research, i.e., to prove whether green procurement is present in the hospitality industry in Serbia and whether the hoteliers' awareness of the green economy significance is being developed. The experiences of tourists visiting hotels in the Republic of Serbia, regarding the selection of hotels operating according to green procurement principles, will be shown in future research studies.

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