THE HOSPITALITY BUSINESS COMMUNICATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF GUESTS’ RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR AND THEIR DIVERSE RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development in the hospitality industry seeks to reconcile economy and ecology, environment and development, protection of social and cultural identities (Simmons, 1999). In all three pillars of sustainable development, the demand side of the hospitality business has received far less attention in the discussion than the production side. There seems, however, little doubt that the hotel guest is equally as important for achieving sustainability. Also, if many consumers perceive themselves as being concerned about all aspects of sustainability, they do not necessarily engage in environmentally sensitive behaviour.

To develop a better understanding of sustainability friendly behaviours, one needs to identify demographic, psychological and social factors that may influence a sustainable conscious behaviour and among them the question of diversity and national origin of guests. They are indeed an important cultural dimension of tourism, both as an attraction for visitors and as a characteristic that influences visitor behaviour and interaction with the local residents and staff of the destination.

This article investigates the attitudes and behaviours of hotel guests towards the sustainable programmes put in place by hoteliers. They involve environmentally-friendly as well as socially and culturally acceptable actions within the frame of a profitable business.

Hotel managers today expect an increased demand and awareness among customers for environmental and social accountability, whether from business trips or leisure stays, combining those demands and the quality of service as well as coherent with economic logic. Therefore no stakeholder is left behind and all components or dimensions of sustainable development will be dealt with: impacts and responsibilities to shareholders, local communities, suppliers, employees, customers, NGOs, environment. Their interests need to be balanced. The article deals with informing as well as educating and involving the guests in the process, on what conditions and how they respond.

Facing a more recent stakeholder in the debate -the hotel guest with new requests- and considering the limitations as well as questioning raised by previous surveys, an empirical investigation proved necessary on whether to inform and involve the hotel guest in the sustainability process put in place by the hotel management, how and with what results. Two conditions underlayed the survey: there should be no alteration in the quality of service and no guilt felt on the part of the guest if this was to be achieved.

1. PREVIOUS DATA AND RESEARCH

1.1 Past Surveys

Past surveys on clients’ attitude and behaviour show contradictory results. Accor Asia Pacific, for instance, published the very positive results of a survey\(^5\) determining guest’s attitude towards the “environmentally friendly” practices introduced as part of the “green games” charter in Sydney. On the other hand, Touriscopie did a qualitative survey\(^6\) on tourists’ behaviours facing globalisation indicating a hotel lack of awareness and guilt when going overseas regarding environmental problems linked to their activities. However, another survey by L’Echo Touristique\(^7\) in 2000 claims that 15% of tourists react negatively to a lack of ethics and 35% are said to be willing to pay more towards a more responsible behaviour. But despite increasing concern about environmental conservation, consumers do not necessarily engage in environmentally sensitive behaviour.

Besides, sustainability includes the notion of harmony with local communities and indigenous peoples which is often absent from existing surveys ignoring the necessary compatibility of commercial, social and environmental considerations. These surveys also focus mainly on tourism of which the hospitality industry is only a fraction and do not account for any corporate aspects of the business.

Big hotel chains such as Hilton and Marriott use a balance scorecard for operations management. It covers four indicators: people (team members), profit (fair market share), GSTS (Guest Satisfaction Track Survey) and quality. If we refer to the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social, environmental), we notice that the environment is not in the picture; nor is communication to guests a criterion; when communication does take place to involve the guests towards a more responsible hospitality business attitude, it is very conventional.

1.2 Past Research

Considerable research attention has been paid to the characteristics and demand of tourists, hotel guests, eco-tourists (Hvenegaard & Dearden, 1998\(^8\); Juric et al, 2002\(^9\)) but little on whether these people actually behaved in a responsible manner. For Honey and Stewart (2002) ecotourism focuses on what travellers do plus the impact of this behaviour on both the environment and the people in the host country.

Fairweather, Maslin and Simmons (2005) show indications that visitors can have favourable attitudes towards the environment in which they travel and appear more likely to behave in ways that are environmentally friendly\(^10\). On the other hand, Wood and Halpenny (2001)\(^11\) argue that issues of sustainability do not figure in visitors’ decision making. Lubbert (2001) showed that individual visitors did not feel responsible for the environment in a holiday destination and consequently were not interested in management systems (the process of achieving standards) that addressed environment issues.

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\(^5\) 105 guests at the Novotel and Hotel Ibis in Sydney, Australia
\(^7\) Écho Touristique, n° 2528, 1012 people interviewed (September 2000) by Institut RMS, published on March 22, 2002, « Les bons principes du tourisme durable restent à appliquer », Hervé Hugueny et Marie-France Kayser, p. 4
But Honey (2002: 363)\textsuperscript{12} and Khan (2003)\textsuperscript{13} report differently. More research shows that concern for the environment in which visitors travel does not necessarily translate into friendly behaviours.

2. METHODOLOGY

The paper reports on a study of the responses of many international guests - Asians, Europeans, Australians, Middle East- whether corporate or tourists in Australian and French hotels. The paper investigates guest behaviour and its relevance for sustainable development in response to measures put in place and communicated by hoteliers.

The survey was conducted in Australia among some 25 hotels in Brisbane, Perth, Broome, Darwin, Cairns and the Gold Coast (coast and hinterland). All hotels had an international clientele, both leisure and corporate at varying degrees with high or low repeat business. A mixture of management types was covered: some hotels were owned, others franchised, others only operated. Some are family or independent businesses, others are part of chains or big groups, some are eco-certified and have deliberately chosen this as a niche. The managers were interviewed on a comprehensive list of measures connected with sustainable development, asked on what was communicated to the guest and how and with what results. The managers involved could be general managers, duty managers, food and beverage, environmental programme managers. We also talked to front desk, housekeeping and concierge to get their feedback on guests’ behaviours.

The survey was conducted in the autumn 2005 (October to December) and was continued in France (29 contacted) among ten hotels in Paris and twelve hotels in the resort of Courchevel in the Alps (winter, spring 2006) to draw comparisons with Australia so as to enhance more specific features in each case.

Typical topics raised in interviews were towel and linen programmes, use of water and electricity, management of waste, “bad” client behaviour linked to noise, smoking, drinking, gambling, prostitution, food, etc…, client safety, suppliers (local vs overseas products, child labour, fair trade…), community relations, cross-cultural differences, risks involved (loss of licence, bad reputation…).

We deliberately mixed rather than isolated all factors influencing behaviours: for the manager: size, age, location of hotel, type of management. Measures are more difficult to implement in medium-sized hotels (no internal economies of scale nor flexibility) when type of management favours short vs longer term (when owned), when the hotel is old and not in the process of being refurbished. Hotels in protected areas or in a country with many water restrictions are more likely to be more environmentally friendly. The manager may also have to follow rules and policies or has a more personal attitude to environmental and social issues.

For the guests: nationality, education, whether they are tourists or on business, whether at home or abroad, can alter their behaviour not to mention their own personal values or beliefs. Where the hotel is located will also make a difference (urban setting vs nature and wild life). Some behaviours on the part of guest or management are pertaining either to education, legislation, environmental or social choices beyond legislation.

The French in ski resorts certainly grant as much importance to the quality of the snow as the Australians do to their beaches. The hotel structure is very different, prestigious groups rubbing shoulders with family-run structures operated by the second or third generation of owners in desperate need of inheritors to take over. Each country has its foreigners of a new kind: the Russians in the French ski resort, Koreans and Taiwanese on the Australian coast.


The study has emphasized motivations, actions, perceptions that could emerge in both France and Australia involving international guests in the hospitality business related to fostering sustainable development down under and up north.

3. PUBLICIZING ACTIONS TO GUESTS

It depends primarily on whether sustainable hospitality is a niche for the hotel or only something they care about. When environmental and societal best practice is part of their operating policy, hoteliers feel inclined to communicate freely to guests. Those hotels or guesthouses or lodges immerse the guest in nature (“as nature would have it”) with discovery programmes providing “a comprehensive schedule of interpretive nature-based activities including guided rainforest walks, four WD tours, adventure days and evening activities” (example: O’Reilly’s, Binna Burra, Qld, AU). Their motto is “take only photographs (or memories) and leave only footprints”. Island resorts and remote places foster very good initiatives. All are in pursuit of sustainability, want to educate the visitor and affect their home lives after they leave.

On the other hand, some hotels, for example in France are at their early stage and will not easily communicate. They admit to being at the beginning of awareness and implementation stages. Accor and Club Med are known to be more advanced and setting an example. Seven hotels declined the interview\textsuperscript{14} for lack of interest…

Some hotels (ex: Intercontinental) have interrupted their towel replacement programme since, in order for it to be credible, it would have had to be consistent with the general policy of the hotel… Others (ex: The Bristol) think that France is lagging behind, like all Latin countries, sometimes purposely… The course of action is often described as being « shy » or « hesitant » (ex: Concorde Lafayette, Hilton) or in the first stages of customer education (ex: Hilton).

The hotels justify their position by claiming that one needs to be consistent with one’s clients. If one were to suggest selective waste disposal in the rooms (ex: Hilton), one would be too ahead of one’s time; one cannot operate counter to the culture of customers who come from all over the world and the dictatorship of one culture is to be shunned (if the Bible is in the night table, why not the Koran?). If few measures have been undertaken so far, there is nonetheless a vision, projects, and awareness. Many have joined the bandwagon and therefore others will follow suit, all the more so since customer mentality is evolving. The vital point remains to be consistent and to mirror mentalities rather than to anticipate their evolution. And, to quote Lenin: « one can be one step ahead of the masses but not two».

4. ACTIONS AND TOOLS USED TO COMMUNICATE TO GUESTS

Hoteliers can communicate by what they are, what they say or what they do. Those who just inform the guest need to be careful about how they say things. All wish to involve the guest in some way and use a variety of means; among them the guest directory in the room may state what is acceptable; environmental policies, practices or commitments may be posted outside or in the rooms; tent cards are used for the towel and linen programmes as well as brochures, posters, pamphlets stating the opportunities for the guest to become involved in sustainable activities; hoteliers invite feedback on those issues and show how it contributes to increased awareness and actions. To arouse interest in the clientele, some hoteliers also use codes of ethical behaviour for tourists and provide pre-trip information on their websites.

Only few hoteliers resort to hard communication except when repeat business is very low (ex: Ayer’s Rock, AU), when competition is scarce or when sustainability is their niche. Normally, it will be indirect or soft in tone and style; they leave the guests with a choice, they provide an opportunity or an

\textsuperscript{14} Four Seasons, Louvre Hôtel, Le Crillon, Concorde St Lazare, Hôtel Lutécia, Hôtel Scribe, Sofitel Champs Elysées (either nothing tangible on the subject, or not a priority for the time being, or do nothing right now or not ready yet).
option, they suggest in a nice subtle way, ask for their help to help the environment, to cooperate with the hotel commitment to preserve natural resources… The programme should be communicated sensitively to guests and attractively presented and explained15, emphasizing what the hotel supports rather than what the guest should or must do. The same applies to eco-certified places and their interpretation programmes which should not be forced onto the visitor.

Some resorts prefer not to regulate but their actions speak louder than words; by setting an example, they educate their guests; the first step is to have substantive actions in place showing the commitments they have made so that their words do not outplace their achievements. The most obvious actions are linked to recycling waste management, water saving, reduced use of paper, consumption of organic products, energy-saving systems, reduced physical waste, planting trees, vegetable gardens… all of these on the environmental side. As for social and cultural issues, responsible behaviour in the community, the following apply: financial contribution to a fund, donations to foundations, contact with indigenous communities, encounter of local cultures, learning local crafts, traditional music and dancing, promotion of eco-tours at concierge desk, property walks, sponsorship, videos on the hotel preview channel, in-house produced videos on sale…

5. THE ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY CHOICE

5.1 Australia

The degree to which hoteliers publicise their environmental programmes -when they have one- to their guests may vary. Some choose not to involve the client as it could be perceived as driving down costs. They argue that when guests pay high room rates, they expect to be pampered and as comfortable as possible. They shun negative comments about a “distasteful experience” says Crowne Plaza manager (Perth) referring to the towel and linen programme. But if an environmental best practice is a fundamental part of its philosophy and operating policy, the hotel will communicate freely to guests. It is the case for instance at Couran Cove Island Resort (Qld) where they go as far as setting their guests an energy “quota” for their stay with a prize draw for the better guests.

Some hotels do not genuinely aspire to heighten customer awareness; no communication whatsoever truly targets the clients in order to induce them to change their habits, notably in terms of energy and water consumption. The argument the hotels resort to is that they first needed to build staff awareness and to develop a structure before being in a position to require efforts from their customers. Others believe that staff awareness would be heightened faster if they were involved in this customer-oriented communication procedure. For instance, the mere fact of requiring from the cleaning staff that its members lay out a leaflet for the benefit of the clients would contribute to making them understand that the efforts or changes in behaviour one is striving to see evolve do not only concern them but also the customers. Through this simple act of information, they would, in a manner, educate and act as models for the clients, and their work would henceforth become a little more prestigious.

Some measures go down better than others: the big push to conserve water in Queensland is advertised by the government with strict practices in place and therefore represents a perfect opportunity to put water conservation programmes16. Recycling is also practiced by many Australians used to doing it at home. Yet most hoteliers report that only 3% to 5% of guests use the towel and linen programme with a maximum of 12% for one of them. Laundry costs represent 10% of all energy costs in many hotels and what they save is very small especially when length of stay is short. This comes in sharp contrast with a study showing that 87% of the guests appreciated a towel reuse programme!17 Or with

15 Successful implementation is thoroughly explained in the Know How Section of Green Hotelier, April 2005, p. 1 to 4
16 In Brisbane, they stopped the outside fountains at the Marriott when water became a more sensitive subject. As the symbol meant that water was “money flowing into the building” after the Chinese builder Fengshui, running jokes because frequent about money not flowing in anymore.
statements that 70 to 90% of guests staying more than one night participate\(^\text{18}\). But, some hotels sign contracts with companies who want to know their environmental policy (ex: Crowne Plaza and BHP-Billiton) and therefore implement them.

### 5.2 France

In Paris, the Accor group approach when encouraging guests to help preserve the environment is not moralistic or pessimistic but positive and enthusiastic. Accor minimizes the environmental impact of its operations without compromising customer comfort. The 2006 objective was to apply the New Hotel Environment Charter (65 items) in all owned and leased hotels and involve the guest in implementing a practical guide used by staff “In hotels as in the Home”. Almost 2100 hotels are now ISO 14001 certified.

Actions are communicated to guests on a poster in six languages whenever ten actions at least are implemented or “complied”. At least one action needs to be visible to the client. They involve the option to guests to reuse towels and sheets, the sorting of waste in bedrooms, the limited individual packaging of hygiene products in bedrooms, visible information about the collection of guests’ batteries, the offer to guests of less polluting means of transportation etc… Guests also notice solar heating panels to produce domestic hot water and photovoltaic collectors (ex: Ibis Porte de Clichy Centre in Paris) or the sustainable refurbishment of the Mercure Paris Etoile in 2005.

The Accor group and Club Med are in France those that practice this most proficiently. The Meridien Etoile, awarded the green key label in 2006, plans to distribute leaflets to guests and to promote the use of bicycles to visitors. Other hotels conjure up nothing to customers such as the Hyatt, the Bristol; selective waste disposal is never a matter of concern for the customers (ex: Concorde Lafayette); it is only back of the house … At the Hyatt, dispensers are accepted in the fitness center, not the bedrooms. Others, like the Opera Intercontinental have stopped informing clients because the guest receives too many leaflets in the bedroom.

At Hilton (three in Paris), the programme “we care” was put in place in January 2006 (already in Great Britain, not yet in Australia). The information stage to clientele is not yet reached. Paris is used as pilot for Europe and Africa. The chain Best Western chose to go for the green flower, the European eco-label which also encourages education and communication on environmental matters.

In French resorts such as Courchevel, most hotel managers are aware of energy consumption but are reluctant to ask their clients to save on sheets or towels. They believe customers who are also aware will inquire or will of their own accord take the necessary steps and that it is not up to the hotel to educate them\(^\text{19}\). In a hotel rebuilt from scratch such as the Kilimandjaro in Courchevel, no environmental concern prevailed and only clever opportunism triumphed.

### 6. THE SUSTAINABILITY SOCIAL DIMENSION

A hotel sustainable development policy is designed to maximize the positive impact of its activities while minimizing possible negative effects. To achieve this goal, it usually supports the economic development of its host communities. Providing support for the local community is not only part of sustainable development; it meets a request today of guests to exchange with local people, understand local cultures: an enriching human experience has become part of travelling; it is also a necessity so as to avoid a risk of having your operations rejected by the locals, for lack of integration and acceptance. This normally involves buying locally, employing staff locally (associates, repairs, maintenance…),

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\(^{18}\) Griffin Patty, President of Green Hotels Association, April 2005, Know How Section, *Green Hotelier*, publisher: International Tourism Partnership (ITP), London, UK

\(^{19}\) Indeed customers never refer to the « small notice » in a hotel such as the Royal Parc in Evian. However, the renovation of the hotel should restore the fountain of the spa-goers in the grand salon to its early 20th century glory since the sources flow under the garden, a veiled message to those stressed-out executives who these days come for a week-end of peping up…
raising funds for charities, supporting micro-projects, sponsoring events, asking the concierge to promote all local business so as to earn a good name in the environment.

6.1 Australia

As it is hard to attract staff in most of Australia, hoteliers have to build up loyalty and smiles (as Novotel, Accor puts it). They market themselves as an employer of choice. When staff is happy at work, it shows and staff-guest interaction is usually encouraged. Australia prides itself on being a good-natured country and guests are usually impressed with the quality of service they get. Willing to help is part of the culture; in smaller hotels, genuine service is more important than professional service; hoteliers believe in casual interaction and teach new staff how to remove the word “no” from their vocabulary (ex: Royal on the Park, Brisbane). “Service is free, let’s give it away” is their motto (ex: Crowne Plaza, Perth). Hotels employ many women managers whose reputation is said to be good at resolving conflicts.

Wherever buying locally is not against company policy (based on price and volume), it is preferred in Australia especially concerning good quality and cost efficient produce like meat, fish, seafood and wine! Local is even better than national considering the competition between states except when local wine for instance is more expensive and not quite as good as in other states (ex: Queensland). Bedding also usually comes from Australia (ex: Marriott, Brisbane), not from China or Asia Pacific regions. To be transparent and beyond reproach is the idea when supporting local growers and producers.

Fair trade products are almost unheard of in Australia which is not on the Accor list of eleven countries serving them (Annual Report 2005). Procurement is mainly based on price; furniture may be easier than food but bugs may be a problem as all imports are strictly checked; even pencils sit four months in customs (ex: the Marriott). Isolation is another cause besides heavy customs quarantine and deterrents, besides the additional price which no one will want to pay, are too many for hotels to “be bothered”.

The potential problem of child labour with suppliers also appears very “remote” to Australians. They are hardly aware that this could happen. When refurbishing the Marriotts, rugs came from India, were bought in Brisbane and hoteliers said they would do what is socially acceptable… no control was offered to prevent child labour.

In Australia, we found the Marriott chain of hotels very advanced with its “Spirit To Serve Our Communities” initiative with associates contributing volunteer service each year. We found many actions encouraging visiting a place without disrupting its natural or traditional way of life, hiring staff and buying food locally, using local guides, providing support for the local community. Among them, sponsoring Christmas lights, boat shows, sporting events, low rates for the locals in Northern Territory hotels during the wet season etc…

The growing interest of indigenous people in tourism is a distinctive feature in Australia. The involvement of Aboriginal people in the tourism sector will be a great support to integrating local cultures, helping local communities, initiatives and local economic development. Indigenous employment programmes with government subsidies are everywhere in Australia, particularly in protected areas. However, not all economic ventures are successful. Some are undermined by domestic violence or alcoholism. Feedback emphasized that those actions should be part of a global programme and may not be the solution for eco-or sustainable tourism.

20 Australia has about 5% unemployment, even less in WA, combined with low inflation and a booming economy
21 In NT and WA especially; quotation from Simone Hansen, Novotel, Darwin
22 In Perth, if it is WA, it is better !
23 Esplanade Fremantle, W
24 Novotel, Darwin, NT
26 Couran Cove Island Resort, experience of Aboriginal dancers, guides and staff
6.2 France

In France, a group like Accor prides itself on being an attractive employer thanks to the “Accor Spirit” programme (personal fulfilment), outstanding career prospects, training programmes (eleven academies) participatory approach to management\textsuperscript{27}. Men (47\%) and women (53\%) with equal pay as well as managers (58\% and 42\%) are about equal in numbers in France\textsuperscript{28}. Accor confirmed its long-standing commitment to combating discrimination and to hiring and promoting people from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds\textsuperscript{29}.

The business had a poor reputation which is gaining now in attractiveness. Indeed, two recent happenings led the group to improve its social practices\textsuperscript{30}. In other groups like Hyatt France, employees are considered to be internal clients. The only two women managers in the EAME region happen to be in France.

A sustainable purchasing policy involves using local suppliers as well as controlling child labour and using fair trade when buying from developing countries. Whoever the decision-maker, most Parisian hotels work with local suppliers. Group Accor pursues a policy of purchasing fair-trade, eco-label and other sustainable development products. Selected suppliers must comply with the principles of the Sustainable Development Purchasing Charter. Hotels favour ecolabel products with reduced impacts on the environment and food products derived from organic farming; organic dishes may be proposed on the restaurant menu.

A way of supporting local suppliers is through food or gastronomy. This concerns less Paris than the rest of France\textsuperscript{31}. In spite of all, the chef generally respects the handful of staples of each nationality in order not to alienate foreigners from their eating habits. However, when the hotel recommends a dish or wine, it tries through the information provided to take the customer on a journey through a region or a vineyard\textsuperscript{32}.

At Accor, the practice of purchasing fair trade products began in 2003, with a commitment from Sofitel in France to serve Malongo coffee in its bars and restaurants. In 2004, other initiatives were launched in France as well as in Portugal, where 29 Sofitel, Novotel and Mercure hotels now serve fair trade coffee. In France, Etap Hotel and Formula 1 hotels support the policy, serving fair trade tea, coffee and hot chocolate in 490 hotels since July 2004.

The Novotel, Mercure and Ibis chains also certified fair trade tea and chocolate suppliers, while Sofitel began serving Malongo coffee for breakfast as well. Accor hotels are both large customers and important venues for promoting fair trade products. Two million informative leaflets were distributed in Etap Hotel and Formula 1 rooms in second-half 2004\textsuperscript{33}. Among the hotels interviewed, in the Alps, only the Mercure (Groupe Accor) applied those practices. Most hotels still belong to family owners and have no incentive of promoting fair trade.

\textsuperscript{28} International Labour Organisation ILO, 2004.
\textsuperscript{29} Corporate Diversity Charter initiated by France’s Institut Montaigne, 22 october 2004.
\textsuperscript{30} In 2001, 24 wage earners employed by a subcontractor (Arcade) went on strike for five months to denounce the furious working pace imposed by the employer, and indirectly by Accor. Implicated, the group reacted by implementing a subcontractor’s charter in 2003. Furthermore, two months after its opening in March 2003, the employees of a Fribourg-based casino belonging to the Accor group in Granges-Paccot united in order to defend their working conditions by speaking out in front of the cameras of the TSR (the Swiss French-language broadcast television).
\textsuperscript{31} The practices of the Accor group regarding contracts in which a person is appointed to manage an establishment in return for a commission on the turnover were besides criticized in a book by Yann Chollet published in 2002 by Editions du Vent, entitled « 7 jours sur 7 à votre service » (i.e.: “7 Days a Week at your Service”). This book denounced the exploitation of human beings in the low cost hotel business (Etap Hôtel et Formule 1).
\textsuperscript{32} In the Alps, the focus is placed on cheeses or Savoy wine. But the smell makes it sometimes difficult except if there is a separate Savoyard restaurant.
\textsuperscript{33} Thus, each Best Western hotel in France offers at least three regional dishes at breakfast as well as one fair trade food item.
As far as the protection of children is concerned, the 2006 objective of Accor was to double the number of countries in which they had signed The Code of Conduct; but it is much more geared at controlling sexual tourism involving children than at child labour at their suppliers’.

With Accor we have already mentioned local supplies (over 50%) and local hiring (Accor has only 1% expatriates in the whole world). In France, as elsewhere, Accor provides local support for a wide range of initiatives intended to protect and showcase its host countries’ cultural assets.

Another area of action is the aid to local communities in need, alongside the Red Cross. Besides, since 2003, Accor’s corporate philanthropy policy has been organized around two priority action areas: child sponsorship and aid to local communities in need. For Plan, an international community development organization (NGO) that focuses on children, Accor provides expertise and access to its network to help recruit new sponsors.

One last action is combating sexual tourism involving children in which French Guiana is a target. In 2005, the French Tourism Ministry Charter was signed, thereby pledging to promote tourism that respects the rights of children in France and elsewhere. France is the one European country where awareness and training programmes for customers and employees were launched, with 500,000 information leaflets distributed in the country.

7. BEYOND LEGISLATION

This is where the Australian manager will not compromise but the international traveller, whether business or tourist, may have difficulty adjusting. Rules in Australia are very strict concerning security and safety, drinking, smoking, prostitution… not so much on gambling which in spite of the promotion of responsible gambling is better accepted socially and ethically in Australia than in other parts of the world. Gambling is neither illegal nor dangerous and even encouraged by governments… On the contrary, responsible drinking and stricter anti-smoking rules are being enforced. Drinking under age is a social issue in Australia. Hotels are a forefront industry to change habits regarding smoking and drinking patterns.

A responsible service of alcohol is mandatory or even more severe in dry areas with Aboriginals or when hotels own bottle shops on their premises (ex: Mercure, Broome: “no vehicle, no service”).

Australians will never compromise on those issues when legal ramifications or safety are at stake. French people will tend not to provoke by “unacceptable” behaviour for clients (not management) within the limits of what is “reasonable”. The most significant difference lies most probably in the will in France to ban as little as possible and to centre the restriction-free offer of luxury hotels under the

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34 www.Accor.com
35 One example is, as an official partner to Lille, the 2004 European Capital of Culture. Elected European Capital by the Ministers of Culture of European Union member states, Lille was host to a wide range of artistic festivals in 2004. Also, Accor is committed to harmoniously integrating its hotels into the surrounding architectural environment.
36 Accor for instance was involved with the Seine et Marne Red Cross Chapter near Paris in 2004 and held an event at the Sofitel Paris Porte de Sèvres on World First Aid Day and takes part in fund-raising efforts. At the launch of World First Aid Day on September 11, 2004 at the Sofitel Paris Porte de Sèvres, customers, employees and visitors were given an introduction to basic first aid practices. The event, which received national media coverage, was attended by Dr. Marc Gentilini, Adriana Karembeu, Ambassador of the French Red Cross, and John Du Monceau, Senior Vice-Chairman of the Accor Management Board in charge of Sustainable Development.
37 A child may be sponsored by Accor employees or customers, acting either individually or with others. In 2004, a pilot operation was launched in 300 hotels in France and the United Kingdom, where employees wholeheartedly supported the principle of child sponsorship by undertaking projects to raise awareness among customers and suppliers. The initiative has since been extended. In France alone, 282 children were sponsored in six months in 2004, of whom 52% by employees and 48% by customers and suppliers. In 2005, all French hotels were concerned and 700 children involved worldwide.
39 Example of Crowne Plaza, Perth: 25% of guests are corporate women travelling alone because of a non-threatening environment. Others employ security officers.
40 Rules differ regionally, for example NSW enforcement is softer. In July 2006, all public areas will be non-smoking in Australia. It has been implemented over a two-year period.
41 Many hotels in Australia have either gaming rooms or direct access to a casino.
42 Warning signs such as “Don’t let the game play you” are seen.
sign of lavishness, leading to self-regulated and, at the end of the day, paradoxically, relatively community-aware customer behaviour.

In France, few hotels provide non-smoking rooms, which they deem hard to manage but in restaurants, ashtrays have most of the time vanished. As for non-smoking in all public places, the voices of hotel managers are raised against all these bans which spoil the stay of the customers who wish to enjoy themselves. Everywhere, one is reluctant to ban and regulate any further since one foremost strives to sell enjoyment.

Tackling discourtesy seldom takes the form of a set of rules but more often is dealt with by imposing a style, a friendly atmosphere that becomes palpable through the presence, attention and warmth that transpire and that constitute a clear admonition to the restless customer who does not belong.

8. DO OFFER AND DEMAND MEET?

If guests’ motivations are satisfied by a sustainable hospitality business as it is communicated to them, hoteliers should get marketing benefits from it.

8.1 The guest:

We must underline a few paradoxes that need to be dealt with. As shown by research, although consumers are aware of the potential implications when they travel, environmental and societal issues are of only minor importance for most of them especially in a holiday decision-making process. Psychologically a holiday is perceived as “individual freedom in an intact world”; “the guests would like to forget personal and collective problems and their own limitations.”

In hotels, they would rather be pampered, use more sheets and towels than they normally would at home, take a bath instead of the usual shower and as we all know, a favourable attitude (in one’s local and personal sphere) towards sustainability does not necessarily mean a sustainable behaviour (especially going abroad, in a different setting.). Also, guests that are getting extra-service, like the Japanese on the Gold Coast or in Western Australia, are not encouraged to blend with local habits, local food or local culture. The hoteliers also want to provide as much comfort and service to their guests so as to get repeat business.

Besides, guests are not interested in the details of environmental issues. Telling them too much, what they don’t want to know or cannot understand is even counter productive. An example of this is gray waters turned into drinking water when confused with sewage water! Above all, guests don’t want to be lectured nor feel guilty. What they want needs to be innovative, authentic, entertaining, sometimes community focused. Studies even point at the “soft ecotourism” inclination of visitors in regions dedicated to sustainability where the “general appreciation and enjoyment of the environment is preferred over formal learning and educational opportunities.”

43 Let us examine the example of the Kilimandjaro hotel in Courchevel (a luxury 4-star establishment) that offers the following features: free minibar; water mattresses; smoker-friendly environment in the rooms as well as in the restaurant; no notice displayed to encourage the re-use of towels; a kitchen open around the clock; the possibility of ordering whatever one yearns for during meals and fast service, and of freely strolling in the bar in bathrobes and barefoot … One must feel good on the premises, at home. Stress is placed on the capacity of staff to be very attentive of customers’ needs and on its availability to provide enjoyment; tremendous kindness, the absence of any formalism will do the rest.


45 ECEAT projects (European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism)

46 for Australians at least!


48 Good examples of this are Novotel and Sheraton, Perth, WA and Crowne Plaza, Broadbeach, QLD

49 Weaver David & Lawton Laura, Hinterland sustainable tourism development study, Gold Coast Tourism Visioning Project 3.4, Sustainable Tourism CRC News, 2002. This may also be explained by the lack of overnight visitors in the research sample
8.2 The hotelier:

Educating the guest may be a true objective of eco-lodges where the focus is on what visitors can take home and apply to other aspects of their lives, beyond their travel experience. At the other end of the spectrum, some hotel managers think this is something guests should have in their mind already when coming to a hotel hence the role of media, of governments, of education (ex: water restrictions) and that there is little they can actually do to change their behaviour.

In some cases, sustainable hospitality will bring a differentiation marketing advantage and create extra business. Eco-rooms for instance are popular with guests but most hoteliers think that using sustainability as a marketing tool is over-exaggerated. There is indeed little evidence that winning an award or being eco-certified increases sales and improves customer satisfaction. Some eco-lodges like Couran Cove (Qld, AU) even market themselves as island resorts with the challenge of getting the market in eco-tourism too; the two populations stay side by side and sometimes compete in the one resort. Such lodges are not cheap and don’t turn any profit which contradicts the economic side of what sustainability normally implies.

Even eco-lodges are aware that people come for the environment; they know that out of ten reasons why people come, the environmental conservation criterion comes number seven or eight. They are satisfied that guests will recommend the place to their friends and may be appear in the New Guide Book on Responsible Places to Stay.

9. NEW TRENDS AND EXPERIMENTS

9.1 Conception of Service

As for service, genuine service in Australia is preferred to professional service; the style is familiar faces and smiles; Australians believe in casual interaction, not so structured with procedures. Helping a friend is very much part of the culture.

In eco-certified guest places, there may be minimum service; guests come for nature and have no TV, no pool or tennis court… (ex: Binna Burra, Qld, AU). This is compensated by rejuvenation breaks, wild walks, bush poetry, ecology talk, birding weekends, frog weeks (ex: O’Reilly’s, Qld, AU); the daily discovery programme run by the guest house provides a comprehensive schedule of interpretive nature-based activities.

The new conceptions of service in France (ex. Intercontinental Opéra Paris) differ somewhat from those in Australia. Since the desire to bring joy is not innate in France -as the Latins are said not to have a culture of service- one seeks to introduce emotions, feelings; the stay must be turned into a travel experience of which the hotel staff members become accomplices; it is the asset which means that once home, one has something to share with one’s family, one’s friends… and which drives one off the beaten track, a little like the “Hilton Moment” whereby going beyond standards amazes and delights. The language barrier then becomes quite tangible: the mastery of a refined customer-enticing English is essential to succeed in such an undertaking!

9.2 Recent Experiments

Here are some recent experiments that Accor has conducted in France to involve guests: one started in 2004 at Ibis with three media to communicate in the bedrooms relative to sheets, towels and electricity

50 They were introduced by Scandic (part of Hilton International) in 1995: 97% of their components are recyclable; they have simple, natural aesthetics and the better indoor air quality is appreciated by allergy sufferers
51 Binna Burra Mountain Lodge, Linus Bagley@binnaburralodge.com.au
52 Quote from Philip Tout, Pethers Rainforest Retreat, Tamborine Mountain, November 2006
53 Special Places to Stay Publisher, Alister Sawday, published in September 2006
(Figure 1). Another is better perceived by clients when the hotel is a technology showcase: renewable energy with solar panels (Figure 2) in Paris at Ibis; it is an efficient and pedagogical communication although hotels stay relatively low profile about it.

Novotel, Mercure and Sofitel guests are not over-informed; they hear about sustainable development when one shot events take place: sustainable development week, fair-trade product testing at Mercure; as long as something concrete and positive can be shown which is not linked to cost-cutting. A similar attitude prevails at Novotel where clients can learn something on a positive subject again not linked to savings such as the biological maintenance of gardens. The idea is to find a more attractive way of broaching the subject than faucet flow regulators would be!

Other experiments concern bird protection. At Etap hotel in autumn 2006, associates will be sensitized to their competence on nature. Another experiment consists in cleaning the Marais Poitevin (Marsh land in Poitou, France): they restore the place with an association54 which is more convivial than doing it alone. Other associations are involved with ADEME “Défi pour la Terre”55: Accor is then perceived as supporting a national cause and benefit from the credibility enjoyed by NGOs.

One more way is being tested on the reservation website56 where information on hotels is already available. The idea is not to use hotels as media. They also communicate with townships when water restrictions are advocated. Australia has used that policy for a long time. So the hotel does not appear to be lecturing and the recommendation is then posted in the hotel. The communication is at its worse when personal interests are diverted for an important cause.

The way to sensitize people needs to be entertaining, enthusiastic with a message such as “we are heading toward innovative times” and not “hard times to come” or having to “tighten our belts”. And if economies are made, it will be to do even more for the environment. Posters designed for guests will also explain what is at stake. Accor’s experiments are being tested and may not be adaptable to all its hotels around the world. Most of them if they prove to be successful would probably work in most cultures, since different weight could be given to actions locally prioritized. The same applies to their communication.

10. CONCLUSIONS: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study does not claim any statistical validity. It is very qualitative and only a small sample is covered. It does not cover any labelling/accreditation standards deliberately but this can be seen as a limitation. Besides, it investigated more upstandard hotels than middle range ones. 3-star traditional hotels may probably be more effective in sustainable development than luxury hotels.

This exploratory study investigated hotel guest behaviour in response to how sustainability is conveyed by hoteliers and how guests could be educated. It shows how hoteliers can play a positive part in increasing consumer commitment to sustainable development principles. It means the guest, whether leisure or corporate, does not only consume a product but also goes through an experience. It means the hotel management investigates a real long term change of culture and not just a policy. Persuasion and example, within the frame of voluntary actions rather than regulations or even incitation will bring transferable results from eco-lodges to traditional hotels if their profitability can be shown.

This is a quotation from Philip Tout (Pethers Rainforest Retreat, Tambourine Mountain -Qld, AU-) which provides a good summary: “it’s the experience, not the words; people are sick of being lectured,

54 LPO : Ligue de Protection des Oiseaux (Bird Life)
55 ADEME : Agence de l’Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l’Energie
56 Accorhotel.com
58 Brouwer, Regional Conference on Tourism Communications for Europe, Tourcom, Conclusions & recommendations for the tourism industry in working with the media, Riga, 12-13 October 2005
they want to know that we care; they don’t want to know the details; because we are green is not the main reason why they come but it’s part of what they value”. This confirms the recent conclusions that communication by the tourism sector should be more and more based on emotions, experiences, stories and dreams (Brouwer)².

11. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

11.1 Hotels interviewed in Australia:

All Seasons Resort (Gold Coast), Binna Burra Mountain Lodge, Couran Cove Island Resort (Runaway Bay), Crowne Plaza (Surfers Paradise and Perth), Esplanade Hotel (Fremantle), Fig Tree Lodge (Cairns), Hilton (Brisbane), Hi Surf -Accor- (Gold Coast), Holiday Inn (Surfers Paradise), Intercontinental (Perth), Marriott (Brisbane and Surfers Paradise), Mercure (Broome), Novotel (Darwin and Perth), O’Reilly’s Rainforest Guesthouse (Queensland), Palazzo Versace (Marina Mirage), Palms City Resort (Darwin), Pethers Rainforest Retreat, Quest Harbour Village (Fremantle), Royal on the Park (Brisbane), Sheraton Mirage (Marina Mirage), Sofitel (Gold Coast, Broadbeach).

11.2 Hotels interviewed in France:

Ensemble, conservons notre planète.
Let's take care of the Earth together.

Figure 1

Intégration de cellules photovoltaïques : une réussite architecturale
Hôtel Ibis Porte de Clichy

Figure 2
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