

Greening within the Johannesburg tourism and hospitality sectors

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Abstract

Tourism and hospitality is a booming industry with negative impacts on the environment. In order to keep up with consumer demand the industry is utilising more natural resources than previously assumed, questioning sustainability practices within the industry. However the industry can contribute to sustainable development by adopting greening principles. Unfortunately, there is limited research to establish how hotels in South African fare in the adoption of greening principles. This paper seeks to explore how important going green is to the South African government, hotel management, hotel employees and hotel shareholders. The paper reports on empirical results for and anonymous four star hotel in Johannesburg specifically within the hospitality industry and which also services the tourism industry. Empirical work by way of semi- structured interviews is reported on to explore the adopting and challengers of implementing greening principles and practices. Results indicate that adoption of greening within the hotel industry is limited with more direct support needed for hotel employees by hotel management. Communication is also needed from regional head office to hotel managers on greening initiatives. However, there is also a need for the South African government to guide hotels on implementation of greening practices.

Key words: Greening, sustainability, hotels, government, Johannesburg



Source: <http://www.ehospitalitytimes.com/wp-content/uploads/images21.jpg>

Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry is no doubt one of the fastest growing economic sectors globally (Scott 2003, Goodwin et al., 2002, Lee 2013). In South Africa the hospitality sector specifically contributed a total Gross Domestic Product of 3.0 percent in 2010 (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2012). It is for this reason why implementing greening practices within the hospitality (and tourism) sectors is important to reduce carbon footprints and impacts on the environment (Kasim, 2004). Anthropogenic caused global environmental change is a huge part of today's society. It is mainly driven by the rapidly growing human population and their high rates of resource consumption (Oskamp, 2000). For example, as a result of the aforementioned there is evidence that recent climatic changes are affecting a broad range of fauna and flora, which is very important in determining the attractiveness of a region for touristic purposes, which also feeds into the hospitality industry accommodation sector to name a few. Therefore it is important that the policies that govern a country be in favour of the preservation of its environment and have policies in place to guide the tourism and hospitality sector (Scott, 2003).

Although the concept of 'greening' is highly contested with various interpretations, the aim of this paper is not to explore the multitude of definitions, rather for this paper going green means, "pursuing knowledge and practices conducive to more environmentally friendly and ecologically responsible decisions and lifestyles, which can help protect the environment and sustain its natural resources for current and future generations" (Micioni, 2009). Generally, the public especially in developed countries seem to be driving the push towards environmental sustainability. They are doing this by being more conscious of the items they use and its effect on the environment (Laroche et al., 2001).

If ever the green initiative is to be effective and successful it needs the buy in of all tourism and hospitality stakeholders' namely local government officials, managers of hotels and tourist destinations, staff and visitors (Yuksel et al., 1998). Each of the aforementioned stakeholders have the capacity to shift the paradigm of greening completely thus bring about lasting change to the environment at large. To do this they need to have policies. The green lifestyle is being stressed to many individuals on a daily basis and there are several research articles that address how to be green and why it is important to move in such a direction (Lee 2013, Micioni 2009, Enz and Siguaw 2003). Numerous studies have been done with regards to guest preferences to green hotels (Jin-Zhao 2009, Millar, 2008). However articles that address greening from the work environment perspective are few and far between (Lee, 2013).

Although South Africa has strong environmental legislation in place post-1994, implementation and enforcement of legislation remains a challenge. Government has yet to assist in establishing a greening principle to guide the tourism and hospitality sectors. The lack of appropriate policies is affecting the possible growth rate of the depreciation of possible harmful air emissions, and overuse of energy and water consumption. The lack of control measures as far as environmental sustainability is concerned can be attributed to government as they have not put in place strict policies that clearly state what is expected of the tourism and hospitality industry surrounding the green revolution. For example, if a hotel management team is not required to go green, the message will then not be passed down to their staff as management are the ones who set the tone and steer their organisation into the desired direction (Kane-Urrabazo, 2006). The uncertainty of what they can do versus what is required by law hinders full participation from all parties and does not help in effectively fighting

problems associated with unsustainable practices.

Unfortunately there is also limited literature surrounding the challenges that hotels in South Africa face when adopting and enforcing greening practices in their operations. This paper attempts to explore this issue by way of empirical results conducted at an anonymous four star hotel in Johannesburg. The name of the hotel is not revealed in this paper for ethical reasons and to respect the decision of the hotel management not to reveal the hotel identity. The four star hotel forms part of a chain of hotels. The hotel staffing consists of forty permanent employees, twenty-four food and beverage staff and fifty-eight housekeeping employees. The following is what current policies are in place at the hotel - A policy that was formulated and issued in a few years ago is the Hotel Environmental Management Plan. This environmental management plan includes key objectives that are grouped around energy consumption, water consumption, waste water, waste management and support and involvement of local communities. Following the environmental plan all of the hotels are expected to identify 3 of the 5 objectives for implementation. Hotels are then expected to come up with measurement methods and appropriate targets to be reached.

The head office also formulated an Environmental Management Policy which requires that senior staff be committed to the green plan, that the everyday staff member be trained and made aware of the green plan or by including the greening plan in the hotels induction manuals and by holding regular meetings. It also contains a section on environmental management, purchasing, people and communities, destination protection, electricity consumption, water consumption, waste management and support and involvement of local communities. The above mentioned are all in accordance to the Responsible Tourism Handbook. Also included are

detailed environmental checklists for housekeeping, front office, purchasing, food and beverage, gardens, pools and maintenance that they can use or set their standards up against.

Empirical work by way of semi-structured interviews with social actors is reported on to explore the adopting of greening principles and practices. This paper also explores if the South African government is passing laws directly aimed at the Hospitality (and tourism) industry with regards to greening. The authors seek to establish whether these laws are existent, and if so find out what the laws are and observe whether it is directly influencing company policies in various hotels. Conclusions are finally drawn and recommendations made.

Going 'green' in South Africa: Laws and regulations governing environmental sustainability

One may question why greening is so important. Going green creates a more sustainable environment by conserving natural resources, it can save a hotel money, ensures that the company is viewed positively by guests, reduces pollution, and all in all helps maintain the ecological balance on the earth to name a few (Lynes, 2006). Tourism and greening are also compatible approaches towards achieving sustainability (Pennisi, 2010). Even with all the benefits ultimately organisations choices and actions are constrained and influenced by social behaviours, including norms and values within their environment (Selznick, 1957).

Although there are no specific regulations and guidance for the tourism and hospitality sector on greening, South Africa has environmental laws in place to provide direction. The South African Government has put in place regulations or laws to achieve environmental compliance (Lee,

2013). For example, the major objectives with regards to tourism is noted in the Environmental Management White Paper (1998). It highlights 'tourism is sustainable and not damaging to the environment,' to ensure that local communities, particularly previously disadvantaged communities, benefit through active participation in tourism associated with protected areas and sites' and to 'ensure the sustainable management and respect for the integrity of landscapes and other environmental assets.' These aims were drawn to assist in the plight for a sustainable environment. However one needs detailed policies that explain how government intends to ensure that tourism is sustainable and not damaging the environment.

The Carbon Tax Policy (2013), the Renewable Energy Policy (2003) and the Waste Policy (2012) have detailed measures on how government seeks to promote environmental sustainability with emphasised targets and goals to reach. The Environmental Management Policy (1998) however does not mention any clear strategies for reducing harmful emissions caused by the Hospitality and Tourism sector which makes it difficult to manage or hold any guilty parties accountable (Goodwin et al., 2002). The South African government has noted responsible tourism as an important aspect of environmental sustainability and has since then released the National Responsible Tourism Guidelines for South Africa (Goodwin et al, 2002). These guidelines contain detailed targets and goals from which establishments can become environmentally responsible (National Responsible Tourism Guidelines for South Africa, 2002). However implementation is optional.

According to the Environmental Policy (1998) government has stated that to ensure adherence with regards to the carbon tax laws, the renewable energy laws as well as the waste policy laws they will be responsible and accountable to achieve

sustainable development and improve environmental governance. In the event that one is found guilty of environmentally harmful actions government claims that they will fine the guilty party, request compensation claims and restitution and/or rehabilitation orders from the offenders. However the policy does not mention which department precisely is responsible for the monitoring of organisations to ensure adherence and although the environmental policy focuses on the tourism industry there is no specific mention of accommodation outlets or restaurants and what role they are expected to play. No rules govern how hotels should sustain their immediate work environment nor what is required to achieve a green rating.

However, the Imvelo Responsible Tourism awards were initiated to coincide with the World Summit on Sustainable Development that was held in South Africa in 2002 (Goodwin et al., 2002: 15). They recognise tourism and hospitality businesses that make a real, measurable and sustained contribution to Responsible Tourism. The awards are in line with the National Minimum Standard for Responsible Tourism, the Responsible Tourism guidelines for the South African hospitality industry and the UN World Tourism Organisation's code of ethics (Imvelo Awards, [n.d]). The Green Globe Certification on the other hand is a structured assessment of the sustainability performance of travel and tourism businesses and their supply chain partners. Businesses can monitor improvements and document achievements leading to certification of their enterprises' sustainable operation and management.

The Standards is a collection of 337 compliance indicators applied to 41 individual sustainability criteria. The applicable indicators vary by type of certification, geographical area as well as local factors (Green Globe, 2013).

Methodology

A qualitative methodology comprised of semi-structured and one-on-one interviews was used for data collection in September 2013. The hotel was chosen due to contacts in the field. A total of ten interviews were conducted with hotel employee and managers and one regional manager. Personal interviews were secured by meeting with informants and agreeing on a suitable time and date that was convenient for the informant. Many employees chose not to be interviewed due to having limited time or due to limited understanding of greening issues. This proved difficult in securing many informants. Nevertheless, semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in allowing the opportunity to get the subjective views of how the staff members felt about greening and how greening was taking place at the hotel. However, an interview questionnaire served as a guide during interviews although informants were allowed to speak freely. Interviews were conducted with the staff and management team and one regional manager in order to discover whether there was any filtering taking place between head office and hotel operations staff. Analysis via grounded theory approach was used to explore themes and which are reported below. Grounded theory involved taking the data apart and comparing data to identify common themes.

Results

Eight reoccurring themes were produced from the analysis. For the purpose of this paper five themes are reported on which include: training and communication, Sustainability, Ignorance and accountability, coherency as well as the government support.

Training and Communication

The majority of staff noted a lack of communication and training as far as greening is concerned. Of the nine staff

members, seven stated that they had not received any training at all, with a majority stating that training on greening was needed. Only two respondents had attended a training session in two years. The management staff displayed having some knowledge on greening but reported that they had not trained their staff.

Employee A at the Food and Beverage department stated that: *“the staff wouldn’t need to be trained if they knew what was expected of them”*. However this response is ironic as for staff to know what is expected of them would require training. Staff indicated that they would appreciate attending a training session as it would broaden their knowledge. More than half of staff interviewed indicated that there was a need for meetings on greening to keep their knowledge of what is expected of them up to date as there was a lack of communication by management staff. Regional manager B stated that as far as head office was concerned they were:

“Communicating the companies green objectives with the general managers of the hotels and that if nothing is being done with regards to greening within a hotel, that is largely the fault of the general manager and not head office”

This suggests a need for communication from head office to general managers of its chain hotels. This would ensure that there is accountability from general managers of hotels to head office. This would also ensure that general managers in hotels communicate with their staff to ensure implementation of greening policies.

Sustainability

All respondents showed an understanding of the basics of what sustainability entailed. They believe that greening was about the planet and environment. They mentioned that it is about saving, reducing, reusing and

recycling waste for the benefit of future generations. Respondents noted it was important to consume less resources, keep environments clean and preserving the environment by minimizing negative impacts from consuming unsustainably.

Employee C stated that, *"I would like to show my children what the big 5 [in South Africa] are, they should be able to see it not only hear about it"*. It became clear that even though not many green initiatives were known to being implemented at hotel level, the staff at least knew what sustainability was and how it tied in with going green. The respondents made mention of how newer companies in South Africa were making sure that their building materials were not harmful to the environment with a reduced carbon foot print.

Ignorance and unaccountability

Although more than ninety percent of employees believed that the hotel had a greening policy which was important for greening the hotel, they had never seen the policy and did not know about the hotels greening initiatives. This was also largely due to lack of communicating by management staff. These included the need to recycle paper, plastic and glass. Very few employees could mention greening initiatives that were undertaken at the hotel. Almost all the departments aren't aware of what green initiatives the other departments were doing and none of them have even bothered to ask. When the department heads were questioned on why they weren't initiating any type of green training within their department they stated that they were waiting to be told by their managers. As employee D mentioned, *"it [training in the hotel] hadn't happened before..."* Overall the general consensus of the hotel staff was that none of them had heard about the hotels greening committee or seen the hotels policy and as a result didn't quite know what was expected of them as far as implementation was concerned.

Coherency– Teamwork

As per hotel policy each hotel is supposed to form a green committee that will carry out the organisations green initiatives. Only two of the ten respondents were aware that the hotel had a green committee. However, more than half respondents stated that if there was a greening committee then it really was not effective in implementing greening initiatives at the hotel since they could not see visible greening initiatives and also due to lack of any communication. Very little team work seemed to be apparent as far as greening was concerned. The housekeeping department seemed to think that they weren't getting enough help from management. Employee A stated that *"the staff needs to get involved in order for greening to be effective"*. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case.

Government support

Generally over eighty percent of employees believed that the South African government needed to play a big role as far as greening was concerned. Although government was trying to create green awareness, they went on to state that more could be done and that a huge part of greenings success in the country now rested on the country's political leadership, which was lacking on greening initiatives. Twenty percent of respondents stated that although government did have a role to play in greening initiatives, it was also up to head office and hotel managers to implement policies. Thus it was important for government and the hotel sector to work together and not in isolation. However there were two respondents that believed that government wasn't doing nearly enough. Employee E noted that *"government fails [in] the ability to monitor and govern greening"*.

Conclusion and recommendations

Empirical results indicated that at the macro level lack of government support and policy direction prevented the tourism and

hospitality industry from implementing greening initiatives within operations. However, at the case study level empirical results revealed that lack of communication from regional managers to hotel general managers did not assist in implementing greening strategies at hotels. Lack of support from managers did not result in communication to hotel employees on greening practices.

There were limited, or neither control measures nor policies directed towards non-compliance at the hotel. Even though the hotel had an environmental management plan that could be accessed by all hotel managers, greening was not effectively driven because the staff were not being trained on greening and the importance of greening. Although the finding for this hotel cannot be generalised for the entire hotel industry in Johannesburg, the following recommendations are made for the implementing greening strategies within operations generally.

- There is an urgent need for hotel regional managers to take greening initiatives seriously. This will require regional manager's communication with hotel managers on a regular basis to ensure that the hotel implements greening initiatives.
- There is an urgent need to set up a functional greening committee that will be active in carrying out the teams environmental goals. Such a committee should be composed of managers and representatives from hotel departments.
- Hotels need to interactively train all staff members on a regular basis on greening initiatives. This greening strategy must also entail creating awareness amongst guests on greening at the hotel and their responsibilities as guests on

greening initiatives. In addition to visible signage on greening and requirements, reception will need to inform guests upon check in about some of the greening initiatives that are in place.

- The South African Government needs to stress greening by turning the Responsible Tourism Guidelines of 2003 into an official policy that will be monitored and managed by an appointed government green team. This team will also need to set industry specific goals for all companies, establishments and companies in the country and have objectives that need to be met.
- The Government will also need to have harsher penalties for non-compliance and a no tolerance approach to environmental damage.

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