

HOTEL'S GREEN INDUSTRY

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In the hotel industry the typically prevailing need for short-term economic profits makes it difficult to incorporate sustainability principles, which do bring profits but in a long-term. Sanga-Saby Kurs & Konferens centre, located on the island of Faringso in Lake Malaren in central Sweden, has a completely different approach. In the beginning of 1990s the decision was taken to make the environment the core of the business policy.

The basis of the environmental activity is the conscious objective of protecting the environment through the use of renewable resources within an eco-cycle that is sealed to the level possible, and the avoidance of environmentally destructive substances. The environmental policy and programme are based on the Natural Step concept.

One of the major objectives of the programme was to operate the facility using only renewable energy, and that was achieved in September 1996. Only green electricity is purchased, while the rock- and marine-based heat pump systems with propane as refrigerant ensure space conditioning for the facility. The entire facility can be provided with cooling from Lake Malaren during the warm summer months, and during the winter time rapeseed methyl ester oil is used for additional heating. Water for the pool and sauna is heated by means of heat pumps and solar panels.

The cold-rooms and refrigerators in the kitchen also utilise lake water as a cooling medium. Even the vehicle fleet and all gardening equipment operate on bio-fuels, apart from lawnmowers of which one is electric, one solar powered and the third - grass powered. Furthermore, a number of energy efficiency and saving solutions are in place.

The facility is equipped with its own water purification and sewage treatment plants as it relies on the water from Lake Malaren for its needs. Own sparkling water is produced on the premises to reduce the unnecessary transport. Waste is sorted to over 20 fractions and own compost plant has been created. The quantity of chemicals used in the facility has been significantly reduced and all products are eco-certified. All the raw materials, construction materials and consumer products are carefully selected and preferably eco-labelled, in order to offer the best service and achieve optimum environmental adaptation.

The holistic environmental approach is especially visible in the new addition to the complex - the 16-room Malarblick building. It was constructed in a way to blend in with the surrounding nature, rock blasting was minimised and no trees were cut during the construction. The building is made of certified wood and equipped with eco-labelled interior materials and furniture. It uses rock heat pumps with floor heating for space conditioning and solar panels for hot water production.

In general, all operations are designed to lead to continual improvement and to create the basis for preventive environmental programmes. This approach has led to increased occupancy and higher profits.

The annual turnover was tripled in the last decade and the profits are at the level of 10-12%. This example clearly shows that environmental management does make a good business sense even in a highly competitive hotel market.

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) describes tourism as one of the most important economic, social, cultural and political phenomena of the 20th century, while hotel buildings are outstanding landmarks at many destinations. The tourism industry has a dual relationship with the environment but has for many years claimed to be a “smokeless industry”. In fact, accommodation facilities interact with their environments during every stage of their life cycle, often negatively. Resorts are frequently developed in pristine and fragile ecosystems with little or no consideration for the local natural or cultural environment. Many of the services offered by these establishments require the consumption of substantial quantities of energy, water and non-durable products. The resource-use efficiency of the many end-users in such facilities is frequently low, and the resulting environmental impacts are of significant magnitude.

The international awareness of the trade’s substantial negative impacts on the environment has been increasing in recent years. While the average visitor may not yet be vocalizing clear-cut requirements for more sustainable practices in the tourism sector, the increasing environmental awareness among travellers is gradually translating into a growing environmental demand. In response, hotel companies begin to consider environmental issues in their business practices.

Hilton International is an example of a worldwide known company that has put Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and environmental sustainability high on their priority list. A comprehensive environmental programme has been developed and implemented chain-wide. It is based on five corner stones: Environmental Policy, environmental education (ecolearning), environmental reporting (Hilton Environmental Reporting), a creation of sustainable facilities (Sustainable Hotel Siting, Design and Construction Guidelines), and internal communication (Hiway).

Most of these initiatives are based on a 10-year experience of environmental work at Scandic (Scandinavian based hotel brand, and a part of Hilton since 2001). Scandic has introduced the concept of a 97% recyclable hotel room (eco-room), and developed its own Environmental Construction Standard (SERECS), listing materials that may not be used in their facilities, and specifying acceptable alternatives. Currently more than 10,000 rooms in the Scandic stock are 97% recyclable, while a number of hotels have been built or refurbished according to the eco-hotel standard. Between 1996 and 2003, energy consumption in the Swedish Scandic branch was reduced by approximately 19% on a kWh/m² basis and 15% on a kWh/guestnight basis (with 1996 as a reference year). In the same period, water consumption was reduced by approximately 6% on a liter/guest-night basis, and the amount of unsorted waste decreased by approximately 48% on a kg/guest-night basis (NB: only properly reporting hotels are included in the analysis). Furthermore, 77 out of 123 eligible hotels (62.6%) have been eco-labelled with the Nordic Swan Eco-label, the most demanding ISO Type I label for the tourism accommodation. The results of the environmental program at the Hilton level will be more clearly visible in a couple of years, but the right direction has already been established.

This experience shows that the hotel industry can be an important partner in introducing sustainability into the built environment, and that responsible practice makes a good business sense.