

IMPLEMENTING ECO-LABEL FOR ACCOMMODATION SERVICES IN AGROTOURIST PENSIONS

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The hereby work wishes to study the main rules applicable to granting the eco-label for accommodation services in our country, as well as the possibility of introducing these rules in the rural areas, specifically in some Agro hostels. Although the law governing the eco-label has existed since 2005 and it is based on an older European rule, there have been taken few steps in our country to introduce the eco-label for accommodation services. Our data show that there is only one housing unit holding the eco-label: a hotel in Saturn resort. Based on these reasons, we have studied the possibility of introducing the eco-label in agrotourism. The study was conducted on a sample of 100 representative hostels located in the main agrotourist areas of the country: Bucovina, Neamt, Maramures, Bran, Marginimea Sibiu, Vrancea-Buzău, Danube Delta, Harghita Covasna, the Apuseni Mountains and Oltenia under Mountain

Key words: eco-label, agrotourism, pensions, the comparative analysis

The assignment criteria of the ecologic label for tourist housing services are governed by the Government decision no. 1855/2005. This law transposes the European Commission Decision no. 287/2003/CE regarding the establishment of ecologic criteria applicable for the assignment of ecologic label for community tourist housing services, published in the Official Journal of the European Communities (JOCE) no., L102/2003.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study has been performed during the 1st of September and the 1st of December 2008 on a sample of 100 hostels situated in the main agrotourist areas in the country: Bucovina, Neamț, Maramureș, Bran, Mărginimea Sibiului, Buzău-Vrancea, Delta Dunării, Harghita-Covasna, the Apuseni mountains and the higher parts of Oltenia. In order to get correct and useful information, the comparative analysis has been focused on 10 hostels representative for each region, within localities with high tourist attraction potential, each of the hostels holding 3, 4 or 5 stars.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researches carried out in the field have aimed at comparing the criteria of assigning the ecologic label for tourist housing services with the real existing

conditions, as well as at underlining the agrotourist locations where the ecologic label can be implemented.

These criteria can be divided into two groups: compulsory and optional criteria.

Compulsory criteria. All such criteria in the group must be fulfilled.

Energy

1. Electric energy coming from regenerating resources – At least 22% of the electric energy has to come from regenerating resources. In conformity with The Government Decision no. 1535/2003, the regenerating un-fossil resources are: the wind, the solar, the geothermal, the winds, the high tides, the hydro-electrical, the fermenting gas of scraps, the gas deriving from the used water and biogas separators.

2. Coal and hard oil fuel – The coal and the resources of hard oil fuel having a sulphur concentration higher than 0.2% is not to be used as energy resources. This criteria is applicable only to tourist housing hostels with own heating system.

3. Using electric energy for heating – At least 22% of the electric energy used for heating rooms and sanitary hot water has to come from regenerating energy resources.

4. Working capacity of hot water boilers – The effective working capacity of a new boiler/heat generator purchased within the period for which the ecologic label is assigned has to be of at least 90%.

5. Air conditioning units – All air conditioning units purchased within the period for which the ecologic label is assigned has to be classified at least as having B category energetic efficiency.

6. Windows insulation – All room windows have to have a high level of thermo insulation in conformity with the local climate and have to offer an adequate level of sound insulation.

7. Heat and air conditioning stop – If the air conditioning and heat are not automatically switched off when opening the windows, there has to be an easily accessible announcement reminding tourists to close the window/windows when the heating or air conditioning systems are working.

8. Lighting switch off – If the room is not equipped with a lighting automatic switch off, there has to be an easily accessible announcement reminding tourists to switch off the lights every time they leave the room.

9. Low energy consumption bulbs – Within one year from the date of submitting the request for the ecologic label, at least 60% of all the electric bulbs in the housing unit have to belong to class A of energy efficiency. Within one year from the date of submitting the request for the ecologic label, at least 80% of all electric bulbs situated in places where they are supposed to work more than 5 hours a day have to belong to class A of energy efficiency.

10. Sauna timing out – All sauna installations have to be equipped with timers.

Water

11. The housing unit has to announce the authority responsible for the water supply with regard to its intention of switching to another water supply resource, such as: water from the public or the surface networks, if studies within the water protection plan demonstrate that using the current water resource has a great environmental impact. This criteria is applicable only for tourist housing units that are not supplied with water from the main water pipe of the public network.

12. Water flow at taps and showers – The water flow at taps and showers should not exceed the amount of 12 liters/minute.

13. Saving bathroom and toilet water – Both in bathrooms and toilets, there have to be adequate information regarding the best way tourists can contribute to saving water.

14. Garbage baskets in toilets – There should be a garbage basket in every toilet and tourists should be advised to use this one instead of the toilet basin for some scraps generated when using the toilets.

15. Water flow for wee units – Wee units should be equipped with an automatic or manual washing system that should not allow the cleaning of more than five units at a time.

16. Leakages – The personnel has to be trained to check on a daily basis for possible visible leakages and act accordingly. The tourist has to inform the personnel with regard to occurrence of such leakages.

17. Changing towels and bed sheets – The tourist has to be informed with regard to the environment protection policy used by the housing unit according to which the bed sheets and towels are changed either upon request or once a week for inferior housing units or two times a week for superior housing units.

18. Watering plants and gardens – Flowers and gardens have to be watered before noon or after sunset if the area or the climate conditions impose as such.

19. Used waters treatment – All used waters must be treated. If there is no such possibility of connecting to the local station for treating used waters, the housing unit must have one of its own.

20. Administration of used waters – The housing unit has to request the water management plan from the local authorities and in case such a plan exists, they are forced to respect it.

Detergents and disinfectants

21. Disinfectants – The disinfectants are to be used only when it is needed for respecting the legal hygiene imperatives.

22. Personnel training regarding the use of detergents and disinfectants – The personnel have to be trained not to use a higher quantity of detergent or disinfectant than the one stipulated on the package.

Waste

23. Separating waste by the tourist – The housing unit has to supply adequate recipients to allow tourists to separate waste in conformity with the local or national systems. There have to be clear information in every room inviting tourists to separate waste.

24. Dangerous waste – The personnel has to separate the dangerous waste. This includes toners, ink, freezing devices, batteries, pharmacy products. If the local authority does not ensure the discharge of dangerous waste, then the economic agent has to submit annually a declaration to the local authorities stipulating that there is no waste clearing off system.

25. Waste separation – The personnel has to separate the waste by categories that can be handled distinctly in the local or national installations for administrating wastes. If the local or national authorities do not provide the possibility of collecting and/or eliminating separately the wastes, the housing unit has to send a letter expressing the wish to separate wastes.

26. Waste transport – If the local authorities do not collect waste at the housing unit or nearby, the latter has to provide the transport of its own wastes to the right place, reducing as much as possible the distance on which these wastes are carried.

27. Single use products – Unless the law expressly enforces it, in rooms and restaurants there will be no single use products such as: ‘sliced’ or single use care products such as shampoo, soap, glasses, plates, dishes.

Other services:

28. Non smoking areas in the common places – In the common places, there have to be a non-smoking area.

29. Public transportation – Tourists and personnel have to be able to get easy access to information regarding the way they can reach the housing unit and other local places by means of the public transportation.

General management system

Economic agents requesting the assignment of the ecologic label that apply an environment management system registered in conformity with the Order of the agriculture, forest, water and environment ministry no. 50/2004 or certified in conformity with the Romanian standard SR EN ISO 14001:2005 have to comply automatically with the following compulsory general management criteria.

30. Maintenance and general repairs – All installations used for tourist housing services are to be repaired and maintained in conformity with the national legislation in force and whenever necessary, the works will be performed by trained personnel.

31. Maintenance and repairs of hot water boilers – The maintenance and repairing of hot water boilers will be done at least once a year or even more frequently if such thing is stipulated by the national legislation in force or it is necessary.

32. Establishing policy and action plan – The managing board of the housing unit has to have a policy regarding the environment and to make a simple statement regarding the environment protection and a clear action plan to ensure that the environment protection policy is applied.

The action plan identifies the performance goals in the environment protection field with regard to energy, water, chemical substances and waste that have to be set up every 2 years in consideration of the optional criteria. The

program establishes the person responsible for the environment protection within the housing unit. Tourists have to be invited to express their comments.

33. Personnel training – The housing unit has to offer the personnel information and training courses, as well as written procedures and manuals in order to ensure the correct application of the environment protection measures.

34. Tourist information – The housing unit has to offer tourists information regarding its own environment protection policy, the actions taken in consideration hereof and the ecologic label. The information have to be offered to tourists in an active way at the reception and the announcements inviting tourists to support the environment goals have to be visibly posted, mainly in the rooms.

Evaluation and verification: The economic agent requesting the assignment of the ecologic label has to submit declarations of fulfilling these criteria together with the relevant technical documents.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the comparative analysis of the legal criteria regarding the assignment of the ecologic label for the housing services and the possibilities of implementing it in the 100 hostels located in the main agro tourist areas in the country, we have succeeded in identifying the regions where this program could be more easily or more difficult to introduce:

1. Easy to introduce: Bran, Mărginimea Sibiului – all compulsory criteria and part of the optional ones can be fulfilled with minimum investments of the hostels owners;

2. Relatively easy to introduce: Harghita-Covasna, Bucovina, Neamț, Maramureș, Buzău-Vrancea – The criteria can be met with average investments of the hostel owners and the local councils;

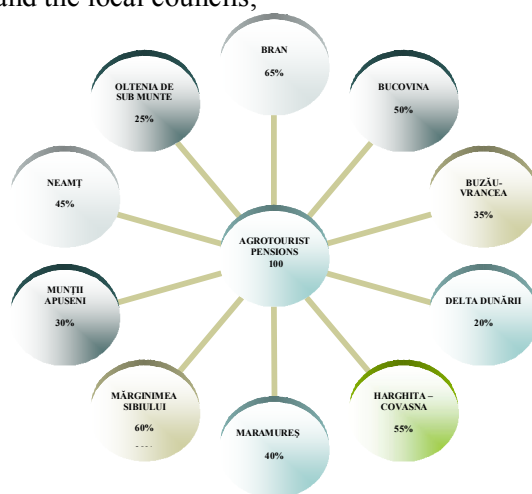


Figure 1 The possibilities of implementing eco label in the 100 agrotourist pensions

3. Difficult to introduce: The Apuseni Mountains, the higher parts of Oltenia – problems linked to the sewage system, transport, waste stocking, and the trained personnel is not sufficient;

4. Very difficult to introduce: The Danube Delta – there is no commune sewage system; the water resources are polluted; there is no transport and waste stocking system; the personnel with environment training is lacking; it results that a big allocation of funds is needed, both from the local and central authorities to improve the infrastructure and a big effort from the hostel owners. These investments cannot be covered only by the profit resulted from introducing the ecologic label.

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