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The Hotel Sector as an Important Component of Regional Economic Infrastructure

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Abstract:

This paper is focused on working out a set of areas for the development of the hotel sector as an important component of regional economic infrastructure. The authors establish that the hotel sector is expected to help achieve a set of objectives aimed at resolving existing social issues so as to ensure the well-being of the population and improving people's standard of living, which include creating new jobs, improving the level and quality of service, boosting income levels for regions' residents, and ensuring large inflows of foreign and domestic tourists. The paper identifies several unresolved macrolevel issues, including the lack of an integrated strategy for development and a relevant policy in the sector, the imperfect regulatory/legal framework, poor accounting in respect of economic entities, and the unsatisfactory level of quality of hotel services. The authors prove that at the microlevel the current key issues within the hotel sector include poor accommodation availability and the complicated economic conditions in which hotels get to operate these days.

Keywords: hotel sector; service; quality; tourism; hospitality; infrastructure; industry.

JEL Classification: L80; L89.

Introduction

The hotel industry is an indispensable component of the services sector. It is closely associated with the development of tourism, as it provides lodging services to both external and internal tourists. For this reason, of major significance is a focus on exploring the key characteristics of the sector's operation and identifying its typical attributes which set it apart from the other types of entrepreneurial activity within the hospitality industry, which should help gain an idea of the current state of affairs within the sector, determine the latest trends in its development, and, afterwards, develop an appropriate methodology for managing hotel enterprises with a view to enhancing the efficiency of their activity and boosting their competitive advantage.

Most economists construe economic infrastructure as a set of ancillary industries, production operations, and specific types of activity focused on servicing the primary production sector and the population. Economic infrastructure in highly-developed countries is characterized by not just significant supply within the services sector but the high quality of that type of services as well. In the economy of those nations, a special place is occupied by the hospitality industry.

With that said, as a result of technological progress, the hospitality sector gradually has turned into a powerful industry that employs millions of professionals, who are focused on providing consumers with the best service possible. The hospitality industry incorporates a variety of sectors, like those dealing with tourism, leisure, entertainment, lodging facilities, restaurants and other public facilities, tours and sightseeing, arrangement of fairs and exhibitions, and arrangement of scientific conferences.

Issues related to the development of the hotel sector as a component of regional economic infrastructure have been investigated by scholars N.A. Gavrilova (Gavrilova and Yakushina 2016), E.S. Kurbonov (2015), A.N. Petrov (Petrov, Kurochkina and Sergeev 2016), G.A. Polynskaya (2013), V.N. Smirnov (2018), K.I. Shchetinina (2013), and others. However, most of the conceptual foundations of the development of the hotel sector remain ambiguous, with insufficient progress made in terms of designing a proper methodology for the strategic development of hotel enterprises and certain characteristics of the operation of hotel entities considered insufficiently in putting together long-term programs for their development.

1. Methods

The study's methodological basis is grounded in the use of the following general methods of research: analysis and synthesis (to analyze existing theoretical and methodological tenets and insights on issues of the development of the hotel sector, as a major component of regional economic infrastructure); structural/logical (to systematize the factors that influence the development of enterprises within the hospitality industry); factor analysis (to determine the effect of the various factors on the level of development within the hotel sector).

The study's information basis is grounded in relevant government statutes and regulations, statistical materials from federal and local authorities, and research publications by domestic and foreign scholars related to issues of the development of the hotel sector as a major component of regional economic infrastructure (Agamirova, Agamirova, Lebedeva and Ilkevich 2017; Lawrencenko, Vyalyi and Zgonnik 2017; Nikolskaya et al. 2018).

The study's key focus is on developing a set of techniques for helping drive the development of the hotel sector in regions and providing a rationale for a set of strategies for economic development within the hospitality industry. In addition, the authors are undertaking to substantiate a set of techniques for evaluating the performance of enterprises within the hospitality industry and identify and formulate some of the key areas for the strategic development of companies within the hospitality industry at the regional level.

2. Results

The hospitality industry is a special sector within the tourism industry which is concerned with providing accommodation to tourists and incorporates a set of industries that are focused on providing them with a variety of services, like room and board, entertainment, and alcoholic beverages. It brings together sectors concerned with tourism, hotels, restaurants and other public catering facilities, leisure and recreation, and arrangement of conferences and meetings and is an integrated concept that covers a wide variety and diversity of forms of entrepreneurship specializing in provision of services related to accommodating and servicing visitors.

The diversity of services provided within the hospitality industry and their special characteristics is a key factor in the development of the various types of entrepreneurial activity by entities operating within the industry, including state-run and nonprofit organizations. The key subsystems within the industry include: the material/technical base; the region's natural resources; infrastructure provision (the availability of proper conditions for residing in the area); connection to outside areas (links between a locality, district, or region and a foreign counterpart); internal transportation (air, rail, and sea travel; urban and interurban transportation); road quality; cultural/historical heritage; recreational/sanative infrastructure; the service-provision culture; the system and mechanisms for ensuring the safety and security of all guests and protecting their rights; information support for the guests (route and direction signs; information on places to eat at and see; proper staff language skills to ensure comprehensive information support for foreign and domestic guests).

The hospitality business implies the provision of integrated services characterized by a special nature, and that is what governs the creation of a positive image for the enterprise and shapes the secondary demand for its services. The sector occupies a major place in the nation's economy, as its influence cuts across virtually the entire services industry: hotels and restaurants, tourism and transportation, and the entertainment industry (Table 1).

Initially, the hotel sector category dealt with the activity of hotels exclusively. But now this category also covers the activity of mocamps, motels, tourist villages, and cottages. Since hotels were the first type of visitor lodging facility, it was after them that the actual sector was named. At the moment, the Russian Federation also has in place a number of other facilities that provide temporary accommodation to people but are not part of the hotel sector, as lodging is not their primary line of business, while the price of their services is normally not much higher than their prime cost (e.g., holiday centers, health centers, recreation-and-retreat centers, children's holiday camps, and health-and-recreation resorts).

Table 1. Entities which Provide Services within the Hospitality Industry

	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
Entity	Types of the entity
Enterprises that belong in the hospitality industry	 - hotels, mocamps, hostels, and other types of lodging facility; - food outlets: restaurants, cafés, bars, etc.; - places of amusement: exhibition complexes, amusement parks, recreational centers, sporting facilities, concert complexes, etc.; - activity organizers: cultural, health, sports, scientific, and business (congresses, fairs, etc.) activities, concerts, and festivals
Enterprises that depend on the hospitality industry based on the technological value chain	 transportation organizations; travel agencies and operators and sightseeing firms; places of interest: museums, exhibitions, nature parks, and recreational centers; manufacturers and vendors of souvenirs, travel advisories, and other tourism-related products
3. Enterprises associated with the hospitality industry based on the technological value chain	- stadiums, sports centers, shopping malls, recreational centers, theaters, museums, circuses, zoos, etc.; - transportation services (taxicabs, urban and suburban transportation, etc.)
Enterprises that provide the hospitality industry with goods and services	 manufacturers and vendors of special goods and products, companies that provide construction services, engineering services, services related to IT, equipment, logistics support, etc.; providers of services in the area of consulting, marketing, logistics, personnel management, etc.
5. Enterprises that form within the hospitality industry a cluster-based infrastructure of their own	 - information outlets; - R&D institutions and organizations; - educational institutions; - industry trade groups, associations, and special interest clubs
Government agencies and local self- governing authorities	- a central executive body;- sectoral government services and agencies;- local self-governing authorities

Among the key characteristics typical for the hotel sector are the following: consumer needs and wishes always govern the economic efficiency of a company's activity; operation scheduling mainly depends on fluctuations in consumer demand; determining and measuring the quality of services is a problematic task which requires taking an integrated approach; employees must have a solid command of the basic skills needed to ensure the hospitable treatment of the guests; good personnel performance is not the most important factor, as low productivity may be associated with a lack of consumer demand, rather than poor personnel performance; marketing and production in the sphere of hospitality services must be viewed as a twin challenge that often is hard to resolve.

In addition, it may be worth singling out the following distinct characteristics of a hotel service:

- 1) Intangibility. Unlike a material commodity, a service cannot be sensed prior to being provided. To minimize the extent of unpredictability regarding the quality of a service, a client will normally look, before going for it, for something material that can attest to its quality.
- 2) Inseparability. A service is produced and consumed at the same time. In most of cases typical for the hospitality industry, rendering a service requires the presence of both those who will render it and those will consume it.
- 3) Heterogeneity (variability). The quality of a service may vary. The quality of a service provided within the hospitality industry depends on the conditions in which it is rendered. A service is provided and consumed simultaneously, and its quality depends on the shape in which its provider is at the time of rendering it.
- 4) Perishability. Services cannot be stored. If hotel enterprises are to maximize their revenue, they will need to maneuver between their potential and the changeable demand, as it is very hard to recoup losses caused by falling consumer demand.

In the authors' view, given the above characteristics of service provision in the hospitality sector, there is a need for flexible and effective organizational/economic mechanisms that would factor in the special nature of management and marketing in the hospitality industry. One of the key functions in the area of services for tourists and local residents is performed by hotel enterprises that provide one with lodging and personal services during a trip (nearly 60% of overall travel expenditure is accounted for by room and board costs specifically).

With that said, a key function performed by hotels is creating for visitors all necessary conditions for a comfortable and relaxing short stay, with a focus on providing them with a service that is comprehensive in just about every respect: from providing room and board or information about local food and places to see to holding major conferences. Under these

conditions, the service provided by a hotel requires having in place several additional – auxiliary – amenities, like a parking lot, a gas station, a café, a bar, a sauna, a swimming pool, a laundromat, and a set of shopping outlets.

A consequence of this is the creation of new jobs in other sectors of the services industry, which, without question, is going to positively impact the employment rate and produce a significant social effect. Considering the recent trend of core hotel services expanding, it may be worth grouping all additional services based on a set of specific attributes: services related to information and reference assistance; services related to sanative tourism; public services; services related to transportation; entertainment services.

In a climate of this kind, the job of personnel employed within the hospitality industry is just to provide a quality service to the guests. Client satisfaction with the level of service received is going to translate into a positive image for the city, region, or country and the possibility of a particular service being desired again in the future. To note, a major trend today is the focus on an optimum price/quality ratio on services. The appropriate availability of lodging facilities and their proper operation constitute a major factor in the successful resolution of social issues in a community, region, or country.

In exploring the latest applied mechanisms for management, it may be worth pointing up the following key characteristics of management of the regional market for hotel services: enterprises within the hotel sector being oriented toward providing tourists with quality lodging and food services; taking an integrated approach with regard to the system of development of a region's hotel sector, which implies the need to put in place a regional hotel operator based on principles of effective interaction between areas such as material/technical support for hotels, highly qualified personnel, quality training for specialists working in the market for hotel services, developing a region's tourism infrastructure, and developing recreational, financial, and human resources; the hotel sector connecting and interacting with institutions of vocational and higher learning, as well as regional authorities.

3. Discussion

What adds to the reliability of the above approaches is that a modern strategy for the development of the regional market for hotel services in a climate of competition is expected to be designed based on components such as provision of domestic and foreign tourists with hotel services that come with an optimum price/quality ratio; creation of new jobs, above all for young citizens, and a focus on their social adaptation; cultivation of social responsibility within the hotel sector for the well-being of local communities and encouragement of the owners of hotel enterprises to promote the region in the global and domestic markets; creation of state-of-the-art innovation-focused hotel enterprises, associations of that kind of enterprises, and regional hotel operators that would be capable of competing with foreign hotels, many of which are characterized by high economic performance indicators and the ability to ensure the proper development of the hotel material/technical base and foster the professional potential of hotel personnel.

Under these conditions, there is a need to develop an organizational/managerial establishment within the regional hotel sector that will comprise a set of functional units focused on effective interaction with each other and facilitating the coordinated development of key links within the regional hotel sector to help achieve all of the strategic goals set. The functional/economic component of the regional hotel sector must include a set of various types of activity combined to help achieve all of the strategic objectives set (most importantly, provision of high-quality service).

Understandably, the actual provision of services to tourists is a leading vector for activity in the regional hotel sector (Konovalova, Yudina, Bushueva, Ukhina and Lebedev 2018; Nikazachenko, Yudashkina, Vlasov, Novikova and Lebedev 2018; Zaitseva, Kozlov and Nikolskaya 2017). Another vector for the functional structure of the regional hotel sector is the economic component of activity within it, which incorporates three major subcomplexes: the production complex, the nonproduction complex, and the complex concerned with information support for consumers.

Apart from the above components of the regional hotel sector, tourists are also directly serviced by organizations and persons operating outside the sector, like administrators of privately-owned homes, apartments, and cars rented out to tourists; restaurants and cafés; enterprises within the sphere of leisure and recreation (sports clubs and facilities, museums, theaters and movie-theaters, nightclubs, casinos, and exhibition spaces); air companies that provide planes for charter flights; sea and river ports that provide vessels for tourists; banks and insurance companies that directly service tourists.

Conclusion

To sum up, the hotel sector is expected to help achieve a set of objectives aimed at resolving existing social issues so as to ensure the well-being of the population and improving people's standard of living, which include: creating new jobs; improving the level and quality of service; boosting income levels for regions' residents; ensuring large inflows of foreign and domestic tourists; boosting business and tourism activity in regions and cities; attracting funding and investing it long-term in an efficient manner; boosting the level of vocational sectoral education; cultivating the potential for the exchange of best practices with other regions; enhancing the level of service provided by personnel through encouraging lifelong learning and professional development.

In addition, the hotel sector is currently faced with a number of unresolved issues at the macrolevel, which include: the lack of an integrated strategy for development and a sound policy in the sector, insufficient investment, the imperfect regulatory/legal framework, poor accounting in respect of economic entities, and the unsatisfactory level of quality of hotel services.

At the microlevel, the current key issues within the hotel sector include poor accommodation availability, problems with certification of hotel services; the complicated economic conditions in which hotels get to operate today, like increased expenditure on the upkeep and maintenance of hotel rooms, increased utility costs, significant tax strains, and the high cost of hotel services.

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