

Sustainability in the Meetings Industry

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Sustainability in the Meetings Industry

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1. Introduction

In the past decades tourism has grown rapidly in connection with globalization. Business tourism especially has increased heavily and represents one of the largest and fastest growing sectors within the tourism sphere (Lyck 2012:2).

Alongside, the growing globalization and consumption have created a need for an increased awareness of the threats posed by an overuse of non-renewable resources. Subsequently, the concept of sustainability has come into focus.

A commonly accepted definition of sustainability was made by the Brundtland Commission in 1987: “*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” (WCED 1987:43).

The concept of sustainability is often associated with the three pillars: Environment, society and economy (Lyck 2012:1, Weaver & Lawton 2006). In relation to the industry of tourism, sustainability can be described as: *Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee long-term sustainability.* (UNWTO, Lyck 2012:1). The focus in this article will be on how to

establish social and environmental sustainability in a way that is compatible with economical sustainability within the meetings industry.

A traditional distinction of tourism is made between leisure and business tourism. Related to the latter the rather new concept of “the meetings industry” has been developed. The meetings industry refers to business tourism with priority to meetings, congresses and events (Lyck 2012). The meetings industry includes many of the same variables as leisure tourism such as time, location, accessibility and price. Furthermore, the meetings industry is like other kinds of tourism related to the industries of accommodation, restaurants, attractions, transportation and shopping (Lyck 2012:3).

Due to the increasing risk from climate change, economic downturn and demographic shift more strategic and focused attention from the meetings industry is required (ICCA 2012:5). Sustainability in the meetings industry concerns how the involved parties continue to run their activities in an economical successful way whilst contributing towards a stronger and more just society and reducing their impact on the environment (ISO 20121).

Sustainability in the meetings industry, i.e. ”green meetings”, includes all of the above-mentioned industries and the sustainability performances carried out within these.

The research project in its first and not finished version was presented for the first time at the ICCA Conference in San Juan 2012, see Lyck 2012. It was at that occasion announced that the research project would be further developed in 2013. This article includes the first presentation of the latest research developed.

2. The research project

The focus of this article is to investigate how it is possible to combine the issues of environmental and societal sustainability with that of economic sustainability in relation to the meetings industry and how this can be done. The central question of the research project is therefore:

Can green meetings be economically profitable?

3. Limitation

This article does not include transportation or events etc. concerning the meetings, but focuses on the possibilities for hotels to offer sustainable meeting services. It is concentrated on Nordic experiences.

4. Method

As well-known, sustainability has in many years had a high priority among the politicians, the citizens and the corporations in the Nordic states (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and especially in Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway and Sweden). Even though the Western world was hit by the largest economic and financial crisis since the Great Depression sustainability has continued to have a high priority in the Nordic countries. This is the reason for focusing on the Nordic way of dealing with investigation of sustainability.

The investigation is further centered on Scandinavia and Denmark due to operational conditions, as this makes it less resource-demanding for a Danish researcher to conduct an investigation on sustainability.

The method is based on use of secondary as well as primary sources. The secondary sources are 1) The Scandinavian Sustainability Destination Index, which is an index developed by the Scandinavian Chapter of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA). The meetings industry in Scandinavia is used as the recurring example. 2) The use of results from a master thesis written by Sarah Larsen and Sarah Poulsen at the Copenhagen Business School in 2011, a thesis for which the author to this article was the supervisor. The master thesis investigates the Danish hotel industry with focus on sustainable hotel operations. It is based on three hotel cases, interviews with people with deep hotel knowledge, a questionnaire with 100 Danish hotels and a questionnaire with 236 hotel guests and politicians from the major political parties in the Danish Parliament.

Referring to Ecolabelindex 2011 there were 377 eco-labels in the world, of these 44 eco-labels are related to tourism (eco-labels are standard for measurements for

sustainability). As standard measurement instrument in the research the Green Key is chosen. It was established in Denmark in 1994, but is now an international eco-label applied in 42 countries. It aims to:

- raise the awareness of leisure establishment staff and clients,
- increase the use of sustainable methods of operation and technology,
- run ecologically sound and responsible businesses, and thereby
- reduce resource and energy usage.

The Green Key is achieved for one year at a time based on obligatory criteria that must be fulfilled plus point criteria for specific issues. For a precise list of criteria see [International Baseline Criteria Hotels](#), see references.

3) The third input in this article is a primary source that includes in depth interviews with hotel managers in Denmark. All of the hotels are Green Key certified and situated in Denmark. Some of them are independent hotels, others are domestic chain hotels and others are international hotel chains. The results will later be published in a book on Danish hotels. However, in this article the main findings on the Danish hotel industry with focus on sustainable hotel operations are presented.

Based on these three sources main strategic considerations are presented, including a perspective for sustainability in the hotel and the meetings industry. Finally, a conclusion of the investigation is presented.

The method includes both quantitative and qualitative data.

5. The Scandinavian Sustainability Destination Index

Scandinavia is recognized as a pioneer and world leader in social and environmental sustainability (ICCA 2012:5). In 2012 the Scandinavian chapter of the International Congress and Convention Association constructed a sustainability index as a way of assessing and reporting on the sustainability initiatives and performances of the major meetings destinations in Scandinavia. The index constitutes a basis on which it is possible to compare performances of sustainability. The intention behind the index is to

serve to drive performance at a regional level as well as to inspire other destinations. The Scandinavian Sustainability Destination Index for 2012 was presented at an ICCA conference in Århus, Denmark March 4-6th 2013. It is produced by Guy Bigwood, MCI Group Director of Sustainability.

Method for making the Scandinavian Sustainability Destination Index

The Scandinavia Sustainability Destination Index measures and compares social and environmental sustainability performances between capital and regional cities in the five Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The index is based on a questionnaire with 16 questions regarding matters such as the city's greenhouse gas emissions, transportation options and sustainability plans, as well as the commitment of the hotels and venues, see questionnaire in appendix. In the first report from 2012 these were answered by 16 Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVB) in 16 different cities, whereas the number had increased to 20 participating cities in the report from 2013.

In order to compare the destinations, the performance indicators were grouped into two categories: "Hardware" and "software". "Hardware" indicates the sustainability commitment of the city government and performance of the infrastructure e.g. climate change commitment, recycling availability and renewable energy supply. The hardware related questions involved questions such as whether the city had a climate change action plan or not, what the city's total Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions were and which public transport links that exist between the main airport and the city center. "Software" is related to the sustainability commitment and performance of the local meetings industry such as hotels, venues and convention bureaus. In the software category, the percentage of hotels with eco-certification, existence of sustainability policies, communication of sustainability initiatives etc. is measured.

Each performance indicator is assigned 26 points as a maximum i.e. 26 points for hardware and 26 points for software, giving a maximum of 52 possible points.

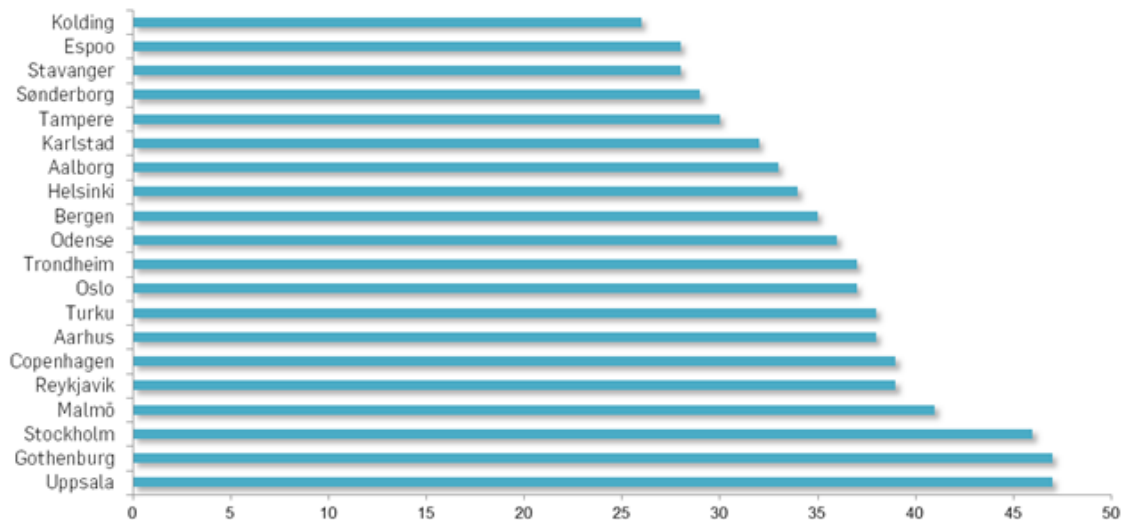
Results

Overview 1: Results from the Scandinavian Sustainability Index 2013

| <u>BENCHMARKING</u> | <u>HARDWARE</u> | <u>SOFTWARE</u> | <u>TOTAL</u> |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Uppsala S | 25 | 22 | 47 |
| Gothenburg S | 21 | 26 | 47 |
| Stockholm S | 25 | 21 | 46 |
| Malmö S | 23 | 18 | 41 |
| Reykjavik Iceland | 18 | 21 | 39 |
| Copenhagen DK | 23 | 16 | 39 |
| Aarhus DK | 20 | 18 | 38 |
| Turku Finland | 19 | 19 | 38 |
| Oslo N | 20 | 17 | 37 |
| Trondheim N | 21 | 15 | 37 |
| Odense DK | 24 | 12 | 36 |
| Bergen N | 20 | 15 | 35 |
| Helsinki Finland | 15 | 19 | 34 |
| Aalborg DK | 21 | 12 | 33 |
| Karlstad S | 19 | 13 | 32 |
| Tampere Finland | 16 | 14 | 30 |
| Sønderborg DK | 18 | 11 | 29 |
| Stavanger N | 15 | 13 | 28 |
| Espoo Finland | 15 | 13 | 28 |
| Kolding DK | 18 | 8 | 26 |

Note: On hardware and software, see enclosure 2.

City destination points 2013:



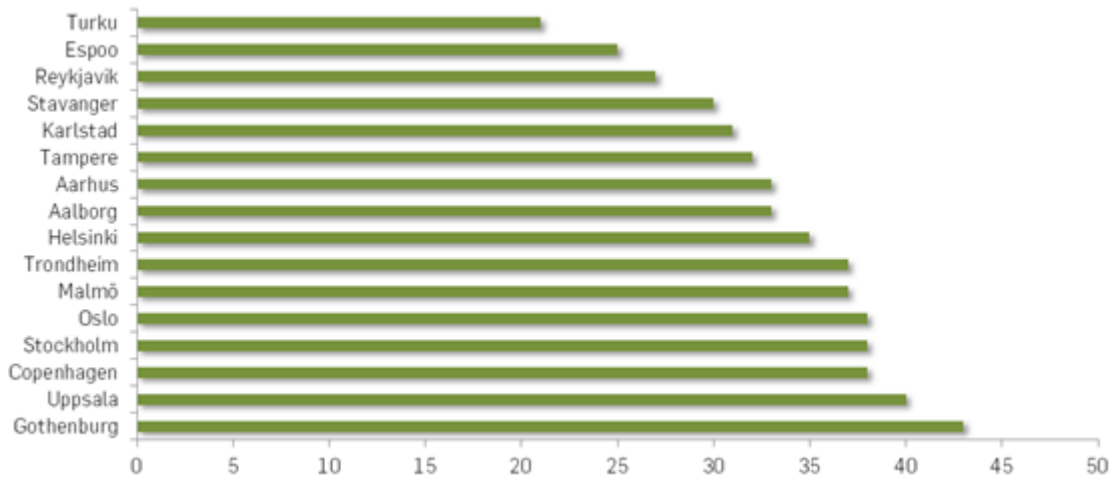
Report: Scandinavian Destination Sustainability Index 2013

The 2013 index shows that Uppsala and Gothenburg jointly share the highest scores in total with 47 out of the 52 possible points. Stockholm and Malmö follow closely with 46 and 41 points, respectively. When comparing the 2013 index to the 2012 results (see below) it can be noted that Gothenburg that was the winner in 2012, has achieved a continuous improvement with a performance upgrade of 9%. Uppsala too improved by a praiseworthy 18%. The difference in total points between the city with the highest number of points and the city with the lowest number of points is 21, as Uppsala is ranked with 47 points and Kolding is ranked with 26.

Overview 2: Results from the Scandinavian Sustainability Index 2012

| | <u>BENCHMARKING</u> | <u>HARDWARE</u> | <u>SOFTWARE</u> | <u>TOTAL</u> |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Gothenburg | 21 | 22 | | 43 |
| Uppsala | 25 | 15 | | 40 |
| Copenhagen | 22 | 16 | | 38 |
| Stockholm | 21 | 17 | | 38 |
| Oslo | 20 | 18 | | 38 |
| Malmö | 18 | 19 | | 37 |
| Trondheim | 21 | 16 | | 37 |
| Helsinki | 15 | 20 | | 35 |
| Aalborg | 21 | 12 | | 33 |
| Aarhus | 19 | 14 | | 33 |
| Tampere | 18 | 14 | | 32 |
| Karlstad | 18 | 13 | | 31 |
| Stavanger | 15 | 15 | | 30 |
| Reykjavik | 19 | 8 | | 27 |
| Espoo | 14 | 11 | | 25 |
| Turku | 18 | 3 | | 21 |

City destination points 2012:



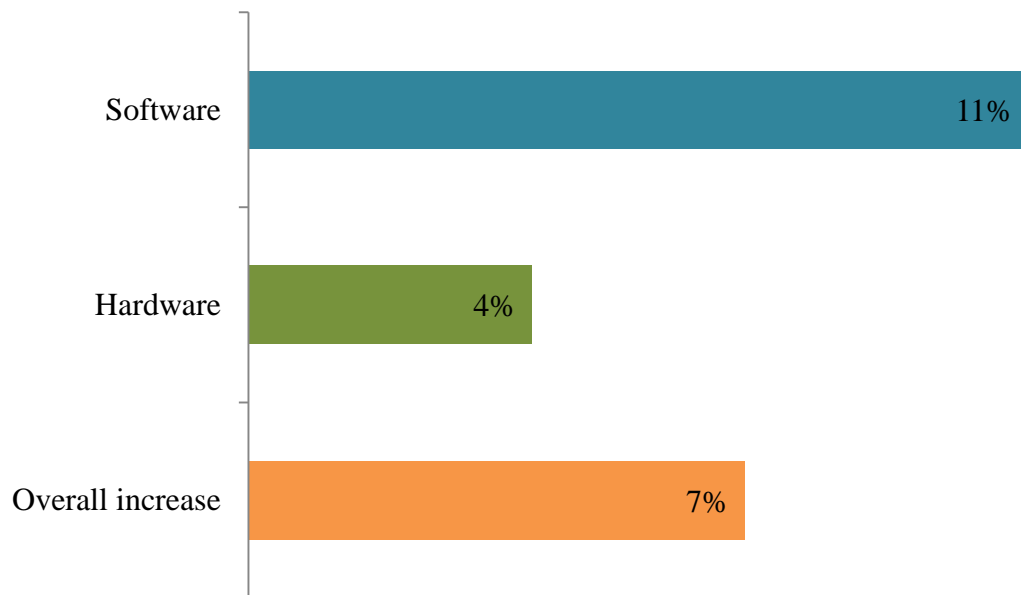
Report: Scandinavian Destination Sustainability Index 2013

Overview 2 shows that Gothenburg held the first place in 2012 too with a total of 43 points. Following is Uppsala with 40 points and Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo all with a total of 38 points.

As seen in the two overviews, the three highest ranked cities in 2013 were, together with Copenhagen, to be found in the top four in the 2012 index as well.

One of the cities that have improved most from 2012 to 2013 is Turku in Finland, which has gone from a total of 21 points to a total of 38 points. Also Reykjavik in Iceland has improved significantly going from 27 points in total in 2012 to 39 points in total in 2013, which places the city in top five. These improvements are shown in overview 4. The difference in total points between the city with the highest number of points and the city with the lowest number of points is 22, as Gothenburg is ranked with 43 points and Turku is ranked with 21. The difference was a bit lower in 2013, but only by 1 point.

Overview 3: Index development from 2012-2013



*Index development from 2012 to 2013,
Scandinavian Destination Sustainability Index*

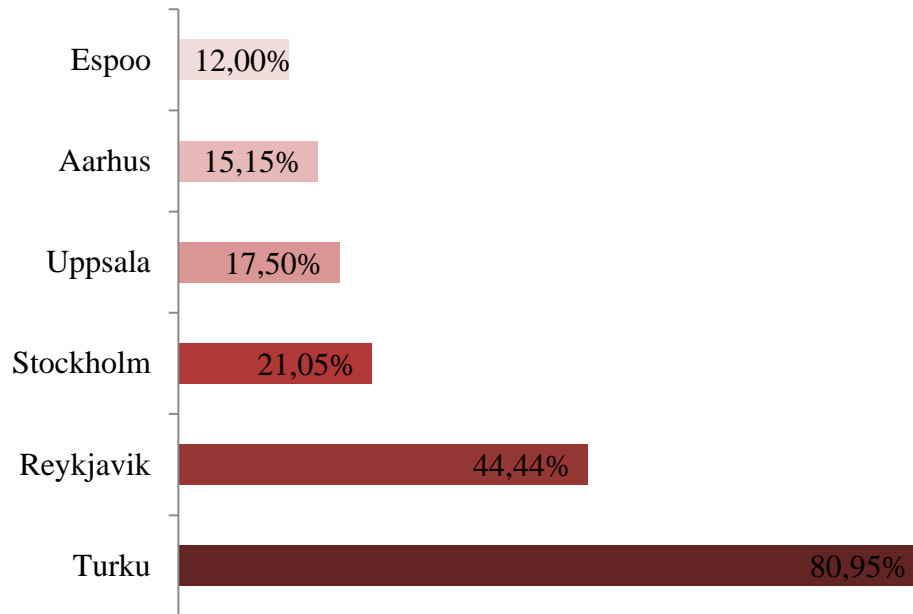
When comparing the results from the 2012 index to the newest index from 2013, there is a 7% overall increase in the destinations performances. Whereas the “hardware” performance increased with 4%, the “software” performances increased with 11% in average.

Overall the cities have achieved a higher number of points in 2013 compared to 2012. Some cities have gone down in points though. Helsinki, Oslo and Stavanger have all three lost one point and Tampere has lost two points.

Since 2012, four cities have been added to the index, be it Kolding, Bergen, Odense and Sønderborg.

One of the most significant shifts can be seen in the number of destinations that have developed and implemented sustainability strategies, communication campaigns and certification initiatives (ICCA 2013:10).

Overview 4: Index improvement from 2012-2013



Scandinavian destination sustainability index

Turku is the destination with the largest development, going from 21 point in 2012 to 38 points in 2013. Hereby Turku demonstrates an 81% improvement over the last year. Reykjavik, Stockholm, Uppsala, Aarhus, Espoo should also be given recognition for their improvement. The improvement is mainly due to improvement of software.

Summative, it can be said that the Scandinavian Sustainability Destination Index shows a general improvement from 2012-2013 regarding social and environmental sustainability performances within the meetings industry in Scandinavia. The sustainability commitment and performance of the local meetings industry such as hotels, venues and convention bureaus have increased significantly.

The index constitutes a way of measuring and comparing performances of sustainability among different destinations within the meetings industry. As sustainability deals with development issues concerning a balance between the three pillars i.e. societal welfare and environment as well as economy, indicators from all three dimensions should be investigated. Since the Sustainability Destination Index only addresses the first two

issues of sustainability, it will in continuation hereof be necessary to include the dimension of economy and ask how economical profitability is related to investing in environmental sustainability and societal welfare. As a way of investigating this question a number of interviews have been made with hotel managers in Copenhagen, but first the hotels' relation to sustainability will be dealt with.

6. “Exploring the Green Key” and its use in Denmark

Sarah Larsen and Sarah Poulsen have investigated the Danish hotel industry with focus on sustainable hotel operations. In their master thesis “*Exploring the Green Key*” they examined what an ambitious Danish Green Key should encompass and how this “Improved Green Key” could be utilized by Danish hotels. The thesis is founded on empirical data based on questionnaires as well as qualitative interviews. The area of research includes interview with politicians from the Danish Parliament, the industry organizations, specialists in hotel issues, the hotels and the private sector evaluations made by the hotel guests, i.e. the citizens' and corporations' evaluations.

Exploring the Green Key analyzes the current Green Key as presented in the introduction with the purpose of identifying its weaknesses in order to create an *Improved Green Key*. The prominent features of the *Improved Green Key* are more ambitious demands to the member hotels as well as to deliver an added market value.

The politicians from government as well as from the opposition agreed that the high political priority of sustainability would continue and even increase.

Both the hotel industry organization and the Danish tourism organization VisitDenmark agreed that sustainability would have a still more pronounced position in Denmark.

Concerning guests there was a clear tendency to environment having a high priority formally, but a less influence for their factual choice of hotel, where price and location had the main influence. The corporations showed a bigger interest de facto in sustainability than leisure visitors. An important finding in the investigation was also that the recognizability of the Green Key eco-label was low among guests, due to a lack of effective marketing.

Of the 100 hotels in 2010, 36 had an eco-label, including 27 with the Green Key eco-label. 64 found certification too expensive for the time being, but expressed that demand for sustainability was increasing from society as well as from customers.

Furthermore, the empirical analysis shows that the Green Key maybe is a little unambitious and uninspiring as well as it shows a need for a greater sparring among hotels, especially the small ones. Additionally, it is expected that there politically will be implemented stricter environmental policies and regulations, especially regarding emissions.

The conclusion of the thesis was that there was an ongoing change in direction of more weight on sustainability. Furthermore, it was concluded that increased marketing value of eco-label certification would be needed for a stronger sustainability development. A green key with a more ambitious structure could be an instrument for a quicker greening of the hotel industry.

Even though all the economic benefits are not directly measurable the thesis concludes that the benefits of greening the hotel industry, including the value of marketing and the long term decrease in costs, most likely will overweigh the financial costs in the long run.

7. Investigation of Danish hotel managers' view and experiences on including sustainability in their strategy and operations

In order to investigate the economic side of “greening” of the meetings industry and especially the hotel business, 11 in-depth interviews have been conducted with hotel managers from hotels in Denmark, mainly Copenhagen.

Copenhagen has achieved a leading position within sustainability with a significant improvement over the recent years. In 2012 64 % of all hotel rooms were eco-certified, compared to 2008 where only 8 % were certified (WOCO 2012, ICCA-report 2012, see references).

The idea has been to investigate hotels that engage in sustainability in the sense of environmental, social and economic initiatives. All the hotels in question are Green Key

certified. The reason to focus on Green Key certified hotels exclusively is that they can be used as examples of best practices and thereby be thought of as inspirational cases for the industry in general and related to strategic evaluations.

The hotels include Danish and international hotel chains and independent hotels, mainly in Copenhagen, but also outside Copenhagen.

Interviews have been conducted with the hotel managers from the following hotels:

Admiral Hotel

The hotel is a 4-star independent hotel located in downtown Copenhagen in an old renovated warehouse facing the sea and canals. Sanne Sander, the Functional Manager was interviewed.

It has been Green Key-certified since January 2010 and is now promoted by sustainability through minimizing waste and improving products, services and working procedures so that the environmental impacts are as low as possible. The requirements for COP15 in Copenhagen were the reason for being certified. Each year a sustainable target is set. Energy consumption has been reduced and water has been saved. Furthermore, the waste handling has created a small income.

The biggest challenge is found to have the staff to become enthusiastic about sustainable behavior and ideas. The Green Key is not used in marketing, but sustainability has been a main factor to attract big American corporations. The investments in sustainability have improved the economy.

Arp-Hansen Hotel Group

It is a Danish privately owned hotel chain with eleven 2, 3 and 4-star hotels in Copenhagen with 10 hotels well located in downtown Copenhagen and 1 in greater Copenhagen. The chief operating officer Malene Friis was interviewed.

The hotel group has been Green Key-certified since 2008 and has the intention to build their new hotels in preparation for being certified as well. Also, they help their costumers find green alternatives when it comes to e.g. activities and transport.

The Green Key was chosen because it was international and developed for hotels.

Especially big corporations ask for sustainability, and the concern on sustainability among the guests has increased. The Green Key is not directly used in the marketing, but it is part of the logo and referred to, when questions of sustainability are raised. Concerning the ecological part in relation to food, it is not implemented due to ecological products being expensive, but it is likely that it will be included in the future.

In total, the investments have given an economic surplus.

Crowne Plaza

Crowne Plaza Copenhagen Towers is the only Crowne Plaza hotel in Denmark. The hotel is placed close to the airport. It is a 4-star hotel. In March 2013, the Crowne Plaza chain accounts for 392 hotels in 52 countries and is still expanding. Allan L. Agerholm, the Managing Director was interviewed.

It has been Green Key-certified since the opening in 2009. Crowne Plaza is completely CO₂-neutral. Sustainability is used to create a difference in the market and so is use of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). When the decision on giving priority to sustainability was taken, it was not so much on the agenda in general but the Managing Director decided that sustainability should be a strategic issue. In 2010, the hotel was awarded the greenest hotel in the world by achieving the Skål International-award (managed by the Association of Travel and Tourism Professionals, Skal 2013). Furthermore, it has the highest ISO classification. The Green Key certification was chosen as it was well-known and therefore had a specific market value.

The Green Key certification lists targets that shall be achieved, but it gives no tools for achieving the targets. ISO goes deeper. The hotel lists own targets and the task is to achieve them by tools given by ISO. (The hotel is ISO DS49001-certified. It is a CSR certification that means that the hotel fulfills the demands by ISO 9001, which is the

management tool, 14001, which is an environmental tool and 26000, which is the CSR part).

Sustainability is applied mainly based on commercial reasons. It has implied big savings on energy, water and waste. Furthermore, it gives a clear branding. No compromises are made in relation to quality. For example, hotel management knows that many guests want to have a minibar in their room. It is why, they do not leave out the minibar, but they choose one that is extremely effective in not damaging the environment. The same considerations are behind having air-condition, mechanical ventilation and computers etc.

The consumption of energy is extremely low due to the investments undertaken (a main cause is the geothermal heating). They have succeeded in being well-known in the media worldwide based on the sustainability strategy.

Hotel Alexandra

The hotel is an independent hotel. It is a 3-star hotel. It is located centrally in Copenhagen, and the building has been used as hotel business for more than 100 years.

Hotel manager Jeppe Mühlhausen was interviewed.

The hotel was Green Key-certified in 1996, which makes it the oldest of the Green Key-hotels in Copenhagen.

The Green Key was chosen as it was international and operational. The hotel has Danish furniture art from 1940s and 1950s. It is also a kind of sustainability to preserve them.

The certification has reduced the costs significantly. The certification has not been used so much for marketing, but especially big corporations demand sustainability.

Comwell Kolding

Comwell Hotels consist of 16 hotels. 2 of these are placed in Sweden and the rest is placed in different Danish cities. They were among the first hotels to bring spa culture to Scandinavia. The hotel hosts conferences for up to 2000 participants and has leisure

tourists too. Peter Shelde, the chief financial officer at the hotel situated in a Danish province city Kolding was interviewed. The hotel got the Green Key-certificate in 2008.

Comwell has during many years been devoted to the environment, for instance it was one of the first hotels that made the hotel smoke-free. Priority was also early given to reduction of energy and to CSR. In the beginning, the strategy followed was more ad hoc. Since implementation of the Green Key certification, the strategy has been developed in relation to energy, waste and ecology. The energy consumption has been reduced by 25 % although the number of guests has increased. Sorting of waste has also created a new smaller income. Concerning ecology, the hotel uses the products of the season so more locally products can be used and the transportation costs reduced.

The hotel was presented as a case at the COP15-meeting in Copenhagen.

Investment in sustainability has given a positive economic return, and now they are looking into the options of using solar cells and geothermal heat. Also, the value chain for the hotel production is followed intensively and dynamically.

G1. Skovridergaard

The hotel is located by a beautiful lake and forest nature close to a Danish province city, Silkeborg. It is 3-star hotel. It functions both as hotel and as conference center. The hotel was awarded conference center of the year 7 years in a row from 2000-2006. It is not a part of a bigger chain. Hotel manager Margit Coulthard was interviewed.

The hotel became Green Key-certified in 2009. The reason was a request in connection to the COP15-conference in Copenhagen. Today, the hotel also follows more ideological intentions and studies ecological issues. Sustainability is not applied actively in the strategy. There has been big savings in energy and electricity. It has been an advantage not to be frontrunner and first to react when other hotels had got some experiences and when new technological changes have come up. An example is the use of LED-bulbs. The strategy is very concrete pointing at many specific issues that can

reduce the costs. In all, the strategy to include sustainability has given a positive economic return.

Savoy Hotel

The hotel is located in downtown Copenhagen. It is a 3-star hotel. The Savoy Hotel in Copenhagen is not a part of a chain and has therefore no other relation the other Savoy hotels besides its name. Christian Oxlund, one of the hotel managers at Savoy Hotel was interviewed.

It has been Green Key-certified since 2009. In connection to the Climate Summit in Copenhagen, it became clear that still more customers demand green solutions.

Certification has reduced the costs to water, electricity and heating. In fact, the costs of electricity have been reduced to the half. The investments have given a high economic return.

Radisson Blu

Radisson is a chain with 435 hotels worldwide, of which 358 is situated in the US. The hotels in Europe, Africa and Asia are called Radisson Blu. They are run by the Belgian Rezidor Hotel Group. 8 are situated in Denmark. Henrik Grønning, the environment and marketing coordinator at the hotel Radisson Blu Fredensborg in the island Bornholm was interviewed. It is a 4-star hotel.

The hotel has been Green Key-certified in several sittings, the first time from 1994 when the Green Key-programme began and second time in February 2013 after a couple of years without any certification. All other Radisson Blu are Swan-certified, but the Green Key was chosen as it is more international. By being certified, the hotel actively takes part in Bornholm's strategy on becoming Bright Green Island. In all, the reasons for deciding on sustainability were 1) economy, 2) marketing, 3) ideology, 4) connection to the society (Bright Green Island). Radisson also has an own certification called Responsible Business. Included in this program is also a part called "Think Planet".

Certification has been a request especially from the big corporations.

In total, the investments have given positive return. The challenge has been to have the staff devoted to sustainability in their daily behaviour.

Hotel Koldingfjord

The hotel is not a part of a bigger chain. The hotel is situated in a Danish province city called Kolding. It is a 4-star hotel. The managing director Peter Madsen was interviewed.

It has been certified by Green Key since 2010, and emphasis has been on not only to fulfil the criteria, but also to *think* green and eco-friendly in everything being done – both by employees and by visitors.

The strategy includes a focus on the surrounding society and on the environment, and it is included in the written vision for the hotel. Also, CSR is an important component.

The Green Key has been a helpful instrument and investments have created a positive economic return. The Green Key is mentioned on the homepage, but it is not used actively in the marketing of the hotel. As a new element the annual report now also includes an environmental account. It is found important still to increase the sustainability level in a dynamic way.

Rungstedgaard

Rungstedgaard is located in the city Rungsted close to Copenhagen. It is a 3-star hotel. The hotel functions as conference centre and as a place for receptions. It is an independent hotel.

It achieved the Green Key-certificate about 10 years ago, when it still to a big extent was a question of values more than economy. Today, Rungstedgaard is focused on green technology, especially solar cells and geothermal energy.

Originally, the investments took place more based on ideology than on economy, but today also the economic dimension is important. There is a strong demand from

corporations for sustainability, and the staff is very engaged sustainability development. Two strategic areas are now in focus, the one is on ecology and the other is on green-tech.

The Green Key was chosen as it was an international well-known certification. It is not used for marketing, as such, but it is clear that many customers would not be customers without the weight on sustainability. Focus has been on break even between income and costs, not so much on high economic return.

The biggest difficulties have been the ecological part of the certification, where the quotas are found in-operational.

Vilvorde Kursuscenter

The conference centre is located just north of Copenhagen by the forest and the sea. It is a 4-star hotel. It is not a part of a bigger chain. It is a small centre with 63 small rooms and one double room. From Vilvorde Kursuscenter Ida Jørgensen, the conference centre and hotel manager, was interviewed.

The hotel was Green Key-certified in 1994 right from the beginning of the programme. It has always been a natural priority for the centre to value health, ecology and a clean environment – ever since it started as a garden centre in 1874.

The certificate is found on the wall in the centre so that it can be seen by all guests.

Participation in the Green Key has given cost savings. Concerning ecology a Bronze-award has been received. A Silver-award cannot be achieved as it would demand that less of the meat was fresh meat and replaced by frozen meat, which would be against the hotel management's focus on the quality level of the hotel's strategy.

The owner's attitude has always been to give priority to the environment and for instance, cleaning has always been without perfume and chemicals.

The Green Key functions well, but there can be some problems with sparring on sustainability due to the centre being small.

Short summary on interviews with Danish hotel managers

In the following, the dominant trends in the interviews will be pointed out and main aspects will be discussed.

First of all the interviews indicate that all the hotels – small as well as big and independent as well as chain hotel – have experienced an increased demand for sustainability from guests and expect that it will grow further in the future. Especially larger corporations that hold conferences or have guests and employees staying at hotels express demands on sustainability engagement.

The impression is that sustainability within the hotel industry becomes more and more common due to these increased demands from specially corporations. As Sanne Sander, hotel manager at Admiral Hotel, expresses it, sustainability has become a “goes without saying”. This leads to that most of the hotels do not use their sustainability engagement actively as a part of their marketing, rather sustainability performances are considered a matter of course, a minimum demand which hotels have to live up to in order to secure larger companies as customers.

A case where sustainability forms an important part of the branding of the hotel is Crowne Plaza Copenhagen Towers, which focuses on meetings and sustainability. Crowne Plaza is the first CO₂-neutral hotel building in Denmark – and possibly in the world – with an energy-consumption in terms of cooling and heating that is nearly 90 % lower than other hotels in the Copenhagen area. An important factor for Crowne Plaza is to insure a comfortable climate throughout the hotel but without damaging the environment unnecessarily. Among a lot of other initiatives this is insured by steps such as intelligent controlling of lightning, use of organic products from local areas in the restaurant and by having a solar system covering large parts of the building. For Crowne Plaza, sustainability has meant a very big decrease in the running expenditures as energy normally is a very big cost for hotels.

Crowne Plaza can be seen as a best practice example, even though it stands out from the other hotels in its way of not only considering sustainability a matter of course but instead uses it as the fundament for the structure of the hotel as well as the central branding aspect.

As the greatest challenge in regard to implementing environmental sustainability initiatives the majority of the hotel managers mark the employees' adaption and engagement. The change requires more than just a few courses and training, it necessitates a change in the mindset of all employees in every division of the company. This part of the implementation therefore constitutes a challenging and vital part of the process.

The hotel managers point out two central motivational factors for engaging in sustainability: an economic motivation and an ideological incentive. This leads to an important finding regarding the financial aspect of environmental sustainability initiatives, related to the question of whether it is profitable to engage in sustainability. It was marked in the interviews that there are two factors that come into play regarding the economical side of being engaged in sustainability for a hotel: First of all, all the hotels pointed out that it was profitable to invest in energy-friendly solutions. Secondly, all the hotel managers mentioned the increased demand for eco-certified hotels and saw the engagement in environmental sustainability as either an inevitable necessity or as an important branding factor.

The general estimate from the hotel managers were that it, when combining the two factors of the lowered costs and the added market value, it is economically profitable and therefore financially sustainable to engage in environmental and social sustainability.

8. Strategic considerations on sustainability

Studying strategy, it is important to investigate the context as well as stakeholder interests. Furthermore, strategic issues and behavior must be identified and discussed.

Concerning context, it is important to notice that sustainability has had a high value in the Nordic countries even before the concept was defined in 1973. It is for instance seen in the Nordic focus on protecting nature and policies related to this already in the 1960s when strong economic growth took place. A common feature of the Nordic policy has been that economic growth and sustainability considerations can be united. Focus has been on achieving economic growth by not damaging the environment and if damages would occur then to invest in replacements to reestablish nature.

The context means that there in the Nordic countries has been and still is a strong focus on protecting nature and on sustainability in the economic policy, i.e. the Nordic countries have favorable atmosphere for giving priority to sustainability.

Concerning stakeholders, it is important to study 1) the politicians' priorities concerning sustainability, 2) the industry organizations and the public authorities' activities in relation to sustainability, 3) corporations' attitude to sustainability and 4) the citizens' attitude and behavior in relation to sustainability.

AD 1. It is characteristic in the Nordic countries that government and also most of the political parties in opposition give sustainability a rather high priority in the economic policy. As a consequence, a main political question is not to be for or against sustainability, but a question how many resources shall be devoted to sustainability issues. It is the same concerning regulation. Also in this area, there is a high degree of unanimity among the political parties.

AD 2. Since the Nordic economies are mixed economies with a big public sector, the framework for the activities will mainly be decided on a public-private platform, implying a high degree of negotiation between the public authorities and industry organizations. It is also the case concerning sustainable tourism and the meetings industry.

The two main private industry organizations in Denmark are the Association of Hotels, Restaurants and the Tourism Industry (HORESTA) and the Danish Chamber of Commerce (Dansk Erhverv). VisitDenmark is the state institution for tourism. The three organizations will have close negotiations. Concerning the priorities on sustainability

between the private and public authorities, there is almost no difference, and it also the case in the other Nordic countries.

AD 3. The framework set by the politicians and private/public structure gives strong signals to the corporations concerning behavior in relation to sustainability. It is easier for the big corporations to find a path and include sustainability in their strategy, as they have a more pronounced labor division due to size of their business activities. Concerning the SMEs, it can be a more mixed picture, as they do not have the knowledge and sometimes not the interest for sustainability. However, it is seen that the big corporations to a still higher degree request sustainability on their deliveries from SMEs, why the corporations as such act still more positively in relation to sustainability.

AD 4. The citizens often appreciate sustainability highly in discussions, but at the same time they often act differently and give a lower priority to sustainability de facto. However, in the ongoing regime also the citizens will act still more in compliance with the sustainability regime.

In other words, there is in the Nordic countries a strong development towards more focus and activities related to sustainability.

Concerning strategic behavior, the main issue for the corporations will therefore often be to decide on a forerunner strategy or on a follower strategy. A forerunner strategy is a more risky behavior as economic return of investments is more insecure. If the forerunner strategy turns out to be well addressed to the future development, it can create a big economic surplus.

The follower strategy has the advantage of avoiding big risks and by making use of experiences from the forerunners and by using new technologies developed over time in relation to the activities.

In this article, the first part with the Scandinavian Sustainability Destination Index shows that the context for sustainability and the development the last years present a strong tendency towards more weight on sustainability.

The second part with the hotel investigations from the master thesis tells that it is a rather fast development concerning sustainability.

The third part with the interviews with the hotel managers demonstrates the different attitude and choices of strategy in relation to hotel size individual preferences. It presents both forerunner and follower strategy.

9. Conclusion

In this article it has been investigated how it is possible to combine the issues of environmental and societal sustainability with that of economic sustainability in relation to the meetings industry. The central question of the research project was more specific:

Can green meetings be economically profitable?

First of all there has been given an account for how sustainability can be understood in relation to the meetings industry as well as there have been presented a way of measuring initiatives and performances of sustainability. This has been done on the basis of an index evolved by the Scandinavian Chapter of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA).

On the basis of the Scandinavian Sustainability Destination Index it was possible to see a strong development towards an improvement from 2012 to 2013 in social and environmental sustainability performances in capital as well as regional cities in the five Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

The development of performance has especially taking place in regard to the expansion of communication campaigns, sustainability strategies and certification initiatives. The positive change has particularly taken place within in so-called software category, i.e. in the sustainability commitment and performance within the local meetings industry such as hotels, venues and convention bureaus.

Secondly, the master thesis has presented the role of the Green Key as an instrument to measure sustainability. The thesis has included stakeholder views on sustainability from political parties, organizations, hotels, corporations and private customers. It was concluded that private customers were hesitating in relation to de facto promote

sustainability, but that the other stakeholders' strong favor of promoting sustainability also caused a change of the private customers' behavior in the long run.

Thirdly, an area of focus has been sustainability in the hotel industry, which has been discussed on the basis of a number of conducted interviews with hotel managers in Copenhagen. The purpose has been to examine sustainability initiatives more closely as well as to debate how these could be combined with economical questions.

Through the interviews it has been made clear that green meetings can be economically profitable.

Next, the strategic questions have been presented and discussed. When the context for the business activities is characterized by a strong political and organizational commitment to sustainability as is the case in Denmark and the other Nordic countries it changes the business regime for the meetings industry and the hotels in direction of more investments and weight on sustainability even under recession. In this development greening is even considered as an instrument to overcome the economic and financial crisis by new green tech investments and job creation.

For the meetings industry and the hotels the main strategic issue is to decide if a forerunner strategy or a more passive adjustment strategy shall be followed.

Hotels are often late starters with a conservative approach to change, but the big success Crowne Plaza and Radisson Blu have had by being forerunners have made it more interesting for many hotels and for the meetings industry to become faster and more devoted to active sustainability investments both in capital and in labor.

Finally, the economic results point in direction of possibilities for exporting the Nordic management and strategy systems developed on sustainability to other parts of the world in order to promote and increase sustainability and rentability worldwide.

Appendix:

Enclosure 1: The Green Key – an eco-label for leisure organisations with baseline criteria for hotels 2012-2015.

<http://www.green-key.org/menu/criteria/hotels/international-baseline-criteria-hotels>

Enclosure 2: Questionnaire and Detailed Destination Results 2012

| Hardware | Software |
|---|--|
| <p>City</p> <p>Does the city have a climate action plan?</p> <p>What are the City's total Greenhouse Gasses (GHG) emissions per capita?</p> <p>What is the City's CO₂ Reduction Target percentage for 2020 (from 1990 levels)?</p> <p>On average, what percentage of the City's total energy mix comes from renewable resources? e.g. Wind, Solar, Hydro, Geothermal.</p> <p>On average, what percentage of the City's total waste is diverted from landfill? Please include recycling, repurposing and incineration of residential and commercial waste</p> <p>How does the country score in the Corruption Perception Index?</p> <p>Which of the following public transportation links exist between the main airport and the city centre?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Express bus - Rail - Metro | <p>Hotel</p> <p>What percentage of the City's total hotel room inventory has achieved 3rd party sustainability certification?</p> <p>What percentage of the City's hotels is within a 1km walking distance of the main congress and exhibition centre?</p> <p>What percentage of the City's hotels is easily accessible by public transport to/from the main congress and exhibition centres?</p> <p>Venues</p> <p>What percentage of the City's congress and exhibition centres have 3rd party sustainability certification?</p> <p>CVB (Convention and Visitor Bureau)</p> <p>Does the DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) or CVB have a sustainability policy publicly available on its website?</p> <p>If the DMO or CVB have a sustainability policy, which of the following components are included?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commitment - Vision - Goals - Objectives - Sustainability reporting <p>What percentage of women working in the DMO (or CVB if not connected) is currently holding leadership positions?</p> <p>Which of the following sustainability information about the destination's meeting venues, hotels and suppliers does the CVB/DMO provide clients?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic information - Guides - Tools - Supplier lists <p>Does the CVB/DMO provide clients with ideas and resources for donation programs for food and/or conference materials?</p> |

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