

To Have Or Not to Have an Accommodation Classification System in Slovenia

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An accommodation classification system is a tool to sustain a high quality of accommodation services and to inform tourists about it. There are numerous hotel classification systems worldwide, and many are frequently amended. The purpose of this study is to collect destination stakeholders' opinions about the changes to the existing accommodation classification system and how best to implement them. Opinions were collected via an online questionnaire, mailed to the web addresses of 1,475 accommodation providers, tourism organizations, and classification assessors in Slovenia. The results are presented using descriptive statistics. Findings show that the majority of respondents support a mandatory classification system, which should be used for informing tourists and not for taxation purposes. Respondents believe that the system should be administered by the relevant government ministry. They accept the idea that only national experts should assess accommodation facilities. The majority of respondents favour a harmonized European system of hotel classification: Hotelstars. Tourism is an evolving process, which requires frequent changes and adaptation of tourism stakeholders. Successful implementation demands collaboration of all stakeholders involved.

Keywords: accommodation classification system, hotel industry, Slovenia, Hotelstars

Introduction

This study explores the opinions of the Slovenian tourism stakeholders on how best to change the accommodation classification system. Establishing or changing any such system for tourism accommodation is a complex undertaking due to the diversity of both accommodation types and of the cultural, environmental, and economic contexts in which systems are embedded (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2015).

Historically, hotel classification systems were developed to ensure safe and reliable lodging and food for travellers at a time when very few such trustworthy establishments existed. Today, standardization and the competitive marketing of hotel services to foreign cus-

tomers and tourist professionals have emerged as driving forces for instituting a local or national hotel classification system (United Nations World Tourism Organization & International Hotel and Restaurant Association, 2004, p. 4).

Hotel classification systems are of great importance and interest to the accommodation industry and the wider tourism sector. When well designed, they offer an independent and trusted reference on the standard and quality of hotel services and facilities, thereby facilitating consumers in the choice of their accommodation. They also provide a framework for accommodation providers to market and position themselves appropriately and to leverage the investments they have made in the quality of their offer of products

and services (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2014, p. 9).

State administrations in different countries apply classification systems for quality control, as well as a basis for imposing tariffs, subscriptions, fees and various forms of fiscal charges. Many authors (Abrate, Capriello, & Fraquelli, 2011; Hensens, 2015; Israeli, 2002. Núñez-Serrano, Turrión, & Velázquez, 2014; United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2015; Torres, Adler, & Behnke, 2014) emphasize the importance of such classification systems in defining the various criteria that facilitate comparisons of hotels in different destinations and countries. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2015) says that the benefits of classification systems, in addition to providing comparable information using simple rating symbols and serving as a justification for pricing, also provide a benchmarking tool to help prioritize investments.

Classification systems, irrespective of the fact that they are considered to be useful, have their weaknesses and challenges. According to Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, and Wanhill (2005), these weaknesses are related to subjectivity in evaluating the number of tangible and intangible hotel service elements. As a result, many classification schemes mainly focus on the tangible and quantifiable elements, such as room size, equipment availability, specific services, and other aspects. The fact that such systems do not cover all the elements of quality has also been confirmed by Cerović (2003), Šuligoj (2009), and Uran Maravić (2016). Cooper et al. (2005) cite challenges to classification systems such as political pressures in designing the classification criteria, categorizing expenses, appeals from the tourism sector regarding rigid and bureaucratic criteria, guidance towards standardization and uniformity of provision, rather than promoting individual excellence.

However, classification systems are not just a set of objective and subjective criteria in classification form. Legislators have to define the nature of the program (private/public), identify the organization to manage the program, the type of standards (hard/soft), the applicability of classification (voluntary/mandatory), the presence, types and frequency of controls, and other aspects. Many legislators do not know such specifics,

and therefore invite different tourism stakeholders to various workshops or to participate in surveys of opinions on the various elements of the system.

Based on United Nations World Tourism Organization studies (United Nations World Tourism Organization & International Hotel and Restaurant Association, 2004; United Nations World Tourism Organization 2015), we can conclude that most of the dilemmas and challenges of the past fifteen years have not been solved. To summarize, the main dilemma is about selecting a unified classification system that could be applied to many countries, when there are already too many different systems. The closest to an ideal is the European Hotelstars system. The second challenge is how to integrate online visitor assessment into a classification system.

This challenge has also been addressed by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, which published a study in 2014 on classification systems and guest review web portals. This is based on the complementary nature of guest review online review portals and classification schemes. Guest reviews on website portals focus more on intangible (subjective) elements of service but, as stated earlier, classification schemes have usually focussed on objective and measurable elements. Combining the scores from the two 'poles:' quality, technical and functional components, definitely gives a complete picture of the quality, rather than that of just one component.

At present, the majority of queries relating to the purchase of tourism products take place online. United Nations World Tourism Organization (2014) states that guests make an average of 14 visits to various travel related sites, with three visits to the (destination's own) site and nine related searches prior to booking a hotel online. Guests usually use a hotel's official category as a filter in their reservation process, while using online reviews to assist with the final selection from a small number of suitable hotels.

Each country, with its cultural traditions, national and otherwise, uses a specific rating system, which prevents the application of a single global classification system (European Consumer Centres' Network, 2009, p. 5). Minazzi (2010) concurs, stating that star ratings in Europe are determined by local government

agencies or independent organizations, and they vary widely from country to country.

In Slovenia, accommodation classification operates on the basis of the Hospitality Act or the Regulations on the Classification of Accommodation Establishments and Annexes, classifying listings for each type of accommodation. The responsibility for fulfilling classification falls to the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia with the aid of specially qualified and certified assessors for accommodation establishments. The system is mandatory for all types of accommodation. Historically, the development of the classification system in Slovenia has two milestones and two major system changes, in 1997 and 2008. In both cases, criteria were based on the German standards (of the time). In 2014, there was a strong initiative to change the system in the direction of Hotelstars. The dilemma of whether to have a compulsory or voluntary system also remains, as part of the tourism economy sees the classification system as an element of coercion (Uran Maravić, 2016).

This study was designed following recommendations by Talias (2016). He advocates that new systems, or changes to the systems, require strong incentives or broad stakeholder consensus; otherwise, they are doomed to fail. The specific objective of this study was to answer the following research questions:

1. What accommodation classification system do the stakeholders in Slovenia want?
2. What should be the purpose of the accommodation classification system?
3. Who should manage the system?
4. Who should assess accommodation establishments?
5. How should the current system change?

Literature Review

Few studies that answer specific questions about elements of classification systems. The Minazzi study (2010) examines classification systems through case studies in five European countries (Italy, France, Germany, Spain, UK), the USA, and Canada. Minazzi looked at specific countries, or at those countries with

their own official classification system, which hotel class, whether private or public, the managing organization, the types of criteria listed within their categories, or whether systems were oriented towards the customer, and how these were controlled. A study by Foris (2014) covered a few more countries, but his information largely summarized a study by the European Consumer Centres' Network from 2009. The only scientific international study covering several countries and also comparing criteria is the study by Cser and Ohuchi in 2008. In Slovenia, several published comparative studies were undertaken by Šuligoj (2009), Rumbak (2009, 2012), Cvikl (2008, 2009), and Uran Maravić (2016). In Table 1, we summarize some of the more relevant studies and their main findings.

Studies from Table 1 allow the following conclusions to be made:

1. Overall, very few studies investigate the area of hotel classification systems;
2. Of the available studies, the majority investigate the importance and relationship between hotel classification systems and hotel service quality;
3. Few studies provide a general review of the existing hotel classification systems worldwide; and
4. Evidence is also available for the future of hotel classification system and avenues provided by tourists reviews.

Furthermore, studies from hotel industry associations, which give a more in-depth view of the hotel classification systems and the comparison between different systems, are also available. For example, the United Nations World Tourism Organization and International Hotel and Restaurant Association (2004) study collates the results of two surveys regarding accommodation classification systems and a comparative analysis of their findings in 31 countries. Moreover, this study investigates the prevailing characteristics of classifications worldwide, which can be used as guidelines for setting up new or amending existing classification systems. Another study, provided by the European Consumer Centres' Network (2009) investigates existing systems of accommodation classification in all EU Member States, as well as Iceland and Norway. The latest study from United Nations World

Table 1 Overview of Research on Classification Systems

Reference	Research content	Main findings	Country
López Fernández and Serano Bedia (2004)	This article discusses star-ratings as good indicators of the quality of the hotel.	They found that there are differences between the expected and perceived quality for hotels in different categories. They also noted that the expectations of guests in the higher categories were greater, which in their view indicates that quality scores are tied more to the quality of the services performed than the hotel category.	Spain
Briggs, Sutherland, and Drummond (2007)	The overall objective of the research was to investigate the level of quality of service in hotels of different sizes. Indirectly linked, was a research question devoted to what classification systems are, and whether they are directed by consumer preferences or targeted at the providers.	As it relates to classification systems, they note that these are too orientated towards tangible elements, such that they may have high-quality scores but still offer poor service. They suggest that such systems comprise both tangible and intangible elements.	Scotland
Cser and Ohuchi (2008)	They point out the many different systems, which damage confidence and cause confusion among consumers. They also studied Asian systems in order to emphasize the difference between European systems. They studied the structure of classification listings and the criteria themselves.	The results reveal levels of comparability for criteria in Swiss, German, Hungarian and Chinese of 50%, and 30% for Japan. The common criteria were based on room, bathroom, reception, lobby and common areas. As a reason for this, they attribute the influence of the local environment, as being greater than the complete tourist offer.	Switzerland, Germany, Hungary, China, and Japan
Šuligoj (2009)	The author shows the diversity of classification systems around the world and the reasons for that. For a precise definition of the Slovenian system, which is formal (though much less so than it was before the adoption of the new classification regulations in 2008), comparisons show differences between the national systems of Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, and Italy.	Clear organizational and conceptual differences have been identified as to the authorship and administration of the systems, mandated membership, control, and finance. Differences between the systems determine variances in hotel offers, which according to the author at this time are also advocated by organizations such as United Nations World Tourism Organization, International Hotel and Restaurant Association, and Hotelstars Union Association. In conclusion, it is revealed that (a) copying classification systems between countries is not appropriate or useful, (b) a diversity of systems is welcome (c) that without developing so-called functional quality we cannot expect quality hotel service.	Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, and Italy

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Tourism Organization (2015) provides an overview of the main accommodation classification systems in Europe and at selected global destinations. It further provides comparisons between different systems and the range and recurrence of criteria in 4- and 5-star category hotels. These three studies served as a framework for this study.

Methodology

Empirical data for the present study was collected with an online questionnaire sent to main tourism stakeholders: accommodation providers, local tourism organizations, travel agencies, assessors and officials dealing with classification in Slovenia. The survey was conducted in May 2016. The questionnaire was sent to

Table 1 Continued from the previous page

Reference	Research content	Main findings	Country
Minazzi (2010)	Compares classification systems based on their benchmarking criteria. Compares the systems, not the classification criteria. Highlights the differences, the rise, and importance of eWOM, makes connections to theories of quality.	The comparison shows that the situation is very heterogeneous. In addition, there were regional differences in each of the countries monitored. He also believes that developing a common European system is possible if there are minimum standards provided in each country. Until a unified system exists, hotel brand and assessment portals will be increasingly accepted over official classification.	Italy, France, Germany, Spain, UK, USA, and Canada
Stringam, Gerdes, and Van-leeuwen (2010)	The study looked for links between online assessment, finding a relationship between overall scores and scores in the specific four areas: hotel services, hotel condition, room cleanliness and room comfort. Indirectly touches on areas of the classification system. They emphasize the differences between systems, for example, US classification is managed by commercial organizations, using classification schemes that accurately describe which criteria must be met to achieve a specific category. They also state that the primary role of the classification system has changed, due to the emergence of online portals for guest assessment.	The authors relate hoteliers' reports saying that websites generate mostly bad reviews. Their study demonstrates the opposite, since 74.51% of the guest comments analyzed were by guests recommending the hotel. They studied the differences between criteria, the results of their analysis showed nothing significant.	USA
Abrate et al. (2011)	The article examines the relationship between the quality rating (stars) and price. Indirectly relates to quality systems. Because of the relationship with pricing, this article helps to clarify the meaning of quality rating.	They showed that quality ratings have a positive impact on the price rises and, unlike other studies, explain how. They also believe, based on the results of their study into updating classification systems, that the current selection of hotel attributes, according to consumer opinion, do not justify higher prices in the highest category.	Torino, Italy
Núñez-Serrano et al. (2014)	This article is dedicated to creating a list of objective quality criteria, or hotel quality index, as an alternative method for determining hotel quality based on demand, and whether hotel star-ratings are a good indicator of quality. It also notes the disunity among classification systems.	According to their quality index design, they found that, in general, a star-rating was a reasonably good indicator of quality, despite some variation that occurs in certain hotel categories.	Spain

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the web addresses of 1475 contacts; 1050 of these were accommodation providers, 420 were local tourism organizations or similar, and five chambers of commerce and associations. The majority of the participants in this survey were general managers, but some were also operational managers. The questionnaire was selected

by 424 respondents and partially completed by 46% of them. Overall, 151 (36%) respondents returned fully completed questionnaires. In total, the questionnaire was sent to 1,475 addresses; full completions amounting to 10.23%; 13.15% of the online questionnaires were fully or partially completed. Further analysis of fully or

Table 1 Continued from the previous page

Reference	Research content	Main findings	Country
Torres et al. (2014)	This study explores how hotel managers obtain feedback from the guests (web portals), experts and internal resources to improve quality. The study is indirectly linked to classification systems since the authors view assessors and secret guests as experts who provide feedback as the basis for improvements in quality.	The results show that managers apply different amounts of time to obtaining feedback. Similarly, the reliability of all the information is not uniform. They found a strong correlation between the results of satisfaction surveys and online assessments, as well as between online assessments and expert assessment.	USA
Hensens (2015)	The purpose of this paper is to delve into future classification systems. It takes a view on the impact of social networking, as a technology that enables integration of guest data, hotel operations, and official classification bodies.	The article predicts full integration of traditional classification systems with web customer review portals (as already takes place in Australia). Even more radically it predicts that traditional systems will not survive if they do not integrate.	–
Talias (2016)	This article analyses the return of the classification system in Israel. After 20 years, the country introduced a voluntary system along the lines of Hotelstars. The authors say that other studies focus on the capabilities of a classification system, reflecting the quality of the hotel services, or a correlation between growth and income, or a correlation between guest satisfaction and category, or similarities and differences between systems. What interested them was the difference between voluntary and mandatory systems, and within those, whether managed by public or private organization, and the implications of this.	The authors note that the attempt to re-establish a system of classification met with disapproval from the Israeli hotelier associations and other stakeholders, despite huge efforts and the low cost of registration. The study has practical implications regarding the means by which voluntary regulatory regimes can be established. These need to be established using strong incentives or with the strong agreement of stakeholders, otherwise, according to the authors, they are doomed to fail.	Israel
Uran Maravić (2016)	The book covers two main studies: a comparison between the Hotelstars criteria and criteria in the Slovenian classification listings, and a survey on the opinions of stakeholders on the current system and changes.	By comparison, the author finds Hotelstars criteria milder than the existing system. Part of the research opinions is presented in this article.	Hotelstars, Slovenia

partially completed questionnaires received by 20 May 2016 was then undertaken. The client for this study did not wish to disclose details of the recipients due to data protection issues. As a result, it is difficult to define the breakdown of respondents and consequently whether the sample is representative or not.

The questionnaire consists of statements intended to measure participant's positions on the development of the classification system and is part of a larger study about the hotel classification system in Slovenia. The present study presents findings from questions pertaining to the five research questions as discussed in

the introduction section of this paper. The studies by United Nations World Tourism Organization and International Hotel and Restaurant Association (2004), European Consumer Centres' Network (2009) and United Nations World Tourism Organization (2015) were used to guide questionnaire design. The questionnaire data is analysed using descriptive statistics.

Results

This section is devoted to the presentation of research results. We first present data on the survey sample.

Table 2 shows the descriptive variables for the socio-

Table 2 Descriptive Variables of Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Category	Sub-category	<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	60	40
	Female	91	60
	Total	151	100
Age	Up to 25	2	1
	From 26 to 35	29	19
	From 36 to 45 years	51	34
	From 46 to 55 years	35	23
	Over 56 years	34	23
	Total	151	100
Education	Elementary school or lower	0	0
	Vocational school (2 or 3 years of schooling)	8	5
	4-year high school	30	20
	Further education	15	10
	Higher education – 1st level	28	19
	University educated or 2nd tier Bologna level (Bologna masters)	54	36
	Research masters	11	7
	Doctorate	5	3
Total	151	100	
Organization type	Public sector	13	9
	Society or association	2	1
	Assessor	4	3
	Hotelier	41	27
	Other accommodation service	42	28
	Local tourism organization	14	9
	Other	34	23
	Total	150	100

demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, the level of education completed and the type of organization in which the respondent is employed. Demographic data was collected at the end of the questionnaire. Not all respondents completed the survey. The sample included 151 respondents, 40% men and 60% women. The majority of respondents were aged between 36 and 55 years.

The majority of those surveyed (65%) who submitted a fully completed questionnaire had completed further education or higher. The largest group of respondents (55%) were tourism sector workers. Work-

ers in local/regional/national tourist organizations amounted to 9%, public sector employees to 9%, 1% of respondents were representatives of Chambers of Commerce, 23% were in other tourism-related activities, and 3% were classification assessors.

Respondents were first asked what their preferences for a future system of classification would be. With both mandatory and voluntary systems existing globally, respondents were given explanations that a mandatory classification system is one in which all accommodation establishments are required to be classified, and the voluntary system is in which accommo-

Table 3 Types of Classification System Preferred

Type of classification system	<i>f</i>	%
Mandatory	120	62
A combination of both (voluntary for lower categories, mandatory for higher)	34	18
Voluntary	21	11
A combination of both (mandatory for hotels, for others not)	14	7
Other	5	3
Total	194	100

Table 4 Purpose of a Classification System

Purpose	(1)	(2)	(3)
Informing guests	32	59	91
Protecting guests	36	42	78
International comparison of accommodation quality	37	47	84
As the basis for inclusion in promotional materials and STO activities	31	27	58
As the basis for payment of tourist tax	14	10	24
As the basis for payment of property tax or other charges	10	6	16

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) partly agree (%), (2) completely agree (%), (3) total agreement (%).

Table 5 Organizations Responsible for the Classification System

Organization	<i>f</i>	%
MGRT, Directorate for Tourism and Internationalization	83	47
Tourism and Hospitality Chamber of Slovenia – TGZ	54	31
Association of Hoteliers Slovenia – ZHS	18	10
Other	17	10
Chamber of Craft Slovenia – OCS	5	3
Total	177	100

dation establishments can be classified if they wish.

The majority of respondents (62%) wanted a mandatory system of classification, as currently exists, which includes all accommodation establishments. In addition, 25% of respondents believe that a mandatory system is only required for certain accommodation establishments. In total, this means that 87% of respondents favour a mandatory system.

Studies by United Nations World Tourism Organization and International Hotel and Restaurant Association (2004) show that 65% of 23 countries have a mandatory system of classification. Research by the European Consumer Centres' Network (2009) of 27

EU Member States (Finland does not have a system), 60% have a mandatory system.

The next question was intended to measure opinions about the purpose of a classification system. We asked respondents whether the system serves to inform the customers, or, for example, is the basis for collecting various types of tariffs or benefits.

Over three-quarters of respondents believe that the classification system is intended to provide information, assure the guests, and for international comparison of accommodation. More than half of the respondents agree that classification is necessary for inclusion in promotional materials and activities of the Slove-

Table 6 Accommodation Assessors

Who should assess?	<i>f</i>	%
Competent national assessor	60	34
Self-assessment (assessment by owner)	30	17
Competent national and foreign combined assessment	25	14
Committee of competent assessors	23	13
Other	16	9
Respected representatives of the profession and business	14	8
Competent foreign assessor	6	3
Total	174	100

Table 7 Preferences about Changes to the Current Classification System

Type of change	<i>f</i>	%
Yes, Hotelstars system should be introduced	55	36
Yes, incorporate some elements of Hotelstars into the current system	36	23
Yes, a significant update	33	21
Yes, other unspecified changes	12	8
No, no changes	18	12
Total	154	100

nian Tourism Organization (STO). Respondents were strongly opposed to classification as a basis for the imposing of any charges, such as tourist tax, property tax or other charges. A fifth of respondents claims to have no preference about category being a basis for promotion material and STO activities or a basis for taxation purposes.

We wanted to know which organization should be responsible for managing the accommodation classification system. The organization would be responsible for keeping records, training, and supervising evaluators, and so on.

Most of the respondents selected the Ministry for Economics and Technological Development (MGRT), Directorate for Tourism and Internationalization. In this context, respondents also emphasized that assessment training should be conducted jointly with experts. Within the EU, 37% of the responsibility for assessment falls to professional associations and 36% to Ministries and Directorates (European Consumer Centres' Network, 2009; Foris, 2014). It is necessary

to emphasize that professional associations and other countries are older and organized differently, and, therefore, have a different reputation and influence among stakeholders. Minazzi (2010), and United Nations World Tourism Organization and International Hotel and Restaurant Association (2004) report similar preferences.

As there are a number of different assessing models available, respondents were asked about their preference. Slovenia uses two different models, namely the self-assessment by the provider of accommodation service or assessment by national licence assessors. The practice is different in the EU, where assessors work individually and in the assessing committees. Hotelstars does not recognize self-assessment for accommodation. Table 6 provides results about the respondents' preferences towards different assessing models.

The respondents largely believe that assessment should be done by a competent national assessor. Around half believe, to a lesser extent, in self-assess-

ment or an assessment commission. The least votes were received for foreign-trained assessors (3%).

We asked for an opinion on whether changes to the existing system are needed and if so, what kind of changes. As previously mentioned, there was a desire to change the system in Slovenia towards the Hotelstars system, which is an attempt to harmonize the hotel classification system in Europe. In 2009, seven countries committed to using virtually the same hotel classification criteria, becoming the founders of the Hotelstars Union Association. In 2011, the three Baltic nations and Luxembourg joined; Malta, as the first Mediterranean country, joined in 2012, with Belgium, Denmark and Greece joining in 2013 (Uran Maravić, 2016).

Most respondents opted for introducing the Hotelstars system or incorporating Hotelstars criteria into the current system. Although the majority of respondents consider the current system to be good (Uran Maravić, 2016), only 12% did not suggest some change.

Discussion and Conclusions

In the hotel industry, the star rating and/or membership of a hotel chain express quality. Such quality ratings are known to tourists and serve as valuable information in the decision-making process (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2015). However, there are many destinations where internationally recognized quality ratings have not yet been established. This is also true of Slovenia, where overall there are few quality rating initiatives, and it is very unlikely that more will be introduced soon. Thus, a strong national accommodation classification system, be it completely national or international, is the only guarantee of quality for the guest.

Due to two unsatisfactory changes of the national accommodation system in the past (1997 and 2008), stakeholders are sensitive to future changes. In 2014, there was a strong initiative to change the system towards the Hotelstars system. The ministry responsible for tourism commissioned this study in order to determine what changes tourism stakeholders believe necessary. This article represents only part of the study. Below, we present the answers to the research questions.

We have determined that Slovenian tourism stakeholders want a mandatory system. Thus, the majority of those legislated in countries within Europe can be established from the studies of the European Consumer Centres' Network (2009), Foris (2014), and United Nations World Tourism Organization (2015). Respondents are highly opposed to accommodation classification being used as the basis for setting the tourist tax, following the example of Italy and many others (e.g. 1* equals a one euro tourist tax, 5* equals a five euro tourist tax). We believe that the fairest way to set such duties are on the basis of categories, as research demonstrates the relation between price and category (Abrate et al., 2011; López Fernández & Serrano Bedia, 2004; Núñez-Serrano et al., 2014).

In the EU, 37% of classification services are managed by professional associations and 36% by ministries and directorates (European Consumer Centres' Network, 2009). In our study, almost half of the respondents preferred this to be done by Slovenia's MGRT, Directorate for Tourism and Internationalization. In total, about 40% of the respondents believe that this should be a chamber or association; a further 10% mentioned other options, most of which are managed chambers and associations. The respondents largely believe that a competent national assessor should make the assessments. To a lesser extent, less than half supported self-assessment or an assessment commission.

Most of the respondents want the introduction of the Hotelstars system, which is a serious attempt to harmonize the classification system in Europe and has already been adopted by 16 states. That harmonization has been successful, according to the majority of the studies cited in this article, including the European Consumer Centres' Network and United Nations World Tourism Organization.

The findings demonstrate that stakeholders share a similar opinion about the need to change the current classification system, yet they differ in their preference for the type of changes. This demonstrates the need to involve stakeholders in the changes to the accommodation system, also validated by other studies (Talias, 2016; United Nations World Tourism Organization & International Hotel and Restaurant Association, 2004)

to assure a smooth transition to an amended system of accommodation classification. Another indicator of the need to involve stakeholders in the process of changing the accommodation classification system is the differences in their preference about the body that should be responsible for the system management. It has been demonstrated that disagreements between tourism stakeholders obstruct tourism development (Uran Maravić, 2016); thus, only a common consensus will make changes accepted and long lasting.

Our recommendations take into account the opinions of Talias (2016), who advocates that changes to the system must take into account the opinions of stakeholders. In addition to exploring the best practices indicated by United Nations World Tourism Organization and European Consumer Centres' Network, it would be useful if more research were conducted into comparative studies and/or case studies of individual countries. It would also be meaningful to translate worldwide classification system documentation into English, consistent with the principles of Hotelstars, thus enabling continuous comparison of system elements and categorization lists.

The present study is limited by the unrepresentative sample size and relatively low response rate. Another limitation is of an ethical nature as the commissioner of the study imposed a restriction on information use within the entire study, which affected the research design and interpretation of results.

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