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**THE KEY FACTORS ON CHOOSING A SPA
HOTEL AS A CONFERENCE SITE: A CASE
FROM SPA HOTEL YSTAD SALTSJÖBAD IN
SOUTHERN SWEDEN**

Master thesis

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This Master thesis has been compiled independently. All works by other authors used while compiling the thesis as well as principles and data from literary and other sources have been referred to.

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis is concentrating on the theoretical approaches and the results of the study, exploring how a typology of customer values looks like and what are the key factors on choosing a spa hotel as a conference site. The relevance of the paper is explained by the fact that the spa industry is fast becoming the world's largest leisure industry, and an accompanying need for the proper knowledge appears. In response to this demand, many researchers have done various studies on revealing the customer perception of the spa industry and motivational factors for visits (Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2009; Tawil, 2011; Hashemi et al., 2015). In many scientific sources, the spa industry is often viewed as one providing experience just for relaxation, enjoyment, stress relief, and fun. Some research papers also recognize its role as one assigning for medical treatments and recovery (Kim et al., 2010; Tawil, 2011).

However, many spa enterprises include facilities, such as meeting rooms, that serve for reasons, others from enjoyment and happiness. The unexplored factors of their purposes in spa hotels and forces facilitating the consumption experience ground the following research problem: what is the nature of customer values determining the consumption behavior? What are factors able to contribute to recognition of spa hotels as conference venues? In particular, understanding the role of conference facilities in spa hotels and importance of customers in the decision-making opens up perspectives for the research and the master thesis. Furthermore, considering the growing concerns about the environment and the increasing tendency of performing conferences in green and sustainable environments, comprehension of reasons for such phenomena sets the aim for this master thesis: to generate a holistic understanding of customer values and key factors determining a choice of a spa hotel as a conference site.

To conduct the research, the author chose a spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad in southern Sweden as a case study, taking into account the following reasons. First, Sweden is normally associated as a sustainable country, able to provide high-level experiences for

customers and combine them with the environmentally friendly attitudes to the nature. Understanding motivational factors of Swedish customers in the decision-making will be able to inform the theory and spread out behavioral patterns to other, less sustainable practices within the spa industry. Moreover, choice of the target groups for the research, which are represented by conference participants from Lund University, who regularly participate in local conferences, and managers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad, who daily communicate with real conference customers, will help to identify customer portfolio, based on the real life practices and reliable data. In particular, conference attendants from Lund University periodically participate in conferences, arranging in sustainable environments or spa hotels; and managers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad are also considered top professionals operating within the meeting sector.

In order to meet the aim of the master thesis, the author formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: How does a typology of values of conference attendants from Lund University look like?

RQ2: Which factors drive the consumption experience of real conference customers in the decision-making process?

The aforementioned aim and research questions formulate the following research tasks:

- to investigate the nature of consumer values, which drive consumption experiences;
- to explore an impact of managerial concepts of conference localities on the delivery of conference services.

This master thesis contributes to the existing knowledge by concentrating on the meeting sector within the spa industry and providing the relevant information about customer values and motivational factors in the decision-making process, considering alike knowledge is not yet covered in the literature sources. Outcomes of the research are also valuable to stakeholders of spa hotels, because the author articulates the pertinent data about the nature of values of potential customers and motivational factors of real customers, which can be considered by hotel management in the process of development of services.

The paper starts shedding light to the theoretical background concerning consumer values and respective studies related to the spa industry and conference management. Afterwards, the paper turns its attention into the fieldwork conducted in January 2016. The data of the study is qualitative and quantitative in its nature and aims to make a content analysis of the existing knowledge together with surveys of conference participants and interviews of hotel's stakeholders, in order to meet research objectives and find answers to research questions.

The paper comprises of two chapters: theoretical and empirical parts of the work. The first chapter is theoretical and called "Theoretical background to spa industry, meeting sector and customer value", which consists of four subchapters. The first subchapter "Insights into the spa industry" provides several terms about the spa industry and latest trends within it. In the second subchapter "Sweden as a spa culture", the author describes peculiarities of the spa industry in Sweden. The third subchapter "Meeting sector and its position in the spa industry" identifies the term "meeting sector" and explains its role in the spa industry. The fourth subchapter "Understanding the customer values" provides an insight into customer values and explains a typology, with a particular attention to each value, and consists of two subchapters. The first subchapter "A framework of customer values" outlines dimensions of customer values and explains their meanings. The second subchapter "A brief summary of customer values" describes each customer value and provides connections with the spa industry.

The empirical part of the paper is the second chapter called "The empirical study on understanding reasons for choosing a spa hotel as a conference locality", and it consists of six subchapters. The first subchapter "General information about the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad" provides overview of the hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad, which has been selected as a case study in this master thesis. The second subchapter "Research methods" indicates research methods, which are applied in this master thesis, and introduces them. The third subchapter "Data analysis" provides analysis of the gathered data and consists of two subchapters: "Conference participants from Lund University as the first research group" and "Stakeholders of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad as the second research group". In these subchapters, the collected data is analyzed for the respective research groups separately, in order to make the master thesis more structured. The forth

subchapter “Research findings” gives insight into findings of the research and involves two subchapters: “Understanding a typology of customer values of conference attendants from Lund University” and ”Analysis of factors affecting the consumption behavior of real conference customers in the decision making process”. In these subchapters, the author presents research findings separately, in order to achieve the logical structure of the master thesis. The fifth subchapter “Discussion and recommendations” debates research outcomes, provides recommendations for the hotel managements and discusses a field for the further research. The sixth subchapter “Limitations” overviews limitations of the master thesis.

The author presents outcomes of the research in Conclusion, which follows after theoretical and empirical parts of the papers. Then the paper is structured as follows: Acknowledgements; References; and Appendices, which includes four appendices.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO SPAS, MEETING SECTOR AND CUSTOMER VALUES

The chapter provides a short overview of the spa industry, as well as a position of the meeting sector within it. The author also describes peculiarities of Sweden as a spa culture and discusses its distinctive features. Finally, the chapter presents introduction into customer values, with a particular attention to each value and its interpretation within the spa industry.

1.1 Insights into the spa industry

The spa industry is currently one of fast growing subsectors of the health tourism (McNeil & Ragins, 2005), where the term “spa” means health via water (*salus per aqua*) – acronym for the Latin phrase (Frost, 2004). Smith and Puczkó (2009) note that the spa industry has not traditionally been a part of tourism, with exception for some destinations and hotels. In 2011, the Global Spa and Wellness Summit referred to spas as a part of the tourism industry, with a particular accent on spa, wellness, and medical constituents, despite the fact that primary motivations of customers for trips could involve other activities: business, sightseeing, culture, shopping, and others.

The International Spa Association (ISPA) identifies spas as “entities devoted to enhancing overall wellbeing through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body, and spirit” (ISPA, 2006). The term “industry” is described as “the aggregate of productive enterprises in a particular field, often named after its principal product” (Industry, 2007, cited in Cohen & Bodeker, 2008, p. 69). Cohen and Bodeker (2008) argue that the official beginning of the global spa industry, where the terms “global”, “spa”, and “industry” appeared together, occurred in 1987 in the USA,

when a travel and tour specialist Jeffrey Joseph published a comprehensive catalog of fitness and health resorts called “SpaFinder”.

Presently, the spa industry has increasingly becoming an economic and marketing strategy for a number of hotels and resorts (Azman & Chan, 2010), and participation in spa activities is currently growing, because customers perceive spas as venues to improve their health and wellbeing. In this vein, Porritt (2004, p. 7) refers to the spa industry as one of “conspicuous consumption”, as attending spas is an aspiration, and while spa visits have been possible to the wealthy, mobile and educated customers in the past, spas are becoming increasingly accessible to a global market nowadays.

However, over last decades, the public has been also increasingly recognizing the importance of environmental problems (Han & Kim, 2010), and this has led to structural changes in consumer buying behavior and switches to more eco-friendly attitudes. Such green consumerism has brought about modifications in purchasing methods (D’Souzza & Taghian, 2005), and particularly in the spa industry. Brundtland Commission shapes the tendency under the term “sustainability”, which means “meeting the needs of the present generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Forum for the future, n.d.).

Recognizing such shifts in the buying behavior has provoked many spa businesses to develop and adopt proactive environmental management and implement eco-friendly practices to improve their competitiveness and meet customer demands (Claver-Cortes et al., 2007). Greening efforts by eco-friendly enterprises not only contributed to fulfillment of consumers’ needs in the marketplace, but also lowered operational costs by reducing the significant extent of solid wastes and improving energy saving consumption (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007). Moreover, as spas embrace personal wellness, which is not separated from wellness of the planet, they now take on responsibility to demonstrate how environmentally friendly technologies can be used to deliver the spa experience in a sustainable manner (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008, p. 345).

Implementing sustainable policies in spa enterprises is crucial, because the spa industry is being led by the hospitality industry, where a growing interest in “eco-tourism” has resulted into increased consumer awareness of environmental issues. Nowadays,

travelers and guests expect spas to have policies and practices that promote sustainable activities, such as waste management, reduce energy use, encourage sustainable purchasing, use local produce and products, minimize carbon emissions, and provide support for local community projects (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008, p. 349).

A variety of research works prove the importance of sustainability considerations for the spa industry and spa consumers. The National Marketing Institute in the United States has recognized the crucial role of “well-beings”, taking care of healthy lifestyle and sustainability. It also refers to a wide range of industries that are designed to be environmentally conscious, sustainable, and socially responsible both for people and the planet (Smith & Puczko, 2013, p. 117), and able to provide customers with sustainable services and solutions. Cohen and Bodeker (2008, p. 13) prove the growing importance of “conhumanism”, which involves consumption with maximal awareness about the environment, efficiency and enjoyment, and minimal wastes and pollution. In this vein, the spa industry is responsible for reflecting the environmentally friendly attitude, able to satisfy environmentally conscious customers and maintain sustainability of the planet.

1.2 Sweden as a spa culture

In Sweden, the very first spas were established in the last decades of the seventeenth century, and they have received much attention by the Swedish royalty, aristocracy and cultural elite (O'Dell, 2010). They aimed to facilitate the spread and development of new facilities in the eighteenth century and support existing ones, due to a set of treatment opportunities, which became available to them, and a status that could be maintained through spa visits (Mansén, 2001). However, Swedish spas were designed just for medical reasons due to the influence from other European countries. It was believed that waters contained hidden properties – which have been further identified through careful studies – which could be put in use while treating a wide range of diseases. The medical ambition of uncovering and harnessing the curative power of waters was significant, if for no other reason than that it provided a spa visit with a particular structure, duration and a form of cultural legitimacy that remained in place for more than two hundred years (O'Dell, 2010). Spa visits were concentrated on taking the waters as well as the medical application of various forms of muds, baths and showers.

The hospitality of spas was also organized around a series of movements and activities, which involved visits to resorts' doctors, daily trips to resorts for waters consumption, instructions on diets and others. This has immediately become a part of rhythms of cure and was quickly routinized by spa facilities.

To succeed with development of the spa industry, experts tried to figure out curative elements of waters and impose more importance on them. For instance, by 1827 scientists determined that waters of the spa Ronneby Brunn, located in southeastern Sweden, contained many chemical elements, among which there were sulphates of zinc oxide, manganous oxide, sodium alum, aluminum chloride and others (O'Dell, 2010). Having such research results, the supervisor of the spa Doctor Hellman, while publishing a book about the spa, included instructions on how to best prepare for spa visits and how to behave when attending treatments courses. To support the recommendations, he also devoted a whole chapter to characteristics and special features of waters elements, discussing their role in effective treatment.

A state of the spa industry in the nineteenth century remained same, with a focus on a medical constituent. The only difference was in a more detailed investigation of quality of waters, which resulted into development of treatments and procedures, oriented on particular diseases. In the twenties century, most Swedish spas fell on hard times, and all but disappeared after the Second World War. However, some survived by working with physical therapy and rehabilitation programs in conjunction with local municipal healthcare systems, some became health farms, some established themselves as conference centers, some started working as summer vacation destinations (Mansén 2001, p. 50).

In the late 1990s, a few remained spas found themselves receiving an increasing number of guests. At first, such growth was incremental, but by the early years of the twenty-first century, revenues of Swedish spas have increased by 50-75 percent per year. Hotels without spa facilities started expanding their territories and constructing new amenities. Nevertheless, a notice of medical reasons for spa visits kept saved; and spa managers tried to transform their facilities into places, where customers could improve their wellbeing and have a wellness vocation.

Now, Swedish spas are advertised as places that produce experiences of wellbeing, which eliminate from within – albeit with the aid of others, in a specific material environment, and through the orchestration of new modes of mobility. The space of hospitality around spas is organized around individual oriented experiences in a form of slower pace, time for oneself, and a potential to relieve stress and find new strengths (O'Dell, 2007). Due to existing environmental problems and global warming, sustainability as a part of the spa's policy has received much attention; therefore, affected customer preferences considerably. At the same time, modern Swedish spas incorporate treatments and designs from other cultures, in order to compete in the industry (Hambraeus, 2006). However, their philosophy remains unchangeable: improve circulation and mental clarity, relieve stress, and improve the quality of life.

1.3 Meeting sector and its position in the spa industry

In studies about the meeting sector, scholars define the term differently. For example, Happet al. (2012, p. 382) refers to the meeting sector broadly and defines it as such, where involved guests represent their own profession and specialty, and “through successful meeting on business trips, generate the development of other professional areas”. The authors adds that one of key factors of meeting tourism is a good amount of quality offers, such as conference hotels, congress halls, sport halls, museums, and others. Kovalenko (2012) addresses functionality of conference facilities and argues that meeting segment involves a very demanding category of customers, who require from organizations to have a sufficient capacity, ability to provide high quality services, and service infrastructure. Moreover, the researcher describes the sector of meeting customers as more demanding than one of leisure guests. According to the International Association of Professional Congress Organizers (IAPCO), the meeting sector involves trips, where “the main purpose is business and in which people are brought together for a particular purpose” (CBI, n.d., p. 1). It is considered to be a sub-sector of business travel and can involve a leisure component.

The meeting sector includes facilities, hospitality (accommodation, food and beverage), planners, transportation, and technical services (Dwyer & Mistilis, 1999). It also traditionally involves “add-on” activities, which can increase the amount of participating guests, as well as diversify the state of the tourism industry and economic

development strategy (Hudson, 2003). Such entertainment may include cultural tours, sport events, team-building activities, and spa packages. However, an interest in such activities is able to blur a fine line between the meeting sector and leisure tourists. In particular, the main difference between two segments lies in choice – business travelers are not responsible for arranging a place for a conference. Nonetheless, they are able to affect event planners by their primary demands (Holloway & Humphreys, 2012).

According to the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST) (n.d.), there are a growing number of business travelers nowadays. Researchers explain this feature by articulating the role of marketing, infrastructure, human resources management, and issues of service quality (Weber & Ladkin, 2003). In turn, this tendency provides economic and social benefits for particular regions, such as real income growth, technological development, impacts on the local image, enhancing destination attractiveness, and others (Dwyer & Mistilis, 1999; McCartney, 2008).

Another tendency suggests that current business travelers prefer staying in green-certified hotels (CREST, n.d.). This trend began in 2013 and served as a win-win situation for many hotel and spa enterprises: they were able to save money on energy consumption while caring for the environment and attracting environmentally conscious buyers (Guillemot, 2013). Within the meeting sector, the most environmentally conscious market is called the Scandinavian market, because it is especially the strictest one on finding a venue in the property that follows the policy of sustainable development and reflects its environmental responsibilities.

Armand Guillemot (2013) adds that all major enterprises tend to choose the setting for their event in places where environmental sustainability is a priority. When asking properties whether certain markets are more receptive to green conference center facility, they refer to the Scandinavian market first where the green attitude starts to be promoting from childhood. However, properties owners feel that this attitude has expanded to include all European destinations.

Some scholars refer to spas and call them as ones, which have a potential in providing “soft” and conscientious, results-oriented and business experiences, which are integrated into and balanced with the corner stone of the spa experience: rest and

relaxation (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008, p. 356). A spa experience typically helps people to focus on “personal sustainability” in terms of taking responsibility of one’s health and well-being, providing a sense of balance and control. Business opportunities, provided by conference facilities and combined with further spa experiences, could position a spa as a venue for conferences and well contribute to the spa enterprise itself, given it follows the concept of sustainable development. In particular, focus on sustainability could increase attractiveness of spas to environmentally-consciousness customers, as potential conference sites. From a strategic perspective for spa enterprises, sustainability could mean an economic impact, because it responds to the growing needs of humans and ensures saving of resources. Unfortunately, such interconnection between the meeting sector and spa industry, with sustainability at the cornerstone, is not yet investigated. Nevertheless, considering the aforementioned features, environmentally oriented customers and the meeting sector in particular should be under focus of spa enterprises. Understanding exact values and needs is crucial, because it helps develop sustainable green marketing policies, aimed at achieving the customer segment.

The spa industry is only just emerging as a significant global industry and its business practices, products, and services, as well as sustainability agenda are still evolving (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008). However, it has opportunities to apply human genius and technological virtuosity and demonstrate that sustainable technologies can not only save money and resources, but also attract various segments of customers and offer luxurious and sustainable experiences.

1.4 Understanding the customer values

Knowing customers and ability to provide them with desirable experiences are essential tasks for today’s service providers and at the core of the marketing paradigm nowadays. Gale (1994, p. 26) explains this by the fact that “companies succeed by providing superior customer values”; therefore, customer-centric way of doing business is of particular importance. In particular, Vargo and Lusch (2004, p. 6) argue that customer-oriented businesses are able to prosper only if they go beyond their boundaries and “collaborate with and learn from customers, and become adaptive to their individual and dynamic needs”. The authors prove that value is defined by and co-created with customers, who become co-creators of their experiences in this process.

Such service-centered logic attained much attention in the academic sources, and various authors attempted to enumerate possible categories in order to grasp an understanding of such values. For instance, Zeithaml (1988) identified four forms of values: low price; whatever the customer wants in a product; the quality I get for the price I pay; and what I get for what I pay. In other words, the researcher addressed price, quality, customer wants, and value of possession as dominant values in the customer purchasing behavior. Attempts of other authors to conceptualize customer values resulted into a development of unidimensional and multidimensional concepts (Groth, 2005; Bove et al., 2008; Yi & Gong, 2013); and connections with four stages of experiences (Woodall, 2003).

Whilst many approaches have been announced, the concept proposed by Morris Holbrook – one of the prominent researchers involved in the field of customer values and author of the book “Consumer Value a Framework for Analysis and Research” – has been widely supported in a number of other studies. The researcher attempted to reveal existing values and outline them into a well-known framework of customer values. According to one of reviews on the Holbrook’s approach, this typology is “the most comprehensive”, because customer values “must be seen as an ongoing assessment within an evolving customer relationship” (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007, p. 443).

According to Holbrook, “customer values” rest on four pillars (Hilliard 1950, cited in Holbrook 2003):

- interactive
- relativistic
- preference
- experience, which occurs in the process of evaluation of some object by some subject.

Taking into account a variety of terms in the definition, such as “interactive”, “relativistic”, “preference”, and “experience”, the author of the paper explains them in the text below.

Interactive value occurs, when a person or a customer (subject) interacts with a product (object). However, such collaboration entails either a subjectivist or objectivist interaction between a subject and an object, due to a type of the nature of the experience (Brightman, 1962). More specifically, subjectivism states that a product has its value only if it pleases some customer (Levitt, 1960), while objectivism claims that value is present in any object whether anyone happens to recognize it or not (Frondizi, 1971, p. 20). Considering the aforementioned, one can conclude, value does not exist without interaction and occurs in the relationship between a customer and goods or services.

Value is relativistic, and in this context, it is comparative, personal, and situational. Comparative side of the value involves recognition of a value of one object in reference to that of another object as evaluated by the same individual (Holbrook, 2003, p. 6). In other words, value judgments take place in case of relative preferences among objects for a given person, rather than utility comparisons among individuals (Pettit, 1983, p. 32). In this case, a meaning of value to a certain individual depends on the relative merits of one object compared with another.

Value is personal, because its perception varies from one individual to another (Lewis, 1946, p. 421). When thinking of personal interpretation of values from subjectivist or objectivist points of view, a subjectivist tends to initiate a personal relativity towards a product by analyzing to which extent it is able to meet his demands. In case of objectivism, objective values tend to vary from one individual to another (Bond, 1983, pp. 57), and value perception means different to them.

Finally, values are situational, because they depend on the context in which the evaluative judgment is made (Lewis, 1946, p. 421). It means that value perceptions are highly dependent on the context, varying from one set of circumstances to another: from moment to moment or from place to place.

Value is preferential, because it embodies a preference judgment (Holbrook, 2003, p. 8). The general concept of preferences involves a set of value-related terms and such parameters, as *affect* (pleasing or displeasing), *attitude* (like or dislike), *evaluation* (good or bad), *predisposition* (favorable or unfavorable), *opinion* (pros or con), *response tendency* (approach or avoid), or *valence* (positive or negative) (Hall, 1961, p.

191; Frankena, 1967, p. 229; Holbrook, 2003, p. 8). Despite differences in the nature, all above-mentioned values are able to represent a unidimensional preference order.

The last term “experience” received much attention in literature sources, and various authors interpret this term differently. For example, for Sundbo (2008) it is a mental process; Pine and Gilmore (1999, p. 12) define experiences as intangible, sensational, and memorable; Holbrook (2003, p. 9) argues that customer value resides in the consumption experience rather than in a physical product or service. According to Chan (2009), experience is an important component, which affects quality of experiences and visitors satisfaction. However, despite a variety of possible definitions, the common idea unites them: experience is a very individual category, and customers tend to receive a mental journey through the process that leaves them with a memory.

1.4.1 A framework of customer values

According to the framework of customer values suggested by Holbrook, there are eight types of customer values. Before immersing into details, the following visualization material is provided below (see Table 1).

Table 1. A Typology of Consumer Values

		Extrinsic	Intrinsic
Self-oriented	Active	Efficiency	Fun
	Reactive	Excellence	Aesthetics
Other-oriented	Active	Status	Ethics
	Reactive	Esteem	Spirituality

Source: Holbrook, 2003, p. 12.

As shown in the table, the typology is based on three dimensions: active or reactive, extrinsic or intrinsic, and self-oriented or other-oriented. In turn, these dimensions result into eight categories of values: Efficiency, Excellence, Status, Esteem, Play, Aesthetics, Ethics, and Spirituality.

Starting with active or reactive sides, Holbrook argues that the difference between them lies in an attitude towards a product by a customer. When the value is active, physical or mental manipulation of tangible or intangible product is involved: a consumer performs actions to or with a product as a part of some consumption experience (Holbrook, 2003, p. 12). In case of reactive value, a product vice versa influences on a consumer by making him apprehend, admire, appreciate, or otherwise respond to things done by a product to or with a consumer as a part of some consumption experience.

Extrinsic value occurs in the means-end relationship, when consumption is prized for “its functional or utilitarian instrumentality in serving as a means to accomplishing some further purpose, aim, or objective” (Holbrook, 2003, p. 18). For example, money is usually considered a means to meet some goals, such as purchasing goods or services, rather than to enjoy it just for being money. By contrast, intrinsic value involves such interaction, when experience is appreciated as “an end in itself” – for its own sake (Bond, 1983, p. 20). In this case, money can be regarded as a means to collect and get inspired of accumulating different currencies, just for sake of collection.

Self-oriented and other-oriented values involve directionality as their distinctive feature. Value is self-oriented, when a person prizes some aspect of the consumption selfishly for his own sake. For example, a person goes to a spa, because it is able to provide him with some relaxation and rest. In this case, the value lies in a capacity of the spa to contribute to *own* consumption experience. When it comes to the other-oriented values, a personal consumption experience is valued for *their* sake, or how *they* react on it or what effect the experience has on *them*. For instance, a person attends a spa in order to impress friends or relatives.

The author of the master thesis proposes to have a deeper insight into the values, in order to provide a sufficient ground for the research and create an understanding of customer values of Swedish customers.

1.4.2 A brief summary of customer values

As shown in the Table 1, a typology of customer values is represented by eight categories. The author of the master thesis initiates their description by addressing to

each value and providing their definition, having three dimensions in mind: active or reactive, extrinsic or intrinsic, and self-oriented or other-oriented.

Efficiency. According to the typology of customer values, active extrinsic self-oriented dimensions characterize Efficiency. Holbrook (2006, p. 716) describes this value as a case in which “a product or consumption experience serves as a means to customers’ own objectives”. In this case, customers appreciate some goods or services for their ability to accomplish some objectives (extrinsic value), which results from the use of particular goods or services (active value), aimed at provision of customer’s satisfaction (self-oriented value).

According to Diesing (1962, p. 12), Efficiency often means *convenience* to customers and is normally measured as a ratio of outputs to inputs (or O/I ratio). In this ratio, time is a key parameter, because it has a capacity to provide efficiency in general and convenience in particular, as it is a crucial resource input of interest. For example, time-shifting devices could allow people to enjoy experiences now and pay for them later.

In the spa industry, scholars often refer to convenience in terms distance and time (Mak et al., 2009; Setiowati & Putri, 2012). They argue that such parameters are directly connected with satisfaction of customers, who consider convenience as one of key factors on choosing a spa provider. For instance, day-spa guests are sensitive to flexibility and location of spa facilities, due to their tight timetables.

Excellence. It differs from efficiency by the essence of the reactive dimension, or the ability of goods or services to affect customers. In this case, customers appreciate the potential ability of goods or services (extrinsic value) for their capacity (reactive value) to reach certain personal goals (self-oriented value). The concept of excellence is close to the conception of *quality*, because customers tend to compare their expectations with the actual performance in the process of consumption (Bond, 1983, p. 121; Zeithaml, 1988, p. 3).

Holbrook (2003) emphasizes that quality arises when customers admire products or services for their abilities to achieve some objectives, but *without* using them for that

purpose in reality – reactively rather than actively. For example, customers may possess high quality products and do not make use of all possible advantages.

However, in the spa industry, the notion of quality is crucial, because customers become more sensitive to elements of provided services and overall quality of the organizational output (Snoj & Mummel, 2000). In turn, provision of qualitative services is able to enhance profitability, improve productivity and strengthen the competitive position of businesses on market. Perceived quality affects customer satisfaction and probability of future returns, because it results from a comparison of monetary and nonmonetary sacrifices with quality or benefits that customers receive (Kashyap & Bojanic, 2000). Therefore, focusing on managing the value of services is called important, because it has a potential to adjust customer perceived quality and their loyalty towards spa businesses.

Status. According to the typology of customer values, Status is defined as active extrinsic other-oriented value. In other words, customers appreciate the potential of goods or services (extrinsic value), resulting from their active manipulation (active value) and aimed at achieving a favorable response from someone else (other-oriented value). Holbrook (2006) argues that it occurs when one's own consumption behavior serves as a means to projecting responses from others. In such consumption, customers make use of goods or services in a way to improve a status-enhancing favorable impression.

The concept of status is closely connected with impression management, in which customers engage in the consumption experiences, in order to project the image they would like to create. They select certain goods or services or adjust their consumption behavior, with a use of a set of symbols (dress, smell, lifestyle etc.) to construct a person who achieves success in a form of status in the eyes of others. Holbrook (2003) views status from three dimensions: status definition, or determining a persona one wish and should adopt; status seeking, which means obtaining goods or services, able to achieve the projected goal; and status validation – evaluation of efficiency of contributed efforts and outcomes of the constructed status. Taking the aforementioned into account, one can conclude that status is an ongoing process of social construction and involves various aspects of symbolically oriented customer behavior.

The spa industry has a potential in enhancing and promoting a personal status, because spas are often associated as luxurious entities; therefore, dedicated customers evaluate such facilities as most desirable places (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008). Mak et al. (2009) add that luxurious settings and exclusive high-quality services of spa enterprises contribute to construction of customer impressions and potential ability of guests to differentiate themselves as those, who possess high status attributes.

Esteem. It is characterized as a reactive extrinsic other-oriented value. Holbrook (2003) points out that Status and Esteem are interconnected, and these categories are difficult to differentiate. He defines it as a value, which results from consumption, where customers appreciate the potential ability of goods or services (extrinsic value) for their capacity (reactive value) to enhance a personal public image in the eyes of others (other-oriented value). The author argues that Esteem results from “a somewhat passive ownership of possessions appreciated as a means to building one’s own reputation with others” (Holbrook, 2003, p. 17).

Bond (1983, p. 161) evidences that such characteristics of the value Esteem make it close to the concept of conspicuous consumption, or the demonstration effect. In this case, the term materialism is often involved, because it is able to differentiate one’s own possession as an index of prestige or social position. For example, possession of the Ferrari car that is conspicuously parked in a private driveway could illustrate lifestyle-defining ways of consumption.

However, Maslow argues that Esteem also involves the need for self-respect and approval from others (Kaur, 2013). Following this logic, the spa industry has a potential in the field by addressing issues that are hot debated nowadays. Considering the growing concerns about sustainability, spas can attract environmentally consciousness customers by offering them sustainable experiences.

Fun. According to the typology of customer values, active intrinsic self-oriented dimensions characterize the value Fun. It arises from own pleasure (self-oriented value) in the process of consumption of experiences (active value), which are appreciated for their own sake as ends in themselves (intrinsic value). For example, fun might derive from different leisure activities, such as playing the piano, entertainment, attending

saunas, and others. Particularly, discussing the value Fun, Holbrook (2003; 2006) usually addresses the concept of Play, which appears when customers actively engage in the activity for its own sake, in the playful consumption.

To support the interconnection between Play and Fun, where last normally results from the experience consumption, many scholars agree on the following. First, any activity is not a play, until it is pursued for its own sake. Second, enjoyment, which results from such activity, is a self-oriented reward, such as “fun”, “happiness”, or “joy”. Finally, Play is commonly described as involving active engagement in the process of consumption of experiences (Lieberman, 1977; Garvey, 1977; Holt, 1995). Considering the aforementioned, one can obviously notice a very close connection between Play and Fun, where both possess such dimensions as active, intrinsic, self-oriented values. Holbrook (2003) equals Play to Fun, proving that play typically involves having fun, and customers participate in such activities for the potential of having fun out of them.

The spa industry is a prominent example of the field, able to provide experiences for sake of fun, happiness, and joy, due to a variety of entertainment opportunities that it can offer. Therefore, Mak et al. (2009) suggest that customers tend to strongly appreciate an opportunity of having fun and being entertained in spa facilities. Moreover, according to the trends in the global spa industry (Ellis, 2008), the significant emphasis is placed on achieving emotional health. The author suggests that a possibility of spas to provide just plain fun makes them important to nowadays customers.

Aesthetics. It possesses reactive intrinsic self-oriented dimensions, and it refers to self-appreciation (self-oriented value) of the reactive consumption experience, which is valued as end in itself (intrinsic value). For example, beauty is able to illustrate the value, because it depends on personal evaluation (self-oriented) and is reactive in nature. Moreover, it is normally appreciated for its own sake (external or internal ambiances, the inner or outer atmospheres etc.) rather than for achieving some goal (extrinsic value).

Other examples to characterize the value Aesthetics arise from fashion, which is prized for attractiveness of the product design, as well as fine arts. Wagner (2003) argues that in case of applied arts, the role of aesthetic value is more difficult to evaluate, because

beauty of products depends upon customer perception. Moreover, appliances, furniture, inner ambiances should be not only attractive, but also meet some range of utilitarian and social wants and needs.

The aforementioned is especially important to the spa and wellness industry, where Aesthetics involves such parameters as general impression, integration of the space in landscape, planting, furnishing, and others (Kern, 2003). Achieving aesthetic enjoyment becomes particularly crucial, in order to produce the desirable customer value and let customers appreciate the environment, as well as provide the sensory spa experience.

Ethics. According to the topology of customer values, Ethics is described as an active intrinsic other-oriented value. It involves a concern for how a personal consumption behavior affects others, when this experience is viewed as an end in itself. Such consumption results from active manipulation of goods or services (active value) and is aimed at their own sake (other-oriented value). By active manipulation, scientists agree on the application of ethical conduct, norms of social justice, equal treatment in real-life operations (Lewis, 1946; Parker, 1957; Frankena, 1973, cited in Holbrook, 2003).

Holbrook (2003) also refers to the terms virtue, justice, and morality when describing the value Ethics, because they involve matches between the natural, the right, and the good. In particular, they include features, which allow people to follow the laws and rules, and enhance wellbeing of others. They are also called basic examples under the general heading ethics.

In the tourism industry and in the spa sector in particular, the role of ethics is critical and central. Hall and Brown (2006) explain this by the fact that tourism is concerned with the human behavior, involves several actors who represent a certain set of perspectives and objectives, has an applied content, as well as social, cultural, economic, environmental, and other dimensions. Consequently, organizations, which operate in respective sectors, create codes of conduct or ethics codes, in order to treat customers properly by reflecting an understanding of the culture visited, respecting and being sensitive to the host population, and handling softly the host environment.

Spirituality. It is a reactive intrinsic other-oriented value. It entails adoption, admiration, acceptance, or adoration of some supreme forces (reactive and other-oriented values), and such experience is appreciated as an end in itself prized for its own sake (intrinsic value). To illustrate some examples, Holbrook (2003) suggests such samples as faith, ecstasy, sacredness, or magic. Brown (2003) also proves that spiritual elements are able to influence the consumption behavior considerably, due to certain religious convictions of consumer subcultures.

In the spa industry and in the field of spirituality in particular, scholars usually refer to yoga and meditation classes, which are able to reduce stress, improve wellbeing, and immerse into the experience with other forces (Frost, 2004; Lehto et al., 2006). However, McCormick (1995) recognizes the relationship between spirituality and the nature, and Gall et al. (2005) support this connection. The authors prove that the nature could be seen as a coping resource; therefore, customers are able to derive strengths and a sense of “groundedness”, resulting from their interaction with natural forces. Natural and silent environments are called crucial, as they are perceived as a potent source of coping with stress and providing emotional comfort.

To sum up, the author provided the overview of definitions, concepts, and thoughts regarding the research topic: spa industry, meeting sector, and customer values. In most cases, these terms are considered separately in literature sources, and this represents the research gap, which the author aims to fill in.

As stated above, despite the growing concerns about sustainability, spas have potential to offer sustainable solutions for conference participants. This statement is supported by the existing tendency of performing conferences in green enterprises and benefits, which could become available to spa businesses, given they follow the concept of sustainable development. Such benefits include saving of resources, increasing net income, enhancing the public image, attracting most demanding and environmentally consciousness categories of customers, and others.

However, knowing exact needs and values of customers is crucial, in order to maintain the competitive position and offer services, which are directed at the exact market segment. Customer values involve several characteristics, which have to be taken into

consideration by spa enterprises. Businesses should be aware that interaction between a subject and an object in either subjectivist or objectivist ways initiates a process of customer experiences. Recognition of values and building personal judgments, as well as personal attitudes towards a product or a service are highly dependent on a particular situation or a set of circumstances, able to affect the evaluation process and determine a preferential assessment. Being connected in-between, values tend to influence the customer experience, resulting into the level of satisfaction and perceived quality of experiences. This also affects probability of customers to return to a place and their loyalty towards particular enterprises.

Considering the aforementioned, the author aims to conduct the study, able to identify customer values, typical for Swedish conference participants. This information is crucial to the existing knowledge, because it fills the gap to a certain extent. It is also useful to single enterprises, as it helps them to know customers and offer experiences, consistent with their values and demands.

2. THE EMPIRICAL STUDY ON UNDERSTANDING REASONS FOR CHOOSING A SPA HOTEL AS A CONFERENCE LOCALITY

2.1 General information about the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad

The four-star spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad is located in the town Ystad, situated in the southern part of Sweden. It has long been the natural location for meetings, nature, and wellbeing since 1897, because it is surrounded by forests and the Baltic Sea. It has a direct access to the extensive and white beach, which supports its beautiful beachfront environment (see Appendix 1).

Among existing facilities, the hotel comprises of a spa area, several restaurants, meeting rooms, outdoor terraces, and accommodation rooms. In particular, it has 140 rooms, including 2 suites and 10 mini-suits; 13 meeting rooms, with the largest seating of 324 people; a Swedish-American seafood restaurant called Port, with the emphasis on seafood and vegetables, and a French-American bistro Vitas. The spa area is a two-floor facility, which includes several pools, Jacuzzi, steam and dry saunas, and relaxation rooms. The overnight accommodation packages, which are also designed for conference guests, include the free access to the spa, available from 3 PM on the day of arrival till 3 PM on the day of department.

Since May 2007, the hotel has acquired new owners, who have a professional background in the hospitality industry. In accordance with a new concept of the business, Ystad Saltsjöbad is now approaching a new direction towards becoming a new port-inspired hotel. To achieve the aforementioned, the hotel management involves its location, internal and external ambiances, and sustainability course in the promotion of the business.

The spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad can be reached with the means of public and private transport. For instance, it takes one hour to get the facility from the Copenhagen airport, 50 minutes from the Malmö train station, and three hours from the Gothenburg train station by train; nine hours from Swinoujscie in Poland and 80 minutes from Bornholm in Denmark by ferry. There is also a direct bus going from the Ystad train station to the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad, and the drive takes five minutes. Moreover, the facility offers a spacious parking place for those guests, who arrive by cars.

The spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad pursues the policy of the sustainable development, which is reflected by such mechanisms as waste management, resources efficiency, use of sustainable and environmentally-friendly construction materials such as wood, and continual staff trainings. The hotel is labeled with the Nordic Ecolabel – a brand name, which proves a participation in the extensive environmental network and recruitment of highly qualified personnel. It also a part of the network of the conference booking company Svenska Möten, which label is awarded to hotels labeled with the Nordic Ecolabel. Such membership, as well as the seal “selected by Svenska Möten” proves the hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad to be a finest conference facility and one of best spas in Sweden. Finally, the facility belongs to the association “Svenska Spahotell”, or “Swedish Spa hotels”. Membership in this association is awarded, given the spa hotel meets the following requirements: movement, rest, nutrition, and touch. For guests, such label serves as a proof that the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad is able to offer high-quality range of services and treatments, which are carried out by highly skilled and trained staff.

Moreover, the sustainability course is also supported by the mission of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad, which is “to make our guests’ spa visit, conference, or an event far beyond their expectations”. In this context, sustainability means the “ability to continue to provide the intended benefit over a long period of time” (Shediac-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). According to the hotel’s vision, staff should be trained and sensitive enough, in order to exceed guest expectations, every time when they come to the hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad. It is especially important and at the same time challenging for private customers, who return to repeat their experiences several times per year.

Regarding the target market, the hotel is oriented on all possible categories. However, customers coming for conference reasons are mainly from Sweden and Denmark (the

Copenhagen area), for wellness experiences – from Sweden and Denmark as well. There are still a minor number of guests coming to the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad from Poland and Germany, due to the location of the facility. Nevertheless, the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad lacks the necessity of attaining new markets, because the existing markets are able to guarantee the hotel's full occupancy all year around.

2.2 Research methods

The aim of the master thesis is to generate a holistic understanding of customer values and key factors determining a choice of a spa hotel as a conference site. In particular, the author intends to find answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: How does a typology of values of conference attendants' from Lund University look like?

RQ2: Which factors drive the consumption experience of real conference customers in the decision-making process?

In order to provide a sufficient ground for generating the data and analyzing the information, the author chose the methods survey and interview. Their use is compatible with the aim of the research and respective research questions.

The choice of the tool survey as a research method is explained by its possibility to collect the original empirical information, such as opinions or thoughts from a group of people, in order to form an understanding of their behavioral patterns or some other characteristics (Williams, 2007, p. 67). Kelley et al. (2003, p. 262) also suggest that survey does not necessarily allocate participants into groups, and this feature is appropriate to this master thesis, due to peculiarities of the research group and difficulties to gather respondents in one place. Williams (2007, p. 67) calls a survey research as one of the most efficient ways to conduct study in the social sciences.

In the master thesis, the survey forms were generated for the first target group called the conferences attendants from Lund University, who regularly participated in local conferences and were potential customers for conference events in spa hotels. In particular, in the process of formulating survey questions, the researcher addressed such issues as, which values drove the consumption behavior of conference participants from

Lund University, what kind of conference localities they preferred, what was their relation towards spas as potential conference venues and as businesses in general, what sustainability and other aspects of managerial concepts meant to them. Based on the results, the researcher could find tendencies in their customer behavior, investigate existing values, generate a customer portfolio, and provide spa businesses with valuable data to consider, as well as suggestions and recommendations for further improvements.

In order to provide a sufficient basis for analyzing a typology of customer values, in the process of generating survey questions the researcher kept existing customer values in mind and employed them behind the letters, to make the first research group confident with the context of questions (Appendix 2). Moreover, the author offered a set of questions where respondents had to choose between values, so that to investigate which exact values drove their consumption behavior. Surveys also served as the valuable knowledge, able to grasp an understating of factors affecting the purchasing patterns, due to questions addressing the issues of sustainable development, attitudes towards spas and environmentally friendly enterprises, and importance of entertainment facilities.

To enhance the information and investigate factors driving the consumption behavior in choosing the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad in southern Sweden as a conference locality, the researcher conducted a series of interviews with the stakeholders of the respective hotel. The researcher agrees on Turner's (2010) argument that interviews are able to provide thick and rich data about participants' experiences, as well as about their viewpoints, even from the stakeholders' perspective. The results facilitate the research process by gaining an understanding of how stakeholders perceive customers and their preferences, and what they practically do in order to meet their demands. However, the method has its limitations. Silverman (2013) questions the access to experiences via interviews and emphasizes that researcher should take into account that the interviewees are constructing their own narratives during interviews. In other words, people may alter their answers in order to meet their ideals, or emphasize their certain values in the experience. Therefore, during the interview, the emphasis should be done on stakeholders' viewpoints rather than absolute truths in the meeting sector of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad in southern Sweden.

The researcher chose to conduct a semi structured guided general interview, as well as structured online interviews. Turner (2010) suggests that a semi structured interview is a more structured style of data gathering than unstructured interview, yet it gives the interviewer a considerable amount of space to word the questions and select relevant follow-up questions based on the answers during the interview. Consistency can be a challenge during the analyzing phase (McNamara, 2009 cited in Turner, 2010); however, it depends on the number of conducted interviews.

Structured interview is an organized way of collecting the information, because it normally includes a list of predetermined questions, with minimal or no variations for follow-up questions (Gill et al., 2008). Consistency is usually easy to achieve and administer, due to structured ways of formulating questions in interview forms (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). However, limitations of the methods involve limited responses to questions, which are unable to provide the in-depth knowledge.

In order to find answers to research questions and meet the aim, the researcher conducted interviews with the second target group of the research, called stakeholders of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad: one semi structured guided general interview with the marketing director Christian Björk of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad and ten structured online interviews with managers of the same hotel. Christian Björk also helped with distributing the interview forms to hotel managers, therefore facilitated the process of gathering the data.

However, initially the author aimed to collect the data by conducting semi structured guided general interviews with all hotel managers, as well as hotel guests. Changes in the data gathering occurred during the preparation phase, due to the piloting method, which is called an effective way of increasing the quality of the actual data, able to help the researcher to refine the actual research questions and methods (Kvale, 2007 cited in Turner, 2010). In particular, the marketing director Christian Björk denied the access to managers in a form of verbal communication and hotel guests, due to business of the hotel staff and request to avoid guests' disturbance. The semi structured guided general interview was performed on January 28, 2016 in the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad in southern Sweden, and structured online interviews were done with a use of Google Forms on February 1 to 12, 2016.

In the preparation phase, construction of the questions was done with the research aim in mind and on basis of the theory, which equally led the curiosity to gain a deeper understanding of what practically occurred with customer values on choosing a conference locality and which factors drove their consumption behavior. When creating the questions, the researcher aimed to follow the recommendations from McNamara (as cited in Turner, 2010) and let the interviewee choose his own terms answering the questions, while the interviewer aimed to be neutral on the answers and ask the questions one at the time.

In the process of generating interview questions, the researcher kept customers values in mind and made use of them behind the letters, in order to find out their meaning to the hotel management and attitudes to them from the managerial perspective (see Appendix 3 and 4). The researcher also addressed factors driving the consumption behavior to a bigger extent, with a hope to get the knowledge from the second target group, which was engaged in everyday activities with customers. During the semi structured guided general interview with Christian Björk, the author used a recorder, as well as personal notes, in order to make a retrieval to the collected data possible.

After gaining access and generating data in a form of surveys and interviews, the researcher interpreted and analyzed the data with the goal of finding answers to research questions by continuously reflecting to the aim of the study. To make a sense out of the data, the author did the grouping and theming of the information, which was a supported way of working.

2.3 Data analysis

The process of data analysis starts with addressing the gathered data, obtained in a form of surveys and interviews. The author received 95 replies to the questionnaire forms developed for conference attendants from Lund University and eleven interview answers from managers working in the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad.

Initiation of the analytical part of the work departs from revealing answers from respondents, and this involves comprehension and comparison of gathered opinions. While interpreting the data, it is important to have the research questions in mind and

concentrate on finding common features in responses, despite possible differences. The researcher implements visual methods for the reflection of research results, because they are able to address the meaning of the data and relate to its interpretation (Knoblauch et al., 2008). The data analysis starts with the first research group called conference participants from Lund University and continues with the second target group – stakeholders of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad in southern Sweden.

2.3.1 Conference attendants from Lund University as the first research group

As the first research question of the master thesis aims to unveil the typology of values of conference attendants from Lund University, the data recognition and analysis departs from this research group. In order to collect the knowledge, the author conducted surveys with conference participants from Lund University, who regularly participated in local conferences and were recognized as potential customers for attending conference events in spa hotels. Altogether, the researcher distributed 200 survey samples to researchers, professors, and PhD students working at various faculties and departments in Lund University: department of Service Management and Service Studies, department of Strategic Communication, department of Arts and Cultural Studies, department of Sociology, department of Communication and Media, department of Human Geography, department of Educational Sciences, school of Economics and Management. The author made use of Google Forms, in order to facilitate the process of gathering the knowledge and make it convenient to respondents, and applied the method on January 18 to 29, 2016. Consequently, the researcher collected 95 responses from the first research group, which are being analyzed in the text below.

According to the received responses, all conference attendants from Lund University participate in different conferences at least three-four times a year. Their preferences regarding the best conference site vary significantly, however it is still possible to determine common features (see Figure 1).

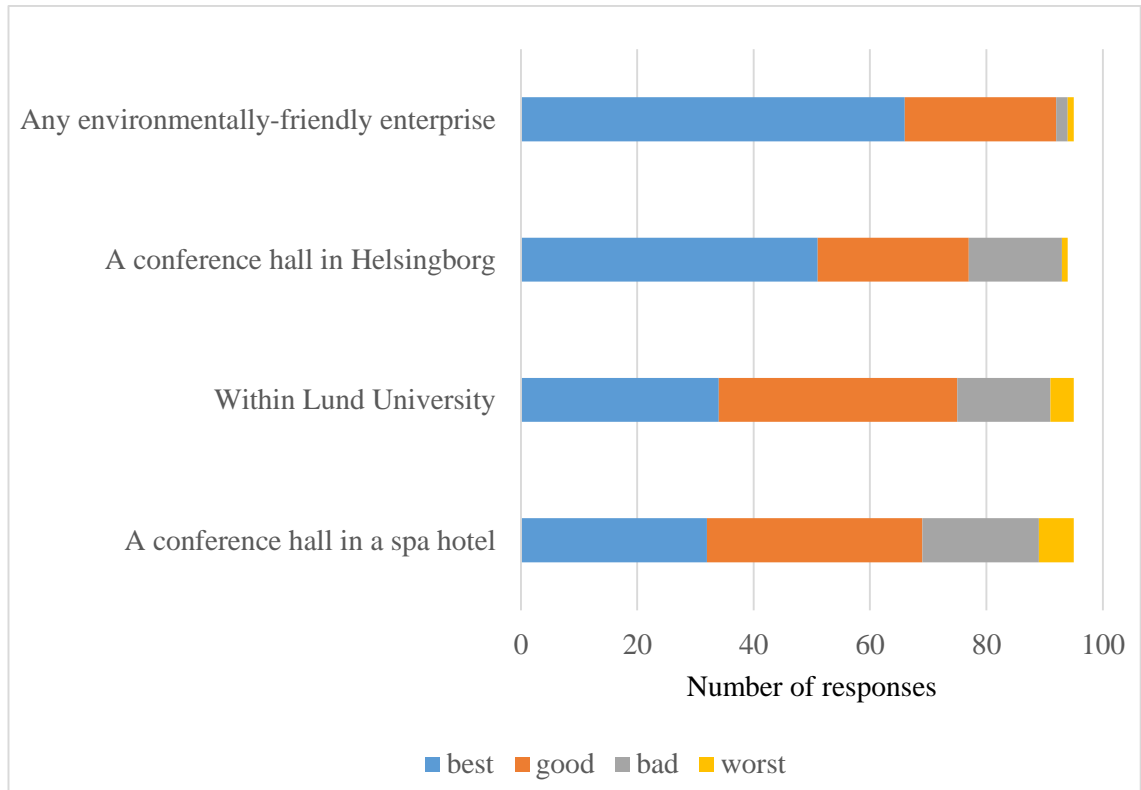


Figure 1. Best conference sites for conference participants from Lund University (compiled by the author)

In the research question, participants could evaluate the degree of attractiveness of conference sites to them on the scale from one to four, where one is worst, second – bad, three – good, and four – best. According to the results, conference attendants from Lund University mostly prefer conference halls in any environmentally friendly enterprises. Localities within Lund University, as well as a conference hall in Helsingborg and in a spa hotel have received fewer responses, however are still of preferences among respondents. In particular, on the four-point scale 70% of conference attendants from Lund University marked a conference hall in any environmentally friendly enterprise and 54% of respondents – a conference hall in Helsingborg as best conference localities. At the same time, 36% of potential customers chose localities within Lund University and 32% of respondents – a conference hall in a spa hotel as best conference sites.

Because the researcher kept research tasks in mind in the process of formulating the questions, such as to investigate a *nature of customer values* of conference attendants from Lund University, *customer values*, such as Efficiency, Status, and Esteem, have been behind the letters. For instance, any environmentally friendly enterprise refers to the customer value Esteem, a conference hall in Helsingborg – Efficiency, localities within Lund University – Efficiency, and a conference hall – Status. Such references to customer values and formulation of respective questions have been done in accordance with theory and explanation of customer values.

The received results evidence that conference attendants from Lund University tend to value Esteem (70%) and Efficiency (54% and 36%) to Status (32%). The role of the value Esteem arises from commitment to environmentally related issues of potential customers from Lund University, as well as Efficiency, which allows them to escape from a need to travel to other localities and thereby reflect the environmentally friendly attitude. Moreover, in the process of analyzing comments for choices regarding ideal conference localities, majority of respondents mentioned the importance of distance of a conference site from their workplace, convenience to travel and reflection of the environmentally friendly attitude at the same time.

In order to understand the typology of customer values, the author employed all customer values behind the questions and let conference participants from Lund University choose between them. For instance, sustainability as a leading concept refers to the value Esteem; distance from Helsingborg – Efficiency; existence of silent surroundings – Spirituality; beautiful and attractive internal and external ambiances – Aesthetics; commitment to principles of equal treatment and social justice – Ethics; availability of latest technologies on spot – Quality; reputation – Status; existence of entertainment opportunities – Play. Formulations of questions, evidencing customer values, have been done in accordance with theory and explanations of customer values. The results are presented on the Figure 2.

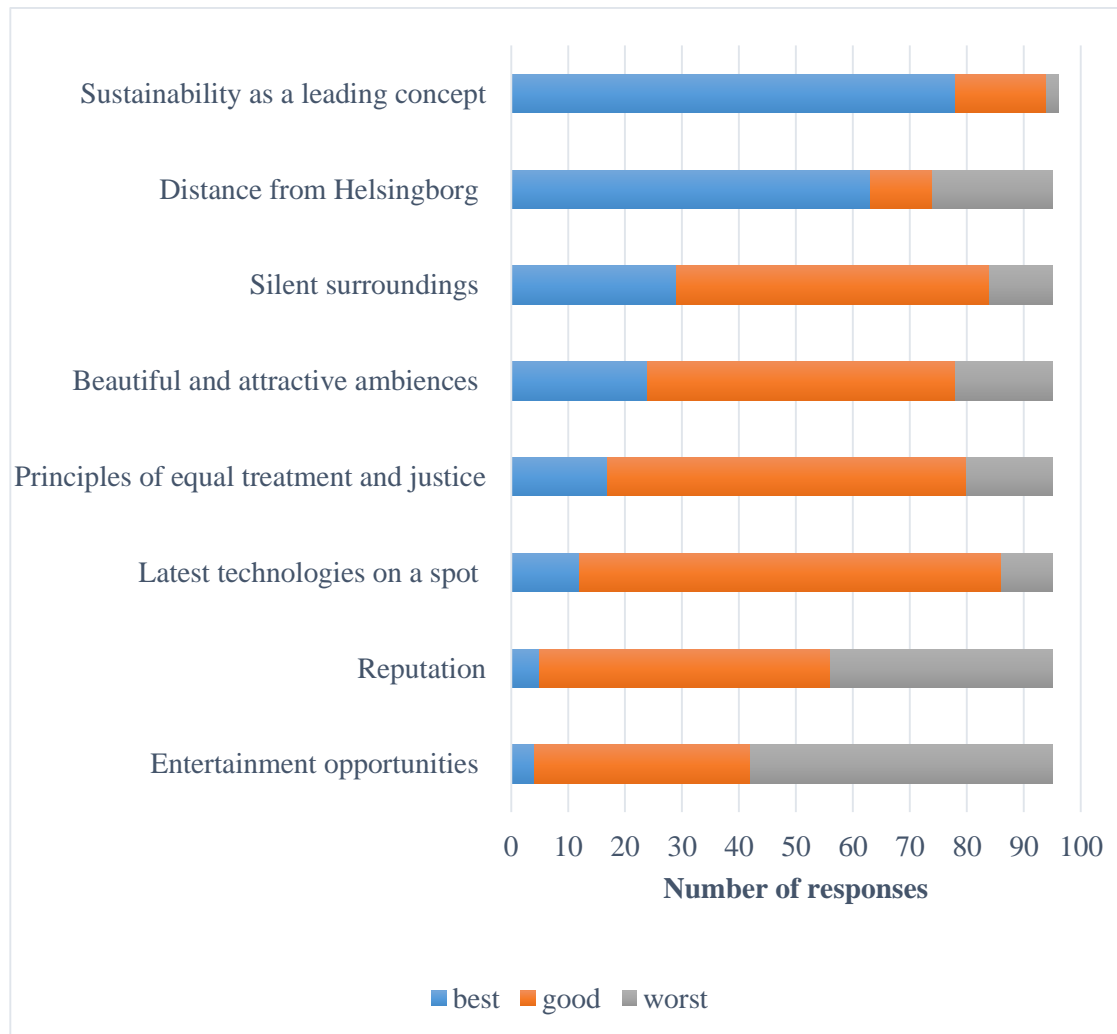


Figure 2. The factors of importance regarding the ideal conference site for conference participants from Lund University (compiled by the author)

The author offered respondents the eight-point scale, allowing them to choose most appropriate options, where one is worst, two – worse, three – bad, four – somewhat bad, five – somewhat good, six – good, seven – better, and eight – best. In the process of interpretation of the data, the author applied the method grouping, in order to present the results in a more structured way. On the figure above, there is a three-point scale, with one – best, two – good, and three – worst, indicating customer preferences.

In accordance with the responses, sustainability as a leading concept of a conference site and distance from Helsingborg are of the highest importance to a majority of conference

participants from Lund University: 82% and 66% of responses respectively. Such options represent the values Efficiency and Esteem, and this supports the results from the previous question when respondents were asked to determine the best conference locality. However, such parameters as existence of silent surroundings, beautiful and attractive internal and external ambiances, availability of latest technologies on spot, and admittance to principles of equal treatment and social justice are important to the first research group as well. Precisely, 29% of respondents identified importance of silent surroundings, 24% of conference attendants – beautiful and attractive internal and external ambiances, 17% of potential customers – commitment to principles of equal treatment and social justice, and 12% of respondents – availability of latest technologies on spot. These factors represent such values as Spirituality, Aesthetics, Quality, and Ethics, and the results are of crucial importance when building the typology of customer values of conference attendants from Lund University.

Taking into account the importance of sustainability to Scandinavians and supporting survey results, where sustainability was determined as one of driving motivational factors, the researcher tried to comprehend what sustainability meant to conference participants from Lund University. According to the results, it is resources efficiency management (87%), clean and healthy environment (74%), and use of ecological food and equipment (50%). Respondents could select multiple choices, therefore the total percentage of votes does not equal to 100%. Several respondents also mentioned transportation under “traveling to places other than Helsingborg and Lund does not sound sustainable”, amount of emissions under “minimal emissions when staying in Helsingborg” or “going somewhere produces emissions”, and use of local and green equipment as further determinates of the term sustainability to them.

The author also formulated a question, where respondents had to choose between options regarding the best conference site, in order to get the more comprehensive and structured information about preferences of conference participants from Lund University. In the first case, the first research group had to choose between any environmentally friendly enterprise and a conference hall in Helsingborg. As customer values have been behind the questions, respondents had to make a choice between values as well. In particular, any environmentally friendly enterprise refers to the

Esteem, and a conference hall in Helsingborg – Efficiency. Therefore, respondents had to choose between the values Esteem and Efficiency. Formulations of questions, evidencing customer values, have been done in accordance with theory and explanations of customer values. On the figure 3, the author of the master thesis presents respective results.

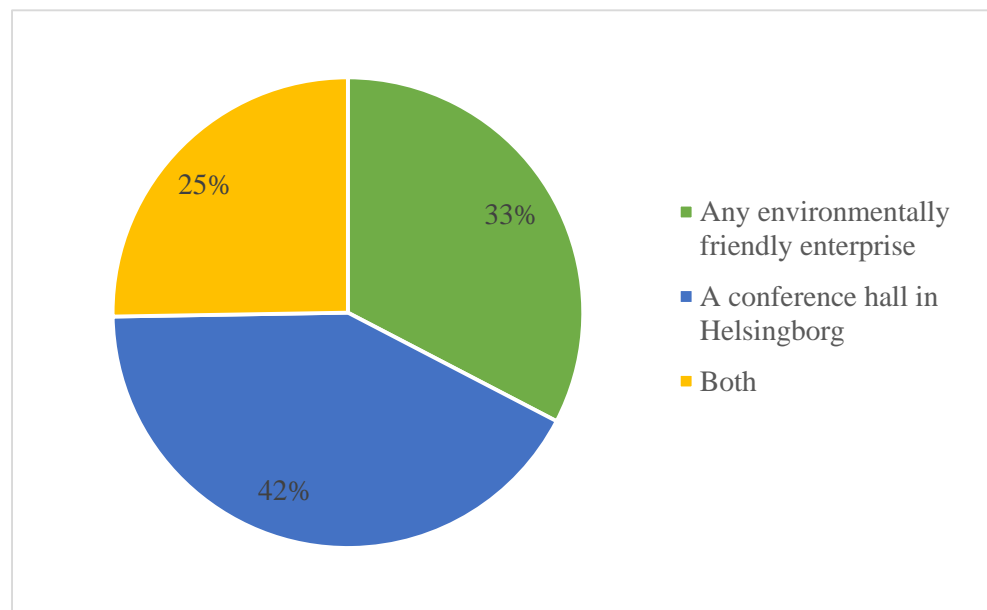


Figure 3. The choices between preferable conference sites: any environmentally friendly enterprise or a conference hall in Helsingborg (compiled by the author)

According to the results and comments to the research question, conference participants from Lund University tend to prefer a conference hall in Helsingborg (42%) to any environmentally friendly enterprise (33%), due to the evidence that participating in a conference in Helsingborg unveils a more sustainability-related attitude due to the least need to travel. For them, it also indicates an opportunity to stay closer to home and workplace. For example, some respondents commented, “to be in Helsingborg seems to be rather environmentally friendly due to the travels! But otherwise environmentally is to prefer” or “a conference hall in Helsingborg because it does not require much traveling”. However, there are still a big number of respondents (25%), who do not

differentiate between staying in the city and going to any environmentally friendly enterprise. Nevertheless, this case evidences that Efficiency is dominating over Esteem, or means “same” to conference participants from Lund University.

The second set of questions involved a choice between localities within Lund University and a conference hall in a spa hotel. The options represented customer values Efficiency and Status respectively. Formulations of questions, evidencing customer values, have been done in accordance with theory and explanations of customer values. The results are reflected on the figure 4.

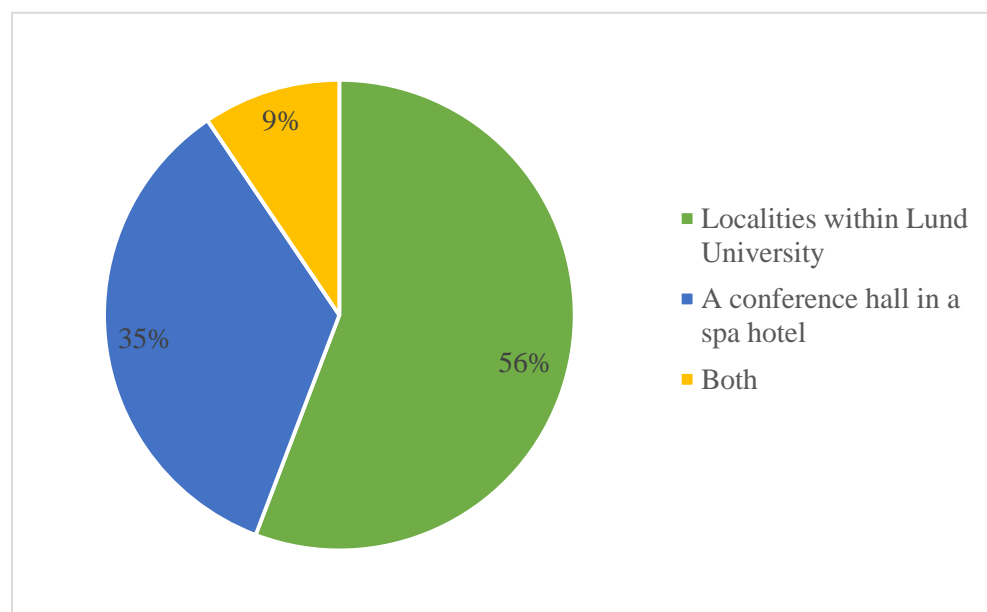


Figure 4. The choices between preferable conference sites: localities within Lund University or a conference hall in a spa hotel (compiled by the author)

The results demonstrate that respondents tend to prefer localities within Lund University (56%) to a conference hall in a spa hotel (35%). Some respondents commented that location of a conference site is important to them, and this supports dominance of the value Efficiency over Status. They also mentioned that they know a distance between cities Lund and Helsingborg, and the exact information about locality of a spa hotel, its policy, and the context of a conference is crucial, in order to make

right choice. However, this case indicates the customer value Efficiency to be of more importance than Status.

The last set of options included a choice between any environmentally friendly enterprise and a spa hotel as best conference sites. The respective customer values Esteem and Status have been behind the questions, and respondents had to choose between the values Esteem and Status. Formulations of questions, evidencing customer values, have been done in accordance with theory and explanations of customer values. The results of this case are showed on the figure 5.

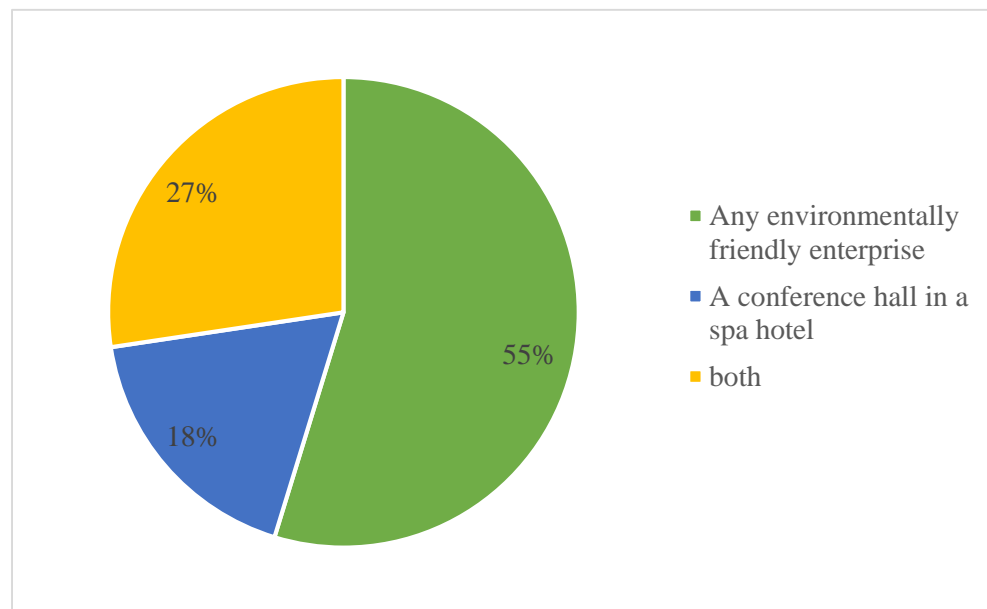


Figure 5. The choices between preferable conference sites: any environmentally friendly enterprise or a conference hall in a spa hotel (compiled by the author)

The choice between any environmentally friendly enterprise and a conference hall in a spa hotel showed diverse results. Respondents prefer environmentally friendly enterprises (55%) to conference halls in spa hotels (18%). Interestingly, a considerable amount of potential customers (27%) does not differentiate between facilities, which mean “same” to them. However, this case indicates that the value Esteem is dominating over the value Status, and for approximately a third of respondents, the categories are

equal. In the process of the interpretation of the data, some respondents commented that they prefer environmentally friendly enterprises due to the limited knowledge about spas and their policies regarding sustainable development, because “environment is more important than fun”.

Having the abovementioned opinion in mind, the researcher asked about associations when thinking of a spa as a conference site. Majority of respondents (60%) commented that spas were mostly associated with relaxation, swimming, or having fun, as well as a place for medical treatments (12%). None mentioned a spa as a business pursuing sustainable policies and caring about the environment. Reasons as such help to understand reasons for the provided choices, which are discussed in the following parts of the thesis.

2.3.2 Stakeholders of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad as the second research group

Data analysis from stakeholders of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad helps the researcher to clarify the portfolio of conference participants, as well as find answers to the second research question. In particular, gathering the knowledge about factors that drive the consumption experience is highly dependent upon the information from stakeholders, who daily communicate with real customers and have an understanding of their needs. To have the results reliable, the researcher conducted eleven interviews with the managers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad.

When thinking of the meeting sector in the spa industry, there is a commonly shared agreement that a number of conference participants coming to spa hotels are constantly increasing nowadays. There are two main categories of customers, with whom managers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad normally deal: the public segment and the private sector. They have different behavioral patterns, such as those from the public segment book the conference room between two years and six weeks before their arrival, while private customers book typically six weeks before they come. The segment of conference customers complies approximately 35% of the business, with a dominance of the private sector, and their purchasing behaviors differ slightly in various times. For instance, financial fluctuations do not affect private customers rather than those from the public segment; therefore, they are able to come throughout the year.

The spa area is not the main driving reason for conference customers to come, and this supports the survey results from conference attendants from Lund University. Conference arrangers tend to choose spa hotels, because of a number of possible advantages, which become available to conference participants: location in the clean and green environment close to the sea, sustainability as a main concept of the business, and the spa area facilities as complimentary services in conference packages. Moreover, conference participants are called a driving force, affecting the hotel management to introduce the policy of sustainable development and conference arrangers to choose a spa hotel as a conference site. In order to identify driving motivation factors for conference planners to arrange a conference in the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad and conference participants to come, the researcher asked hotel managers to rank parameters, which suit best their conference customers. The results are reflected on the figure 6.

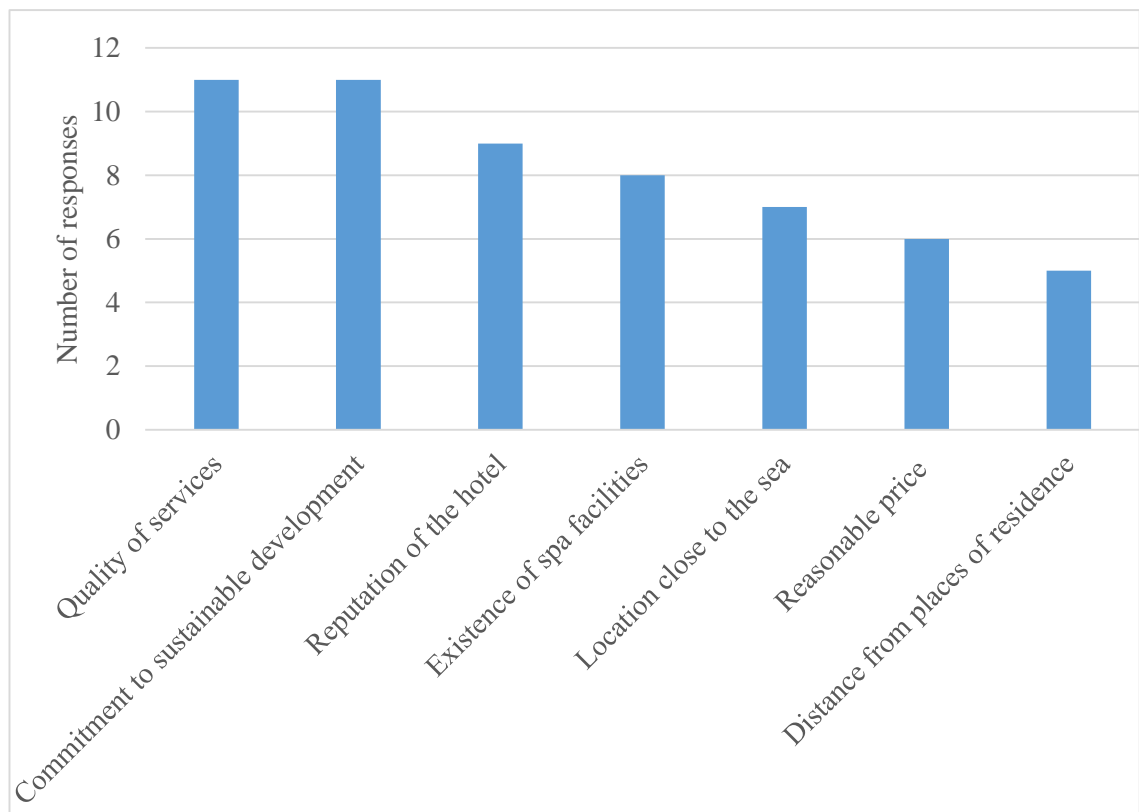


Figure 6. Factors, driving the consumption behavior of conference customers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad (compiled by the author)

All managers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad share opinion that quality of services and commitment to principles of sustainable development are most driving motivational factors for conference planners to arrange a conference and conference participants to come. Indeed, there are customers who are most sensitive to the issues of sustainable development on spot and demanding for sustainability as a key concept of the business. They are a driving force, which makes hotel businesses implement sustainability related policies and practices and reflect the environmentally friendly responsibilities.

At the same time, reputation of the enterprise, existence of spa facilities, and its location close to the sea are also able affect conference arrangers and attendants in the decision-making. In particular, 82% of hotel managers identified reputation of the hotel, 72% of respondents – existence of spa facilities, and 64% of managers – location of the spa hotel close to the sea as important motivational factors for conference customers. Reputation of the business is closely connected with quality of services, since conference customers value a high level of professionalism of the hotel staff. Existence of spa facilities becomes crucial, when additional benefits, such as access to the spa area, are available to customers at reasonable competitive price. Location close to the sea is valued due to the beautiful surroundings of the spa hotel, despite the fact that conference customers do not normally make use of the nature.

Reasonable price and distance of the spa hotel from places of residence are least motivation factors for conference guests: 54% and 45% of responses respectively. This can probably be explained by a lack of dependency on economic fluctuations of target conference customers and a specific location of the spa facility, which involves a need to take a vehicle to reach the place, and this does not sound sustainable for Swedish customers.

In order to clarify the nature of current conference customers, the researcher formulated the question, where stakeholders of the spa hotel had to rank customer values. Such parameters as sustainability as a leading concept of the business, its locality, existence of entertainment facilities, and price, have been included in the question, and the corresponding customers values have been behind the letters. In particular, sustainability as a leading concept refers to the value Esteem; distance of a conference locality from places of residence of conference participants – Efficiency; availability of

entertainment facilities – Play; existence of beautiful surroundings – Aesthetics; sensitivity to price – Quality. Formulations of questions, evidencing customer values, have been done in accordance with theory and explanations of customer values. The respective results are reflected on the Figure 7.

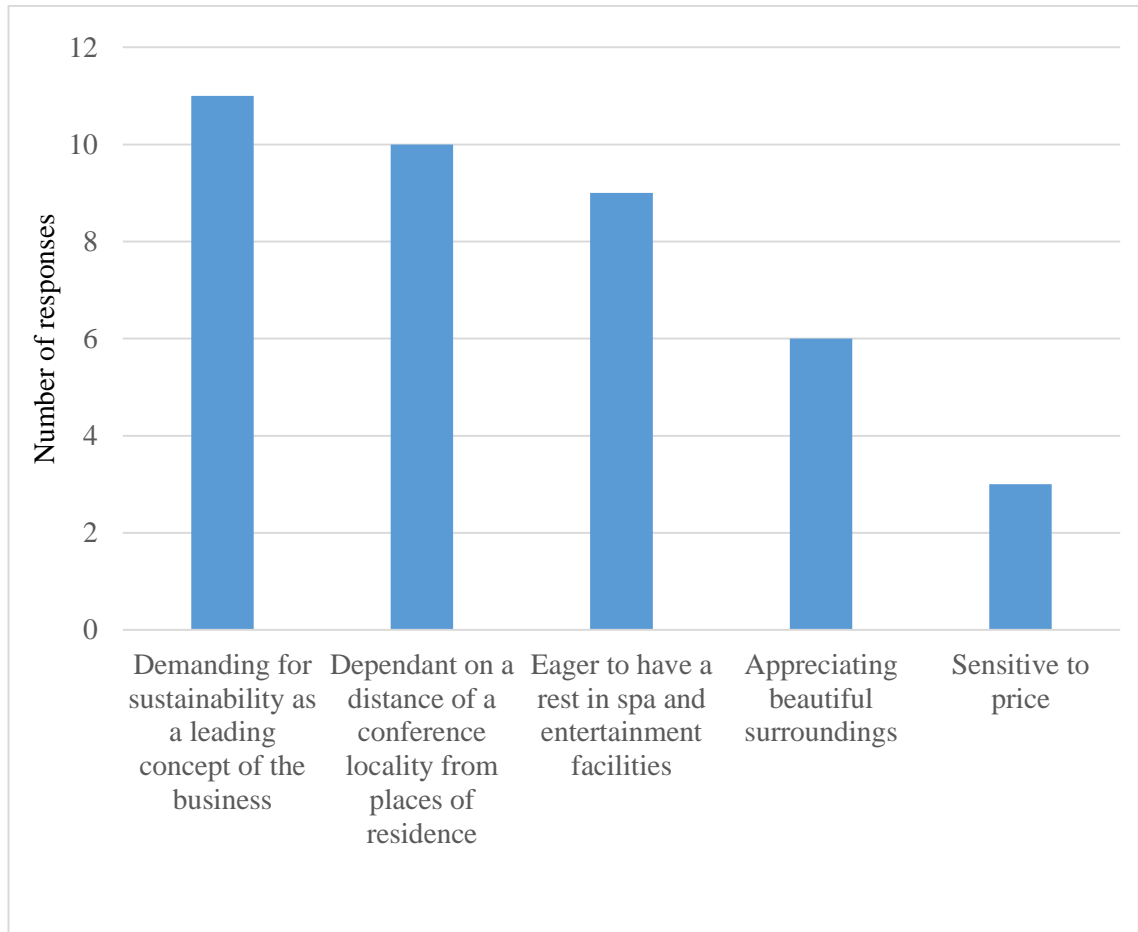


Figure 7. The nature of current conference customers (compiled by the author)

According to the Figure 7, sustainability as a leading concept of a conference locality and a distance of the spa hotel from places of residence are of the highest priority for real conference participants. The results also represent such customer values as Esteem and Efficiency, typical for conference participants from Lund University. Hotel managers clarified that current customer demand for the concept of sustainable

development in spa hotels; therefore, in order to satisfy and make them loyal, the environmentally oriented policy has been introduced in the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad. Importance of the value Efficiency supports the results from the figure 6, where distance of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad to places of residence is the least motivational factor for conference customers to come.

Opportunity to have a rest in the spa area and make use of entertainment facilities are important for conference guests of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad as well, and a use of such amenities is usually a part of the package and represents an additional advantage. Beautiful surroundings are of less importance, and hotel managers explain this feature by indicating that visits to the spa area and participating in team-building activities are most popular activities for conference guests of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad. Conference customers are not price sensitive, due to the target segment – private customers, who come despite any fluctuations in economy.

However, a majority of conference participants tend to arrive to the place by car despite their commitment to the policy of sustainable development and environmentally friendly attitude. A minority of guests arrive by train or bus. This case evidences that Efficiency is dominating over Esteem for real conference customers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad, and can be explained by specific location of the respective hotel.

In promoting the spa hotel, the stakeholders mainly use the word of mouth, which results from guest satisfaction and their desire to share experiences. According to outcomes of the interviews, guest satisfaction is of the highest priority for the hotel management. Therefore, efforts on staff recruitment appropriate to the hotel vision, as well as continual trainings are crucial, and they are aimed at the constant improvement of competences. This supports the mission of the hotel, according to which, hotel management seeks to exceed guest expectations and make them come back later again. The hotel management does not actively use a tool green marketing, because managers are confident that conference guests continue coming to the spa hotel and participate in conferences, even if it does not follow the concept of sustainable development any longer. However, this represents a gap of knowledge for potential customers who are not aware of the concept of spa hotel, and conference participants from Lund University are one of possible examples.

The aforementioned provides a sufficient ground for further analysis and discussions, with the aim to articulate answers to the formulated research questions.

2.4 Research findings

In the process of interpretation of the gathered data, the researcher addresses the aim and research questions of this master thesis, in order to create the sufficient knowledge. In the beginning of the paper, the author formulated the aim: is to generate a holistic understanding of customer values and key factors determining a choice of a spa hotel as a conference site. Two research questions involved: how does a typology of values of conference attendants from Lund University look like? And which factors drive the consumption experience of real conference customers in the decision-making process?

In order to provide answers to the abovementioned research questions, the researcher gathered 95 responses from the first research group – conference attendants from Lund University and 11 replies from the second research group – managers working in the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad in southern Sweden. The author applied the tool survey with potential conference customers from Lund University, and the tool interview with the hotel management. The author made use of face-to-face communication, as well as online platform Google Forms, in order to facilitate the process of gathering the knowledge. The collected data serves as a base for articulating research findings, which are presented in the text below.

2.4.1 Understanding a typology of customer values of conference attendants from Lund University

The first research question aims to identify a typology of customer values, relevant to the first research group – conference attendants from Lund University. In order to visualize research findings and make them easy comprehend, the author presents the figure 8. On the figure, customer values are structured in the decreasing order and relevant to survey results, collected from the first research group. The order of customer values corresponds with a percentage of positive replies to each customer value, which is calculated as a proportion: the amount of positive replies to each customer value divided to a total number of replies.

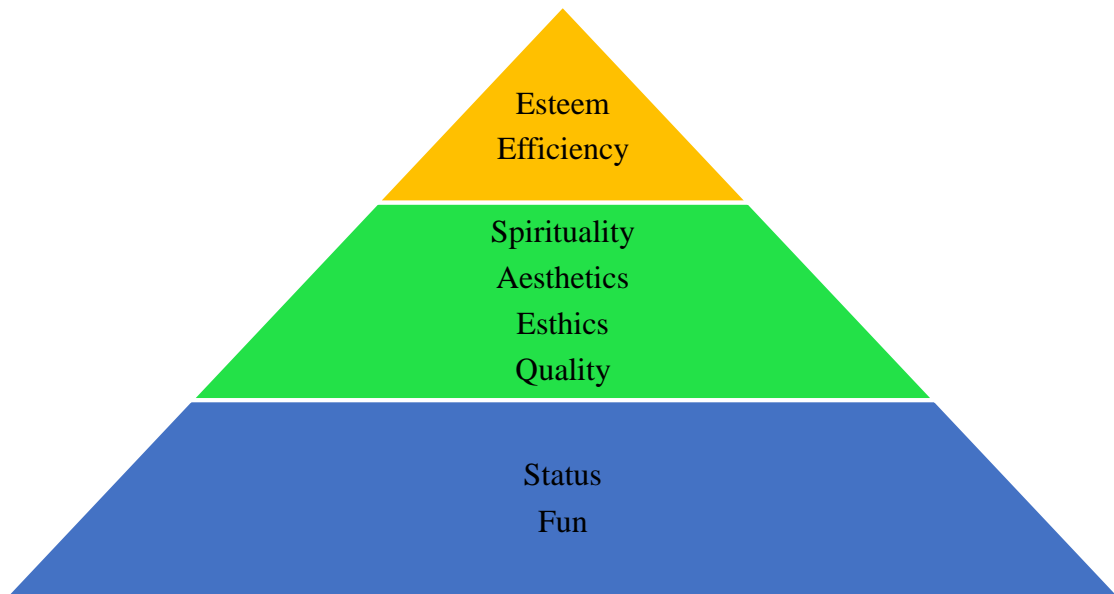


Figure 8. Visualization customer values of conference participants from Lund University (compiled by the author)

According to the figure, one can agree that a typology of customer values inherent to conference attendants from Lund University is mainly represented by such values as Efficiency and Esteem. This statement is supported by the following research results and values behind survey questions: on the four-point scale, 70% of potential conference attendants from Lund University identified a conference hall in any environmentally friendly enterprise (Esteem) and 54% of respondents – a conference hall in Helsingborg (Efficiency) as best conference localities. In comparison, 36% of conference attendants from Lund University chose localities within Lund University (Efficiency) and 32% of respondents – a conference hall in a spa hotel (Status) as best conference sites. Moreover, on the three-point scale, 82% of potential conference attendants marked sustainability as a leading concept of the business (Esteem) and 66% of respondents identified distance from Helsingborg (Efficiency) as major factors, able to affect their consumption experience. The findings are also supported by the fact that 55% of conference participants from Lund University prefer a conference hall in any

environmentally friendly enterprises (Esteem) to a spa hotel, 56% of respondents – localities within Lund University (Efficiency) to a conference hall in a spa hotel.

The aforementioned outputs support the findings by CREST (n.d.), according to which sustainability is very important to Scandinavians. Lack of appropriate knowledge about spa hotels and their perceptions as places providing fun, relaxation, or medical treatments can be understood as major reasons for gathered results. At the same time, conference attendants from Lund University mark that sustainability mainly means resources efficiency management (87%), clean and healthy environment (74%), and use of ecological food and equipment (50%). Several respondents also identified sustainable transportation, amount of emissions, and use of local and green equipment as further determinates of this term. Given spa hotels implement the aforementioned elements of sustainability in their policies and announce them to the public, attitudes towards them as potential conference sites could be different.

The research also demonstrates importance of other customer values, which dominate in potential conference attendants from Lund University. Precisely, 29% of respondents identified importance of silent surroundings (Spirituality), 24% of conference attendants – beautiful and attractive internal and external ambiances (Aesthetics), 17% of potential customers – commitment to principles of equal treatment and social justice (Ethics), and 12% of respondents – availability of latest technologies on spot (Quality). Although values of these categories are lower than Efficiency and Esteem, they are still higher than Status (5%) and Fun (4%).

Translating the findings into the Customer Values theory, the typology of conference participants from Lund University is determined by active extrinsic self-oriented (Efficiency) and reactive extrinsic other-oriented (Esteem) values. The common feature of these values is their extrinsic side, or such consumption, where customers appreciate a possibility to achieve some purpose or objective in the means-end relationship with an object (Holbrook, 2003, p. 17). In this case, such objectives involve participating in a conference in the facility, which keeps to the policy of sustainable development, and thereby customers can demonstrate the sustainability-oriented attitude (Esteem). For instance, pursuing resources efficiency management, providing clean and healthy environment, making use of ecological food and equipment, as well as granting

sustainable transportation, reflecting careful attitude to the amount of emissions, and use of local and green equipment are named most significant activities by environmentally friendly localities and determinants, which customers aim to reflect in their consumption behavior. Alternatively, potential conference participants aim to attend a conference in the working environment and gain the new knowledge, staying close to the workplace or home, thereby avoiding a necessity to travel (Efficiency) and reflecting their environmentally friendly attitude (Esteem).

The active self-oriented qualities of Efficiency involve convenience, or consumption *for my own sake*, when customers do not have to involve “the physical manipulation of a tangible object” (Diesing, 1962, p. 12). In this case, conference participants do not have to travel to other places and can remain on spot. To support the statement, several respondents commented, that “staying close to the work” and “not going far for conference reasons” are important to them, as well as “traveling to other places does not sound sustainable”.

The reactive other-oriented qualities of Esteem involve demonstration of lifestyle, which defines the patterns of behavior and consumption (Holbrook, 2003). Taking into account a number of studies indicating the importance of the environment and sustainability to Scandinavians (CREST n.d.; Guillemot, 2013), considering this factor is important, especially when promoting a conference site as a conference locality. For instance, many potential conference attendants did not choose a spa as their ideal conference place, because “spas could be unsustainable”, “unsure about spas”, “any environmentally enterprise is to prefer”. The aforementioned could be a reason for their choices and a preference of localities within Lund University and any environmentally friendly enterprises to spa hotels. This also represents a gap of knowledge between the potential customers and hotel management; therefore, unawareness about spas and their managerial concepts should be filled.

In order to fulfill the typology of customer values, other categories should be considered as well, even despite their lower qualities: Spirituality, Aesthetics, Ethics, and Quality. In accordance with the theory, these values characterize conference participants from Lund University as those who are motivated to find the integrity with the nature in a form of at least silent surroundings (Spirituality) or appreciate the beauty of internal and

external ambiances (Aesthetics). They also value the quality of the conference site, for its capacity to provide top experiences, as well as commitment to social and moral norms (Ethics). The aforementioned judgements result from characteristics of values, representing these categories (Holbrook, 2003). To satisfy the aforementioned needs, spa hotels have capacities to become most desirable conference localities, because many green spas are normally rich in the nature and silent surroundings and make use of ethics codes, able to treat customers properly, respect and be sensitive to the host population, and handle softly the host environment.

Such understanding of the typology of customer values should be taken into account by the hotel management, in order to provide solutions, able to meet needs of potential customers. This also evidences the necessity of following the customer-driven nature of the business, according to which customers are able to generate the demand and co-create own experiences and business solutions.

2.4.2 Analysis of factors affecting the consumption behavior of real conference customers in the decision making process

As the second research question aims to investigate factors, which drive consumption behaviors of real conference customers in the decision making process, the data gathered from the hotel managers is crucial. Because customers are called generators of the demand and co-creators of their experience (Desouza et al., 2008; Qu, 2016), factors driving the consumption behavior of both conference arrangers and conference participants are crucial to address. In particular, knowing customers and having an ability to provide them with desirable experiences are essential tasks for conference arrangers. Collaboration with and learning from conference participants, and becoming adaptive to their individual and dynamic needs is of particular importance for conference arrangers, if they aim to serve alike category of customers in the long term (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 6).

In order to visualize collected findings and give the general visual view about their importance, the author presents the figure 9. On the figure, the factors are reflected in the decreasing order and relevant to results of interview with the second research group – stakeholders of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad. The order of factor corresponds with a

percentage of positive replies to each factor, which is calculated as a proportion: the amount of positive replies to each factor divided to a total number of replies.

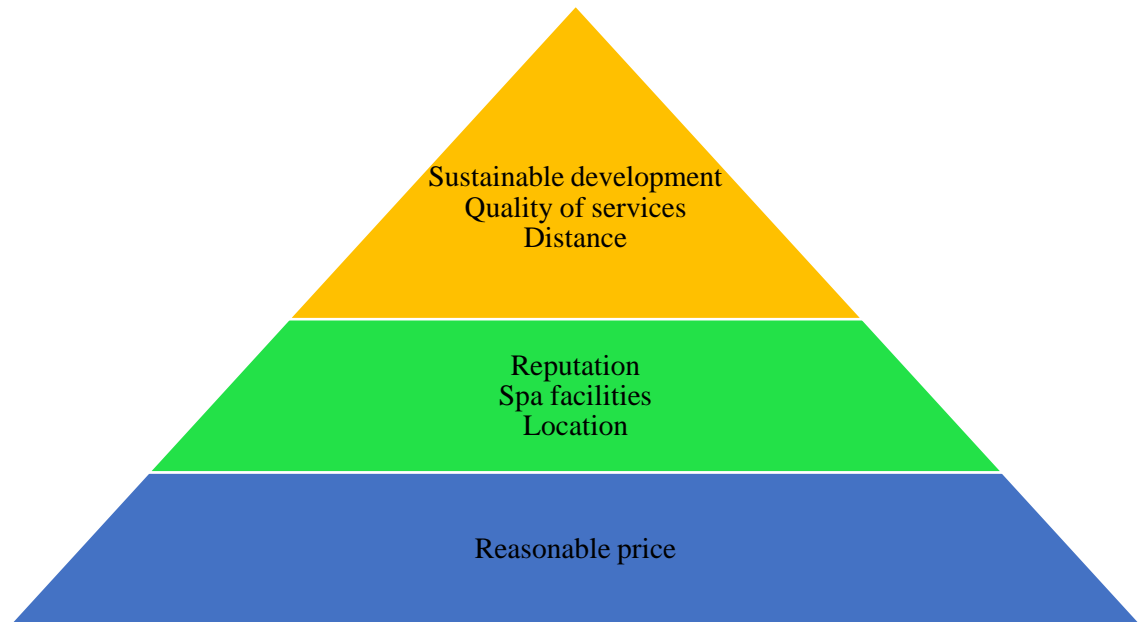


Figure 9. Visualization factors affecting the consumption behavior of conference customers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad (compiled by the author)

According to the hotel managers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad, who participated in interviews, the major motivational factors involve quality of services, commitment to the principles of sustainable development, and distance of the conference facility from places of residence of conference participants. All managers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad share opinion that customers are a driving force and most sensitive to the issues of sustainable development on spot and demanding for sustainability as a key concept of the business. For them, sustainability means waste management, energy efficiency, green materials, location of the facility and local products. In this vein, distance of the spa hotel from places of residence of real customers is important, because transportation has to sound sustainable to them. However, hotel managers noted that a majority of conference customers arrives by car, and reasons are explained by specific location of the business.

Reputation of the spa hotel, its location, and access to the spa area are of less importance; however, are still able to affect the consumption behavior. In particular, 82% of hotel managers identified reputation of the hotel, 72% of respondents – existence of spa facilities, and 64% of managers – location of the spa hotel close to the sea as important motivational factors for conference customers. Reputation of the business is closely connected with quality of services, since conference customers value a high level of professionalism of the hotel staff, as well as confidence of spa managers that conference participants continue to come, even if the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad does not follow sustainability as its key concept of the business. Existence of spa facilities becomes crucial as an additional advantage, which is available to customers at reasonable competitive price. Location close to the sea is valued by conference customers, despite the fact that they do not normally make use of the nature.

Reasonable price is of least priority to conference customers. This is explained by hotel managers as a lack of dependency of their target customers on economic fluctuations. Therefore, reasonable price as a motivational factor is least important to conference customers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad.

The aforementioned findings are corresponding with the survey results, provided by the conference participants from Lund University, whose main customer values involve Efficiency and Esteem. However, the managers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad state that existence of entertainment opportunities (Fun) is important to conference guests, who normally make use of the spa area; therefore, conference packages usually include access to the spa area as the additional advantage. For conference participants from Lund University, entertainment is still out of priority, because “usually I do not use entertainment opportunities due to the lack of available time”. Conference attendants from Lund University also do not call reputation of the facility (Status) as their driving value, and it does not influence their consumption behavior.

Alike gaps could be explained by peculiarities of two target groups of the research: potential conference participants from Lund and real customers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad. For the first segment, priorities of a spa hotel as a best conference site are low (34%), while the second group regularly attends conferences in the spa hotel Ystad

Saltsjöbad and makes use of facilities of the spa area as the additional advantage of the package.

2.5 Discussion and recommendations

The research shows, there is an interest from potential customers to take part in conferences in sustainable and environmentally friendly enterprises, and their number is continually increasing. This supports the study performed by Éva Happ and Anikó Husz (2011), as well as the data gathered by CREST (n.d.), according to which there are a growing number of business travelers, preferring to stay in green-certified hotels for conference reasons nowadays.

In order to understand causes for such tendencies, the author of the master thesis investigated the following research questions: a typology of customer values of potential customers and factors driving the consumption behavior of real customers in the decision making process. Conference participants from Lund University served as potential customers and helped to create a portfolio of customer values. According to the results, values, such as Efficiency and Esteem appeared to be dominating over others, despite the high role of values Spirituality, Aesthetics, Quality, and Ethics. Such category of customers represents a prominent example of the environmentally conscious category, who is concerned with sustainability as a leading concept of the business and location of the conference site. For them, the policy of sustainable development should involve at least resources efficiency management, clean and healthy environment, use of ecological food and equipment, as well as sustainable transportation, careful attitude to the amount of emissions, and use of local and green equipment. In this vein, spa hotel have capacities to become desirable conference localities, given they implement the aforementioned parameters in their policies and announce them to the public. The last point is of particular importance, because spa hotels are still recognized as facilities providing experiences for fun, relaxation, or medical treatments.

Among factors driving the consumption behavior of real conference customers, the research discovered such motivators as quality of services, commitment to principles of sustainable development as a leading concept of the business, and distance of the spa facility from places of residence as most important to them. Despite the fact that

conference arrangers are responsible for selecting a venue for a conference, conference participants are called a driving force affecting the hotel management to introduce respective policies and meet their demands. At the same time, reputation of the facility, its location, and access to the spa area are able to affect the purchasing behavior significantly. Issues of price are of least importance to target real conference customers, who are called least dependent on any fluctuations in economy.

The research indicates that needs of potential conference attendants and real conference customers have much in common: a high demand for sustainability as a leading concept of the business, distance of the facility from places of residence, and superior level of services. For real conference customers, spa hotels are most desirable venues for conferences, because they recognize such parameters and make use of them in the consumption experience. However, the research also shows that the knowledge has a huge potential to create a gap between businesses and potential customers. In particular, unawareness the segment of potential customers from Lund University still signifies a barrier between them and a spa hotel as a potential conference site, despite a high interest in environmentally friendly enterprises as conference localities. Moreover, hotel management, which could inform potential customers about alternative options with a means of green marketing, still maintains a barrier and continues to successfully serve the target market.

Considering the aforementioned, the hotel management should regard other segments as potential categories of customers and take a step to meet those, who are interested in conferences in environmentally friendly sites. A typology of customer values, as well as relevant information about motivational factors driving the customer consumption, are crucial in this regard and serve as a means to reaching sustainability, or “ability to continue to provide its intended benefit over a long period of time” (Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998).

With this in mind, the researcher suggests the hotel management of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad to consider another segments, due to the existing demand from their side, and perform actions with a tool green marketing to build a bridge with potential customers. In it also crucial to inform unaware markets that spas have a capacity to provide experiences, others from medical treatments, with sustainability at the cornerstone.

Taking into account importance of sustainability as a leading business concept and distance of the facility from places of residence, improvements in services should be done, in order to make transportation to the spa hotel sound sustainable and desirable to Swedish customers.

The study provides a ground for the further research, which could eliminate limitations of the current research. In particular, the study opens up perspectives for a deeper analysis of customer values, which means their more detailed investigations with a help of more diverse questionnaires. In order to fulfill a typology of values, correlation between age, sex, profession, levels of experiences, and other parameters could be also done.

In turn, analysis of factors driving the consumption behavior could involve interviewing and surveying of real customers, in order to comprehend their peculiarities better. In this vein, collaboration with spa enterprises is crucial, to get access to conference customers. Moreover, the further research could involve lab experiment as a research method, aiming to prove that knowledge can serve as a means to fill a gap between businesses and potential customers.

2.6 Limitations

The typology of customer values does not consider differences in age, sex, and professional background. It provides a general overview of values, coherent to the first research group – conference attendants from Lund University, and serves as a ground for the further research.

Definition of factors driving the consumption behavior is based on interviews of hotel managers and does not involve opinions from real life customers. Despite the intention to gather stakeholders' viewpoints rather than absolute truths about the meeting sector in the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad in southern Sweden, the researcher collected precise information about the sector in the respective hotel.

CONCLUSION

This master thesis focused its attention on the conference sector and spa industry, due to the increasing number of conferences, which take place in green and environmentally friendly enterprises, and unexplored reasons for such phenomena. Taking into account a potential of spas to provide sustainable solutions for the meeting sector, the author set up the following aim: to generate a holistic understanding of customer values and key factors determining a choice of a spa hotel as a conference site.

In order to produce the reliable data, the author chose conference participants from Lund University as potential conference customers and the first research group, stakeholders of the spa hotel as the second research group, and the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad in southern Sweden as a case for the research. Tools survey and interview have been applied, which helped to meet the research aim, generate the qualitative data, and articulate answers to the research questions.

The research questions of the master thesis involved two questions, which addressed a typology of customer values and factors driving the consumption behavior:

RQ1: How does a typology of values of conference attendants' from Lund University look like?

RQ2: Which factors drive the consumption experience of real conference customers in the decision-making process?

The typology of customer values of conference participants from Lund University is represented by two driving values: Efficiency and Esteem, or a demand for a location of the conference facility close to the working environment and sustainability as a leading concept of the business. The potential conference participants have also appeared to value the opportunity to find integrity with the nature in a form of at least silent surroundings (Spirituality) or appreciate the beauty of internal and external ambiances

(Aesthetics). They tend to value quality of the conference site, for its capacity to provide top experiences, as well as commitment to social and moral norms (Ethics). The research also showed that conference participants from Lund University tend to prefer conference halls in any environmentally friendly enterprises, as well as in Helsingborg and within Lund University to spa hotels. This proved dominance of values Efficiency and Esteem over Status, as well as indicated the limited knowledge about spas and their policies regarding sustainable development. However, spa hotels still have capacities to become desirable conference localities, given they implement the aforementioned values in their policies and announce them to the public.

Factors that drive the consumption behavior of real conference participants support the aforementioned findings. Hotel managers state that the major motivational factors involve quality of services, commitment to the principles of sustainable development, and distance of the conference facility from places of residence of conference participants. In this vein, customers have a role of co-creators of their experiences and business solutions, and they are called drivers for the sustainable policy in the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad in southern Sweden. According to the marketing director Christian Björk, the hotel management of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad tends to listen to customer demands and follows the pace of sustainable development in order to meet their needs.

The researcher identified further factors, which drive the consumption behavior of real conference customers of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad. Reputation of the spa hotel, its location, and access to the spa area are of less importance; however, are still able to affect their purchasing behavior. Reputation of the business is closely connected with quality of services, since conference customers value a high level of professionalism of the hotel staff. Existence of spa facilities becomes crucial as an additional advantage, which is available to customers at reasonable competitive price. Location close to the sea is valued by conference customers, despite the fact that they do not normally make use of the nature. Issues of price are of least importance to real conference customers, because they are called least dependent on any fluctuations in economy.

In the process of the research, the author also identified the existing barrier between potential customers and spa businesses. In particular, knowledge is most responsible for

this feature: despite the demand of potential customers to participate in conferences in environmentally friendly enterprises, spa businesses do not tend to popularize spa hotels as possible venues for alike activities. Alternatively, they take advantage of serving existing markets, which are able to guarantee full occupancy of facilities. However, unawareness about spa hotels as possible conference sites leads to maintaining the opinion that such businesses provide entertainment activities and medical treatments, and their environmental responsibility is often questioned.

Considering the aforementioned, the researcher suggests spa hotels to increase awareness about their business strategies and reach segments, which could potentially become their customers. The existing gap of knowledge should be minimized in order to let the spa industry grow and let environmentally consciousness customers meet their demands by participating in conferences in environmentally friendly businesses. The researcher also suggests improving the services of the hotel and concentrating efforts on achieving sustainable transportation to the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad, so that to satisfy the values Esteem and Efficiency of potential conference attendants.

The further research should be focused on a deeper analysis of customer values, which means their more detailed investigations with a help of more comprehensive questionnaires. In this master thesis, the author used survey forms, totaling nine questions. Such decision is explained by a wish to avoid disturbance of academic staff of Lund University and collect the ultimate number of responses. However, a more thorough accent on customer values should be done, as well as age, sex, profession, levels of experiences, and other parameters of potential conference participants, in order to achieve correlation between parameter and gather the more explicit knowledge.

Analysis of factors driving the consumption behavior of customer values must involve interviewing and surveying of real customers, in order to create a more detailed portfolio of their motivators. In this vein, collaboration with spa enterprises is crucial, to get access to conference customers. Moreover, the further research could involve lab experiment as a research method, aiming to prove that knowledge can serve as a means to fill a gap between businesses and potential customers.

To sum up, the researcher met the research aim and provided answers to the research questions, with several limitations. First, the typology of customer values does not consider differences in age, sex, and professional background of potential customers from Lund University. It provides a general overview of values, coherent to the first research group – conference attendants from Lund University, and serves as a ground for the further research.

Seconds, definition of factors driving the consumption behavior is based on interviews of hotel managers and does not involve opinions of real life customers, due to the request of the marketing director Christian Björk to avoid guests' disturbance. At the same time, eleven interviews are not able to provide a broad picture of customer values and indicate tendencies in the consumption behavior. Moreover, despite the initial intention to gather stakeholders' viewpoints rather than absolute truths in the meeting management of the spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad in southern Sweden, the researcher collected precise information about the meeting sector in the respective hotel. The aforementioned limitations should be considered in the further research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. OVERVIEW OF THE SPA HOTEL YSTAD SALTSJÖBAD



Figure 6. The spa hotel Ystad Saltsjöbad (taken by the author)

APPENDIX 2. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CONFERENCE ATTENDANTS FROM LUND UNIVERSITY

1. How often do you participate in conferences?

2. What is the best conference site for you? Rank from 1 to 4 (1 is worst, 2 is bad, 3 is good, 4 is best).

a) Localities within Lund University

1 2 3 4

b) A conference hall in Helsingborg

1 2 3 4

c) A conference hall in any environmentally friendly enterprise

1 2 3 4

d) A conference hall in a spa hotel

1 2 3 4

3. Could you briefly explain reasons for making a choice for the question 2?

4. What do you consider first when thinking of a conference site? Rank from 1 to 8 (1 is worst, 2 – worse, 3 – bad, 4 – somewhat bad, 5 – somewhat good, 6 – good, 7 – better, and 8 – best).

a) reputation of a place

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

b) variety of entertainment opportunities

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

c) sustainability as a leading concept in the place

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

d) availability of latest technologies on a spot

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

c) distance from Helsingborg

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

e) beautiful and attractive internal and external ambiances

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

f) admittance to principles of equal treatment and social justice

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

g) existence of silent surroundings

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

5. How are entertainment facilities, such as a restaurant, bar, swimming pool etc., important to you when attending a conference?

6. Could you agree that admittance to a sustainability course by a conference site is more important to you rather than a range of entertainment opportunities?

7. What does “sustainable development of a conference site” mean to you?

a) clean and healthy environment;

b) resources efficiency management (energy saving, wastes treatment);

c) use of ecological food and equipment;

d) others:

8. What kind of a conference site would you prefer more? Please comment on your choice.

a) A conference in any environmentally friendly enterprise or a conference hall in Helsingborg

b) Localities within Lund University or a conference hall in a spa hotel

c) A conference in any environmentally friendly enterprise or a conference hall in a spa hotel

9. What associations do you have when considering a spa as a conference site?

APPENDIX 3. ONLINE INTERVIEW FORM FOR STAKEHOLDERS OF THE SPA HOTEL YSTAD SALTSJÖBAD

1. Can you agree that a number of conference participants, coming to Ystad Saltsjöbad, is constantly increasing?

2. Who are current conference participants?

a) demanding for sustainability as a leading concept of a conference locality

b) eager to have a rest in spa and entertainment facilities

c) sensitive to price

d) dependent on a distance of a conference locality from their places of residence

e) appreciating beautiful and silent surroundings

f) other:

3. According to your opinion, why do conference managers arrange conferences in spa hotels?

4. Could you agree that admittance to a sustainability course by a conference locality is more important to conference managers and participants, rather than a range of entertainment opportunities?

5. Why do conference managers choose Ystad Saltsjöbad as a conference locality?

a) quality of services

b) commitment to sustainable development

c) existence of spa facilities

d) location close to the sea

e) reputation of the hotel

f) reasonable price

g) distance from places of residence

6. Which means of transportation do conference participants usually use to get Ystad Saltsjöbad?

- a) car*
- b) bus*
- c) train*
- e) other:*

7. What are the most popular activities among conference guests in Ystad Saltsjöbad nowadays?

- a) walking in the nature*
- b) visiting a spa area*
- c) participating in team-building and other activities*
- d) other:*

8. Which tools of promoting Ystad Saltsjöbad are typically used?

- a) word of mouth*
- b) green marketing*
- c) guests' satisfaction, resulting from the high level of services quality*
- d) other:*

9. Could you agree that conference guests continue attending conferences in Ystad Saltsjöbad when knowing that it does not follow the concept of sustainable development any longer?

10. When thinking of a commitment to the concept of sustainable development by Ystad Saltsjöbad, which 3 activities come immediately to your mind?

APPENDIX 4. INTERVIEW FORM FOR STAKEHOLDERS OF THE SPA HOTEL YSTAD SALTSJÖBAD

1. What tendencies in conference management do you observe nowadays? In spa hotels?
2. How could you describe current conference participants?
3. According to your opinion, why do conference participants come to spa hotels?
4. Based on your experience, what is more important to conference participants: existence of spa entertainment facilities or commitment of a place to the concept of sustainable development?
5. What are most popular activities among conference guests in spa hotels nowadays? (walking in the nature, having meals in restaurants, going to the spa area..)
6. How do you think, the sustainability concept can help a spa hotel to be promoted as an excellent conference site?
7. Based on your experience, do you see seasonality in frequency of guests visits, for conference reasons?
8. Do you see much competition among spa hotels, offering conference services?
9. What means of marketing do you use in promoting your hotel as a conference site?

Thank you for your time!

RESÜMEE

VÕTMETEGURID SPA HOTELLIDE KONVERENTSI TARBEKS VALIMISEL: LÕUNA-ROOTSI SPA HOTELLI YSTAD SALTSJÖBAD JUHTUMIUURING

Anastasia Kulichyova

Antud paberi tähtsus seisneb asjaolus, et SPA tööstusest on kiiresti saamas maailma suurim vaba-aja tööstus. Lisaks sisaldavad paljud SPA ettevõtted endas teisi asutusi, nagu näiteks – konverentsiruumid, mis täidavad muid nõudmisi peale meelelahutuse ja naudingu. Nende eesmärkide seniuurimata tegurid tõstatavad esile järgmise probleemi: mis on kliendi väärtuste olemus mis määrab tarbijakäitumise? Uurimistöö eesmärk on saavutada üldine arusaam kliendi väärtustest ja võtmeguritest mis määravad SPA hotelli valimise konverentsi tarbeks. Uurimistöö läbiviimiseks valis autor Ystad Saltsjöbad'i SPA hotelli Lõuna-Rootsis juhtumiuuringuks. Lisaks olid uurimistöö sihtgrupiks konverentsil osalejad Lundi Ülikoolist ja mainitud SPA hotelli huvirühmad.

Autor sõnastas järgnevad uurimistöö küsimused:

Uurimistöö küsimus 1: Kuidas näeb välja Lundi Ülikoolist tulnud konverentsikülastajate väärtuste tüpoloogia?

Uurimistöö küsimus 2: Millised tegurid juhivad konverentsikülastajate tarbimiselamust nende otsustusprotsessides?

Autor esitas ülevaate definitsioonides, konseptsioonides ja mõtetest seoses järgnevate uurimisvaldkondadega: SPA tööstus, konverentsisektor ja kliendiväärtused. SPA-d omavad potentsiaali pakkumaks jätkusuutlikke lahendusi konverentsikülastajatele. Seda näitab ka olemasolev tendents konverentside läbiviimisel „rohelistes“ ettevõtetes ja kasudel mis võiksid saada kättesaadavaks SPA ettevõtetele. Samas on ka tähtis teada

klientide täpseid vajadusi ja väärtusi, et säilitada turupositsioon ja pakkuda ihaldusväärseid teenuseid.

Uurimistöö näitas, et kliendiväärtuste tüpoloogia Lundi Ülikoolist tulnud osalejate puhul jaguneb kaheks väärtuseks: efektiivsus ja enesehinnang, ehk nõudlus konverentsi asukoha lähedus töökeskkonnast ja jätkusuutlikkus kui juhtiv konseptsioon. Lisaks väärtustavad potentsiaalsed konverentsikülalastajad võimalust leida ühtekuuluvus loodusega (spirituaalsus) või lugupidamine siseste- ja väliste meeleolude ilust (esteetika). Konverentsi kvaliteeti väärtustatakse selle võimekusest pakkuda tippelamusi, aga ka kohustust sotsiaalsete ja moraalsete normide ees (eetika).

Autor tuvastas järgnevad tegurid mis juhivad tarbijakäitumist Ystad Saltsjöbad'i SPA hotelli konverentsikülalastajate puhul milleks on: teenuste kvaliteet, kohusetundlikkus jätkusuutliku arengu põhimõtte suhtes ja SPA asutuse kaugus elukohast. Samal ajal suudavad asutuse maine, asukoht ja ligipääs sellele märkimisväärselt mõjutada külalastajate ostukäitumist.

Töö tulemustest lähtuvalt soovitab autor SPA hotellidel suurendada teadlikkust oma äristrateegiatest ja meelitada sihtgruppe kellel on potentsiaal kliendideks saada. Lisaks soovitab autor parendada teenuste disaini ja keskenduda jätkusuutliku transpordi saavutamiseks Ystad Saltsjöbad'i hotellini, et rahuldada potentsiaalsete konverentsikülalastajate enesehinnangu ja efektiivsuse väärtusi.

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