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**GOING GREEN: DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL
FRAMEWORK FOR THE GREEN HOTEL
RATING SYSTEM**

Going green is more than a mere fad in the hotel industry, green hotel is becoming the mainstream. Based on the relative literature review, this study tries to develop a general conceptual framework of the green hotel rating system, it consists of 3 main parts including environmental protection, natural conservation and building infrastructure and comprises a total of 20 attributes. The paper proposes a general conceptual framework featuring its complex, multiple, relativistic and dynamic nature as a more comprehensive framework of green hotel rating system to provide authorities and hoteliers a guideline for identifying and implementing practical and measurable criteria to assess green hotels.

Keywords: green hotel; green hotel rating system; environmental protection; natural conservation; building infrastructure.

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**ПЕРЕХІД НА ЕКОЛОГІЧНІ ТЕХНОЛОГІЇ:
РОЗРОБКА КОНЦЕПЦІЇ СИСТЕМИ РЕЙТИНГІВ
"ЗЕЛЕНИХ" ГОТЕЛІВ**

У статті доведено, що перехід на екологічні технології став більшим, ніж просто захоплення в готельній індустрії, еко-готель стає мейнстрімом. На підставі огляду літератури в цьому дослідженні здійснено спробу розробити загальну концептуальну основу системи рейтингів "зелених" готелів, вона складається з 3 основних частин, включаючи охорону довкілля, збереження природи і інфраструктуру будівництва і містить 20 позицій. Запропоновано загальну комплексну основу для системи оцінювання "зелених" готелів як орієнтир для урядовців і власників готелів щодо визначення і застосування практичних і вимірних критеріїв переходу на екотехнології.

Ключові слова: "зелений" готель, система рейтингів "зелених" готелів, охорона довкілля, збереження природи, інфраструктура будівництва.

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В статье обосновано, что переход на экологичные технологии стал большим, чем просто увлечение в гостиничной индустрии, эко-отель становится мейнстримом. На основании обзора литературы в этом исследовании сделана попытка разработать общую концептуальную основу системы рейтингів "зеленых" гостиниц, она состоит из 3 основных частей, включая охрану окружающей среды, сохранение природы и инфраструктуру строительства, и включает в себя 20 позиций. Предложена общая комплексная основа для системы оценивания "зеленых" гостиниц как ориентир для

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госорганов и владельцев гостиниц в определении и применении практических и измеримых критериев перехода на экотехнологии.

Ключевые слова: "зеленая" гостиница, система рейтингов "зеленых" гостиниц, охрана окружающей среды, сохранение природы, инфраструктура строительства.

Introduction. As one of the largest industries and one that is reliant on the quality of the environment to ensure its survival, tourism plays a major role in environmental preservation (Tzschentke et al., 2008). Within the tourism sector, going green is more than a mere fad in the hotel industry and hotels should coincide with the green trend of the future that aims to preserve and conserve nature for future generations. This will be the great return to nature – the "green wave" (Holjevac, 2003). The formulation of an action plan for sustainable development with Agenda 21 was approved by 182 countries during the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit (or Rio Summit), which emphasized the need for businesses to comply with environmental regulations and policies to mitigate global environmental problems. In 1996, Agenda 21 for the travel and tourism industry drew attention to the need for developing tourism sustainably. Sustainable tourism has been on the tourism industry's agenda for some time (Mair & Jago, 2010).

Due to energy shortages and severe pollution issues, environmental management has become a key issue confronting each type of industry at development stages. Enterprises are expected to proactively plan and implement energy-saving, pollution reduction measures instead of passively complying with relevant environmental protection laws and regulations, and the hotel industry is no exception. Corporations today have been engineered in order to increase their green and responsible images. The hotel industry is not only requested to provide suitable services and products to guests to fulfill their demands, but also is expected to reduce environmental impact during operations. People pay more attention to environmental damage caused by various business activities and become increasingly concerned about environmental issues, such as global warming, ozone depletion and habitat destruction, and realize that their purchasing decisions directly influence the environment (Lee et al., 2010). The increasing public concern stimulates the implementation of environmentally responsible management in the hotel industry (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Wolfe & Shanklin, 2001). That is, a growing number of hotels are joining the green movement to reduce harmful impacts on the environment, and by doing so eventually increasing their profitability (Pizam, 2009; Wolfe & Shanklin, 2001). Green hotel becomes the mainstream for a variety of reasons, including one or more of the following. First, some hoteliers believe that operating in an environment-friendly manner is the right thing to do. Second, others do so because of increasing governmental regulation. Finally, many find that a greater proportion of their guests increasingly demand green operations (Enz & Siquaw, 1999). Therefore, under the goal of achieving sustainable business development and operations, the concept of green hotel has spouted roots.

Wolfe & Shanklin (2001) indicated that the term "green" refers to the actions that decrease negative impacts on the environment. The environmental concern translated into a movement for green management in the hotel industry aims to mitigate the environmental effects of excessive nondurable goods consumption, energy use, water

wastage and release of pollutants into the air, water and soil (Lee et al., 2010). Some environmental practices considered to be "greening" are changes to products, processes and policies such as reducing energy consumption and waste consumption, using ecologically sustainable resources and implementing environmental management systems (Bansal & Roth, 2000). The last few decades have seen a growing emphasis on environmental protection and implementation of principles of sustainable development. How a hotel firm manages its green reputation and how quickly it responds to growing environmental concerns and changes in the market environment is becoming increasingly important (El Dief & Font, 2010).

Bohdanowicz (2005) pointed out that European hoteliers are increasingly focusing on environmental protection and realizing that protecting the environment means protecting their business. However, Bergin-Seers & Mair's conclusive research indicates whether consumers are interested in, or willing to pay extra for, such "green" products appears to be lacking (Bergin-Seers & Mair, 2008).

What is a "green hotel"? The term "green" is alternatively known as "eco-friendly", "environmentally friendly" or "sustainable" (Han et al., 2009; Pizam, 2009). Therefore, there are various names for "green hotels", such as "green hotels", "green lodging", "eco-hotels", "eco-lodges", or "sustainable tourism" and so on. Because people have different focuses for their environmental actions, the name often reflects the focus of each specific hotel. The definitions of a green hotel only differ in small details. They all use environmental protection as the basic prerequisite to try any possible way to reduce the impact on the environment, therefore reaching the same purpose by using different means. For the sake of simple discussion, we use the name of "green hotel" in this study. The related works reported in literature can be classified into 3 major categories: environmental protection, natural conservation, and building infrastructure.

1. Environmental protection. The majority of past studies in the green hotels focused on the aspect of environmental protection. According to Green Hotels Association (2009), a worldwide green hotel association in the U.S., green hotels are environmentally friendly properties with managers eager to institute programs that save water, save energy, and reduce solid waste, as well as save money. Top Canadian Hotels (2009), an organization in Canada, said that green hotels are environmentally friendly properties that take the initiative and implement very important practices and programs to reduce energy, water, and waste. Green hotels participate in recycling programs and linen changing programs, install energy efficient lighting, and bring their message out to their guests on how they are doing their part to protect the planet. The Strategic Environment Management Plan of Vermont (2009) defines a green hotel as a place for a hotel operator to strive to create an environment which makes it possible for all to participate – staff and guests. The hotel continues to scrutinize every area of its operations to find ways to minimize the impact on the Earth. Ecomall (2010) defined a green hotel as a place offering temporary residence and accommodation. Apart from complying with laws and policies and reconstruction of equipments, it aims to save energy, dispose wastes, protect water sources, and adopt other measures which will bring the least impact on the environment.

For a growing number of customers, knowing that their chosen hotel actively contributes to the preservation of its environment is important for their well-being. As

a consequence, many actors of the hotel industry now recognize the need to adopt a strategy that integrates the principles of sustainable development (Robinot & Giannelloni, 2010). However, due to its very specific operating characteristics and the services it provides, the hotel industry consumes substantial quantities of energy, water and non-durable products. Environmental impacts of hotel facilities are thus greater than those caused by other types of buildings of similar size (Rada, 1996). It has been estimated that 75% of all the environmental impacts created by hotel industry can be attributed to the excessive consumption of local and imported non-durable goods, energy and water, followed by the emissions released to the air, water and soil (Robinot & Giannelloni, 2010). In recognition of environmental degradation, governments, along with the green movement within the hotel and tourism industry and travelers, have become increasingly aware of the need for more effective measures to protect the environment.

2. Natural conservation. The issue of ecological and natural conservation can be important to certain hotels, depending on their geographic locations and specific situations, but this may not be a critical issue to all the hotels; therefore, there is no general consensus on the criteria of natural conservation. Hunter (2002) points out that natural resources degraded by environmentally unsustainable practices are much less substitutable. It is therefore important that ecotourism research also includes assessments of ecological impact of sustainable utilization. Natural resource depletion and environmental degradation associated with tourism activities are sometimes serious problems in tourism-rich regions (Vellecco & Mancino, 2010). Bansal & Roth (2000) suggested that decisions on greening vary depending on how salient the environmental issue concerned is perceived to be (the ecological context). Unfortunately, few studies investigated ecological initiatives within the hotel industry (Stabler & Goodall, 1997; Bohdanowicz, 2003; Robinot & Giannelloni, 2010). Assessing the environmental impact of tourism operations requires a comprehensive understanding of how sustainable utilization affects the ecology, such as the abundance, distribution and demography of wildlife populations; increased mortality and decreased productivity of organisms in visited ecosystems; as well as soil, water and vegetation degradation from increased human visitation (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001; McGranahan, 2011). The perceptions of tourism operators are important for understanding the interaction between tourism development and environment, especially for systems in which research on the ecological impacts of sustainable utilization is lacking (Rodger & Moore, 2004; Rodger et al., 2007; McGranahan, 2011).

In addition, Falkenmark & Rockstrom (2010) indicate that 3 fundamental shifts are required when considering water resources regime: incorporation of land use, focus on multiple scales, and integration of the role of water in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem functions and ecological resilience. Ecological environmental design is concerned mainly with the amount of greening, the green ecological quality and biological symbiosis of construction. Landscape design for a green community should be favorable for the ambient ecological environment and for enhancement of both the local climate of a residential area and the environmental quality of life (Guo et al., 2010).

3. Building infrastructure. The construction industry accounts for 40% of the energy consumption and 30% of the greenhouse gas emissions in the world, mainly

caused during the operation of buildings. Therefore, energy efficient construction is a significant contribution to climate protection, but at the same time it leads to cost savings for a operator of building. Environmental challenges together with the trend of further urbanization are leading to the increased demand for sustainable buildings today (Braig et al., 2010). Buildings have been shown to have impacts on the environment. Consequently, green building rating systems have become a tool to help reduce these impacts (Knowles et al., 2011). Amid concerns about energy usage, greenhouse gas emissions, and other aspects of urban sustainability, the design and building professions have begun to establish and promote standards and practices to lower the environmental impact of buildings. One of the most important attempts to reduce the environmental impacts of the built environment is through the construction of green buildings (Cidell, 2009).

Hoteliers may be wary of the current emphasis on green hotel development, because such trends have come and gone in the past (Butler 2008). This time, however, the important role that buildings have in reducing the negative impact on the environment through implementation of sustainability is highlighted. Sustainable hotels that are designed, constructed, and operated sustainably, use energy, water, materials, and land much more efficiently and effectively than hotel buildings that are simply built to code (Persic-Zivadinov, 2009).

The General Conceptual Framework of a Green Hotel Rating System. The aim of this paper is to document a creation of a general conceptual framework that will aid in the understanding of the green hotel rating system in a general sense and underpin the development of strategies to enhance "green". In order to develop a general conceptual framework of a green hotel rating system, it is necessary to consider the extensive review of the existing literature in the areas of general corporate greening and green tourism. The related works reported in the above literature can be classified into 3 major categories: environmental protection, natural conservation, and building infrastructure. Based on the concept of environment-friendly, in a broad sense, the green hotel rating system we propose in this study consists of 3 main parts, including environmental protection, natural conservation, and building infrastructure, and a total of 20 attributes (see Figure 1).

In order to further understand the green hotel rating system, a conceptual framework is proposed. This will represent the attributes that are influential, including both the organizational context of an individual hotel and the role of the authority in setting the agenda for the salience of environmental issues. A general framework for the green hotel rating system should include the dimensions outlined in Figure 1, which are derived from the existing literature and the empirical research and can be considered to be attributes of "green" in a number of contexts. However, not all the attributes are expected to be similarly influential in all countries/regions. The intention here is to create a general conceptual framework of the green hotel rating system that can be applied to a range of countries/regions although it is recognized that some adaptation may be required when focusing on the specifics of a country/region. It is argued that a general conceptual framework of the green hotel rating system should start with all the potentially relevant attributes even though some may not fit for certain countries/regions. This framework represents the general green hotel rating system, rather than the specific process applicable in any particular context. According

to Pearce (2008), the creation of a framework allows researchers move beyond the descriptive to the explanatory. The application of a framework to a specific issue permits better understanding of the role of contextual factors and underlying dimensions. The contribution of this framework in particular is to provide a foundation on which to base future research, and to provide practitioners with guidance on the roles that different dimensions may play in achieving sustainability.

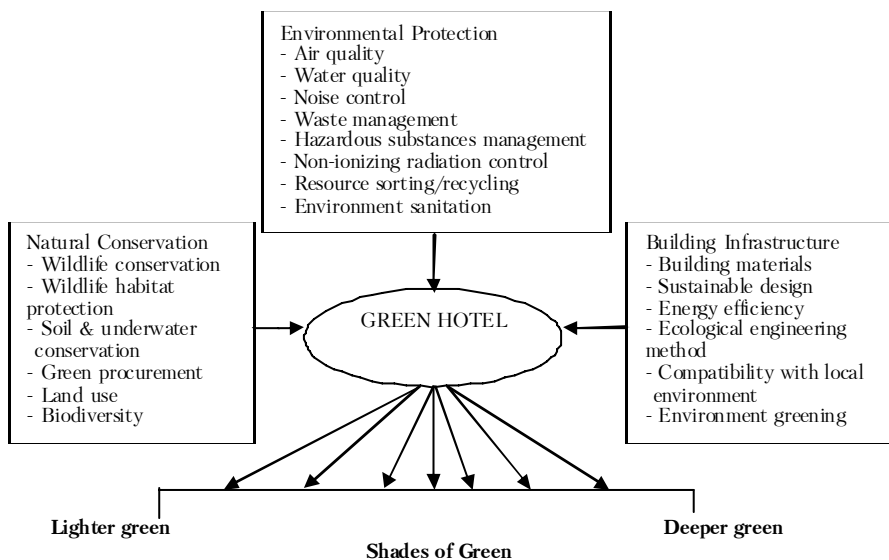


Figure 1. Proposed general conceptual framework of the green hotel rating system

Previous research has shown that there is a wide variety of contexts and a range of different scopes that play a role in the green hotel. Creation of a general conceptual framework of the green hotel rating system will facilitate understanding of current knowledge, underpin the development of strategies to enhance green concept and provide a platform for further research in this area (Mair & Jago, 2010). Based on the literature review, we can make a conclusion that a green hotel should be the one that considers environmental aspects in all the areas of operations, including environmental protection, natural conservation, and building infrastructure. Even once after all the relevant attributes have been considered, the salience of the environment at a given time may exert a positive or negative effect on the hotel's intention to become greener, leading to either a lighter or deeper degree of greening within the hotels. Therefore, our general conceptual framework adopts the concept of "Shade of Green" (Freeman et al., 1995).

Although different green hotel rating systems have been applied in the hotel industry for decades starting from Green Seal 1989, there are lots of studies in the literature discussing the relative issues about green hotel and few on the green hotel rating system. Besides, research in this field is mostly focused on environmental protection. Some countries or regions around the world have developed different appraisal systems for green hotels. The lack of methods to enforce sustainable management and

regulate green messages in tourism has led to an increasing number of voluntary initiatives in the form of codes of conduct, manuals, awards, and eco-labels. There are too many eco-labels, with different meanings, criteria, geographical scope, confusing messages, limited expertise, and expensive systems, which only partly meet the requirements of the process of compliance assessment (Font, 2002). This is why we try to develop a general conceptual framework to provide authorities and hoteliers a with guideline for identifying and implementing practical and measurable criteria to assess green hotels.

Discussion. An effective rating system should guide customers in selecting green hotels that can conform to their demands and expectations among a variety of hotels and be easier and more convenient than they have ever selected. The purpose of this study is to develop a general conceptual framework, to provide amendment directions for those existing green hotel rating systems, and to propose guidelines for establishing green hotel rating systems for authorities and hoteliers in other countries or areas.

As mentioned above, the existing systems are strong on the aspect of environmental protection; however, not enough criteria have been proposed for evaluating ecological conservation. The idea is to build a solid concept of ecological conservation and then to encourage hoteliers to remain aware of ecological conservation. More criteria regarding the dimensions of natural conservation and building infrastructure should be added to the green hotel rating system to evaluate hotels more completely and effectively. Eco-consciousness is now a part of everyday vernacular. Global warming, organic, and sustainable are the current buzzwords. Following the gradual elevation of the global warming issue and commencement of green consumption trend, environmental protection has become a key issue of concern in each industrial field. However, a common complaint leveled at the lodging industry is that it only recently woke up to the environmental issue and then acted primarily as a result of market pressure, but the industry has long worked on environmental matters, by whatever name (Stipanuk, 1996).

For the hotel industry, carrying out environmental protection policies is considered inevitable for possible sustainable operation. Hotels, like most businesses, have responded to this burgeoning trend, raising their green profile in a number of ways: green efforts can be as basic as water conservation measures, housekeepers employing environmentally safe cleaning products, using green energy, eco-friendly cleaning products, recycling bins in guest rooms, and even climate-neutral rooms, or eco-sensitive spa and bath amenities, to even grander initiatives such as all-green construction. Some of these greening efforts may require a substantial commitment of time and money, but the long-term benefits greatly outweigh the initial costs. More and more guests respond favorably to these efforts and are enthusiastic about helping to conserve natural resources, which fosters a loyal customer base. In short, green hotels are a win-win situation for everyone involved.

Conclusion. Application of a general conceptual framework to a specific issue permits better understanding of the role of contextual factors and underlying dimensions. The contribution of this general conceptual framework in particular is to provide a foundation for future research and to provide practitioners with guidance on the roles that different dimensions may play in achieving sustainability. The general

conceptual framework proposed fulfils the purpose of a framework as explained by Loudon and Della Bitta (1993) as a way to construct theory to guide research, facilitate learning about what is presently known about a behavior and underpin strategies to enhance "green". This general conceptual framework can be used to underpin future research into the green hotel rating system in different countries/regions and helps advance our knowledge of the green hotel rating system. The value of the study lies in the development of a conceptual framework and replicable methodology that combines personal and organizational values that can be measured against green marketing strategies and operations.

This study is not exempt from limitations that will suggest directions for future research. Obviously, the main limitation is the results of this study cannot be said to reflect the views and opinions of the entire rating system. However, as the purpose of this exploratory research was a scope study to examine the attributes of green hotel rating system, the findings are of interest and provide a good foundation for future research. In addition, the general conceptual framework proposed requires empirical testing in a number of different countries/regions before any conclusions can be drawn as to its generalizability. It would be interesting to attempt to replicate the study in different countries/regions in order to ascertain how generalizable the results are.

Finally, we acknowledge that our research is exploratory and that these studies need to be treated circumspectly. Much remains to be done, but we anticipate that the work will generate important findings in the field of green hotel rating system. For all countries/regions, because not all the attributes will have equal weights, future research will hopefully examine a number of individual attributes identified in this study, both in order to understand their roles more clearly, to rank them in importance and to give the different weights (may be 0 if it is absolutely unimportant) depending on geographic locations and specific situations of each country/region.

We hope that future research will examine the existing green hotel rating systems developed for many years, provide more detailed results which may differentiate our views from one another and contribute to the establishment of a hotel green rating system in other countries or areas. Surveys should also be conducted on an ongoing basis to keep green hotel rating systems updated. These studies would help to develop a more general and completely green hotel rating system that is trusted and useful to consumers and can be considered a guideline for hoteliers and authorities.

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