

Conflict of interest in tourism and hospitality: Illustrative ethical questions on politics, culture and diplomacy

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Opinion

The fields of tourism and hospitality seems mainly about providing the best possible exercise for the visitors and tourist at competitive prices. However, numerous ethical aspects can be discussed including those related to the hotels policy, employees' status, hotel ranking (starts) and events organisation.

Hotels ranking and the number of stars they receive from the related committees depends upon numerous evaluation criteria mainly – but not only- related to the type of provides services and their quality. For example, does the hotel provide alcoholic beverages? Herein, a problem would raise since in some countries (based on the local culture or religions) alcohol could be prohibited and meat not widely consumed (vegetarian-diet society). This means that the hotel could lose stars not because it does not have good services or because it does not have the ability to provide it but because the local culture (or even regulation) does not allow that hotel to provide that specific service or product. This could indicate the need to adapt the context of hotels ranking according to the local culture rather than applying “international standards” that would fit only a part of the countries on the world. In other terms, we should have general evaluation concepts but the criteria application needs to consider many factors including the local culture and regulations and with an innovative approach.¹

Following the same line of thoughts, a worker at a hotel or a touristic facility could be asked to provide a service or a products he does not usually use in his daily life because- according to that worker personal believes or conviction- that products is harmful (let's take the example of cigarettes). The question that comes within this context shall we respect the worker freedom of opinion and exempt him from such tasks or since he is working in that hotel he has to provide the service the hotel gives to the visitors? Always within the context of personal choices, it is well known that hotels have usually special dressing requirements² that make covering or not covering some part of the body a must. How if this requirements are contradictories with a worker's religion of philosophy of life? Will that worker be excluded from that job (although he might be extremely qualified) because of his faith for instance? This would be an issue knowing the equal-opportunity policy that should be applied regardless of the ethnicity, religion, sex, etc protected by divers laws.³

A wider question would also be, could the hotel owner or manager applies intern lows that could be contradictory to the to the county's regulations. For instance, in a country where it is allowed to smoke in public places including buildings, could the hotel manager make it prohibited to smoke inside the hotel or this will be considered a limitation of “freedom to smoke” given by the country's regulation?

To take an example of the diplomatic issue. We suppose that two countries have been in war or cut their diplomatic relationships

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and passed a law that makes dealing or providing services with officials from the other country punishable. A businessman from the first country opens a hotel in a third county and a delegation from the second country visits that third country for a political event and would like to stay at that hotel. Does this businessmen have the right to refuse making a reservation for that official delegation because his country of origin does not have diplomat relationships or is in war with this delegation's country? Or he has to obey the local regulation and applies the policy of non-segregation?

The illustrative concepts described herein will always give raise to many endless ethical questions and indicate the need to continuous discussions. However, it is more likely that the applied criteria will be decided by those in control of international touristic industry. Yet, it might be possible to make the international touristic market more faire by activating and creating new regional and local organisations who should be in charge of implanting rules and that have to be made up of representative of all the cultures and tourism actors. In fact, this will not only be respectful towards cultural diversity but will also promote tourism diversity as well. Indeed, what a tourists look for when travelling is something different from what they know and different from “international standards” and such diversity is exactly what will provide that. It is worth mentioning that such international organisations should have in charge the protection of the environment from the economic activities related to tourism such as carbon footprint⁴ and even develop it toward a green economy⁵ and the concept of green hotels.⁶

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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