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A STUDY OF HOTELS' MANAGERS AND TOURISTS' ATTITUDES REGARDING THE USE OF FURNITURE WITH HIDDEN COMPARTMENTS BY HOTELS IN BULGARIAN BLACK SEA AND MOUNTAIN RESORTS

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Abstract: Among the main threats facing the tourism sector are crimes, terrorism, and robberies. Researchers in the field state that hotel managers and even tourists themselves are refraining from submitting crime signals. In this respect, one of the main goals of the hotel's management is to assure enough conditions to the guests to make them feel safe and secure in the hotel facilities. For that purpose, except the commonly used security devices, it is possible specially designed furniture with hidden compartments, where the guests to hide their valuables, to be placed in the hotel rooms. Such furniture are already used in the USA but there is no data or previous researches in the field regarding their use in Bulgaria. The main goal of the study is to present data from survey results of the opinions of hotel managers and tourists regarding the effectiveness and the future use of such furniture. The collection of data among hotel managers is based on the case study method. The survey among tourists is based on the questionnaires distributed on the spot. The study of statistical relationships and dependencies is based on the Chi-square test. The findings of the study show mixed reactions by the tourists even though the majority would use furniture with hidden compartments. Managers however do not see any benefits (financial or marketing) from it. The presented results are part of wider questionnaires' and data collected under the project "Model Development and Testing for Monitoring and Evaluation of Sustainable Tourism Development in Bulgaria (after the example of national resorts)" financed by the National Science Fund, contract No KΠ06-H25/3 from 13.12.2018.

Keywords: hotels' furniture, hidden compartments, case study, questionnaires.

1. INTRODUCTION AND STATE OF THE PROBLEM

One of the main strengths of Bulgaria as a tourist destination is the relatively high level of security (NSSDTRB 2014-2030, p.75). According to data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI) the total number of crimes under the Criminal Code in 2019 is 30,276 (24,962 of which have ended with a sentence). Nearly 17% of the registered cases are crimes against property, and nearly 43% are general dangerous crimes (Penal code, chapter 11). Due to their specific activities, hotels are part of the stakeholders involved in the process of ensuring the safety of tourists and their belongings. The main security risks in hotels' rooms, hotels' restaurants, and bars, that may be associated with crimes against property and general dangerous crimes are (but not only): robberies, bomb explosions, money laundering, trafficking and distribution of drugs, robberies during prostitution, bookmarkers, loan sharks, assault and murder, rape, fire risk, guest poisoning, etc. (Hughes, 1984, p. 35; Buzby II and Paine, 1976, p. 205; Burstein, 1994; Barth, 2006, p. 275; Beaudry, 1996; Wood, 2013, p. 78; Zhao and Brown, 2009, pp. 21–33; Nadel, 2009). Hotels use proactive measures which primarily include: installation of different security devices like alarm systems and surveillance systems, hiring internal or external

security guards, appropriate architecture design of the building, parking lot and premises, electronic hotel locks, safes, etc. (Handbook, Part I, 2020; Hayes and Ninemeier, 2006, p. 410). A study of hotels in Bulgarian Black Sea resorts is indicative of the fact that thefts are predominant among the mentioned crimes. Therefore, monitoring and alarm systems are the main devices and equipment used for ensuring guests' safety (Georgieva and Bankova, 2021). Based on the theory of Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), it is believed that security must be embedded in the architectural design or physical changes in the hotel environment (Atlas, 2008, p. 53). Protection should be based not only on the use of security equipment, devices, policies and procedures but also on appropriate design solutions. Although architectural changes to the building and the environment are a focus of the CPTED, the use of appropriate furniture should not be neglected. Furniture enterprises produce a diversity of furniture for public spaces in the form of sofas, tables, chairs, and furniture parts, which differs in styles and models, colors, and sizes (Popova, 2018; Popova 2019). This could be used by hotels for securing guests' belongings.

To keep jewelry, passports, money, and small valuables safe from third parties, people handmade or buy custom-designed furniture with hidden compartments in them. Although the design of such furniture is not a new phenomenon, they are mainly for home use purposes. Thieves are also aware of the possibility that people may have hidden valuables in various places around the room. Therefore, the furniture with hidden compartments does not provide full protection but makes people feel more secure for their belongings. The **main goal** of the study is to analyze the possibility for using furniture with hidden compartments by Bulgarian hotels to protect the valuables of their guests. The main **research tasks** are (1) to be studied the attitude of hotel managers towards the installment of furniture with hidden compartments in hotel rooms; and (2) to be outlined the tourists' opinions and the factors affecting their willingness to use such furniture. The adopted **research methods** are based on - logical, deductive, and comparative methods, as well as on the methods of analysis and synthesis. For the empirical study, the case study method and questionnaires distributed on the spot are used. The study of statistical relationships and dependencies is based on the Chi-square test. The results of the study **support the literature** by presenting more data on different views for the future use of furniture with hidden compartments in hotel rooms. The **main research hypothesis** is that hotels primarily rely on the commonly used protection measures and devices. Hotels' furniture are not considered to provide security and safety of money and small belongings of the guests.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY AND RESULTS OF THE ANALYZES

2.1. A case study investigating the introduction of the furniture with hidden compartments in hotels

The study examined 10 hotels in the sea resorts of national importance in Bulgaria, covering Albena, Golden Sands, Dunes, St. Constantine and Helena, and Sunny Beach. It is based on the case study method and was conducted during the period 18.02.2021-15.03.2021. The survey involved managers of hotels with three (30%) and four stars (70%). The data was collected by the use of telephone interviews, social media discussions, and questionnaires. The main key findings are:

- In more than half (60%) of the hotels, the most common crimes are theft of money and belongings of guests.
- To ensure the safety of guests and to prevent thefts the hotels use: alarm systems (70%), surveillance systems (90%), external security companies (60%), electronic hotel locks that open the door by the use of a card (80%), panic buttons at the reception (70%) and hotel rooms (50%), safes at the reception (90%) and personal safes in hotel rooms (50%). However, more surveillance devices and guards are considered to be needed in terms of securing the safety of the guests.
- The hotels do not use furniture with hidden compartments, and it is not considered to be used as a good practice in the future.
- The majority of hotel managers would not buy such furniture (70%), and it is not considered that their guests would use them or that this would provide real protection of their valuables.

The main limitation of the study is that it was conducted during unstable economic and health situations, which is why the focus of hotel managers is on ensuring health safety measures to the guests and not so much security for their valuables. Also, the actions taken by the managers, are related to pursuing a stabilization policy, which is why the marketing effect of the use of furniture with hidden compartments is not perceived as a priority.

2.2. A study of the use of furniture with hidden compartments by tourists

The survey among tourists is based on the questionnaires distributed on the spot in the mountain resort – Borovets during the months March-April 2021. It is a part of wider questionnaires' and data collected to identify the current needs for tourism development in Bulgaria. The study of statistical relationships and dependencies is based on the Chi-square test, and the measure of association is done by the use of Cramer (V) with the program IBM – SPSS Statistics. 102 tourists were surveyed, from which nearly 93% are Bulgarian and 7% from abroad. The majority of the tourists (93.1%) are between 25 and 65 years old. Most of the respondents visit the resort together with their family (71.6%) and mainly for rest and recovery. For 78.4% the preferred duration of the stay in the resort is between one and three days. Nearly 61% of the people who spend up to 3 days in Borovets indicate that they have spent between 10-25 EUR per person per day (excluding their accommodation and food costs). For nearly 59% of the respondents who stay only for a day those expenses are between 25-50 EUR. For 17.6% this is the first visit to the resort, for 37.3% between the second and fifth, and for 45.1% over the fifth visit.

The respondents were asked questions related to their opinions regarding the use of specially designed hotels' furniture with hidden compartments. The highest percentage of respondents (55.9%) believe that such furniture would protect their valuables from theft. Based on the collected and analyzed data, there are no statistical relationships and dependencies between the age of the tourists and their opinion that the furniture with hidden compartments would protect their belongings. There is no statistically significant relationship as well between (1) the number of current visits to the resort by the respondents, (2) the duration of their stay, (3) the funds that the respondents spend daily, and the opinion that the furniture with secret compartments would protect the respondents' valuables. The collected data analysis provides evidence for an average statistical relationship between the nationality of the respondents and

the opinion that the furniture with hidden compartments would protect their valuables (Cramer's V: 0.480, $p < 0.05$). Although in this case the null hypothesis is rejected not all conditions for the Chi-square test application are fulfilled. This is a prerequisite for being skeptical when accepting such a statistical relationship. Despite the relatively high percentage of respondents who believe that the use of hotel safes does the same job as the furniture with hidden compartments (26.5%) and that hotels are currently safe enough (22.5%), nearly 18% share the opinion that such furniture in the hotel rooms creates an additional sense of security (see Fig. 1). Individual cases believe that the specially designed furniture with hidden compartments is going to be used only for advertising purposes by hotels. Almost 4% do not see any sense in their use.

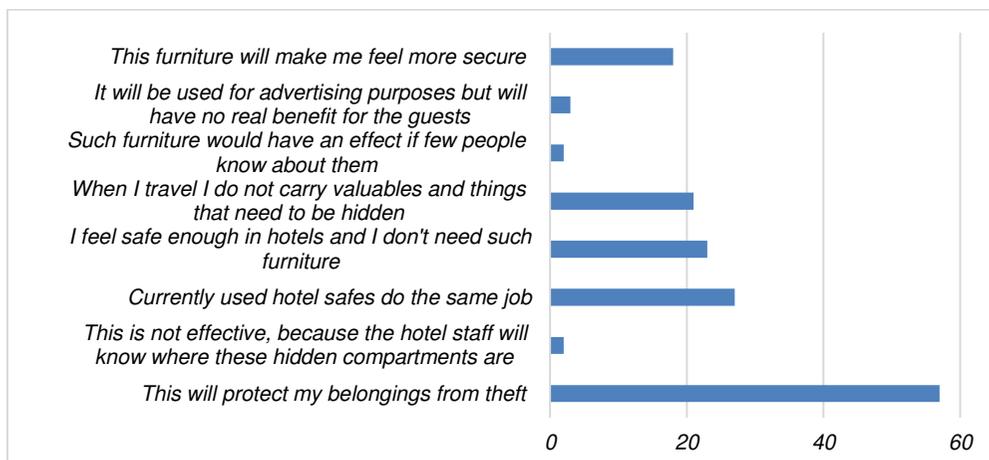


Figure 1. Answers to the question "What is your opinion regarding the use of specially designed furniture in the hotel rooms with hidden compartments in which to hide your valuables?", N = 102

Explanation note: Respondents have the opportunity to give more than one answer

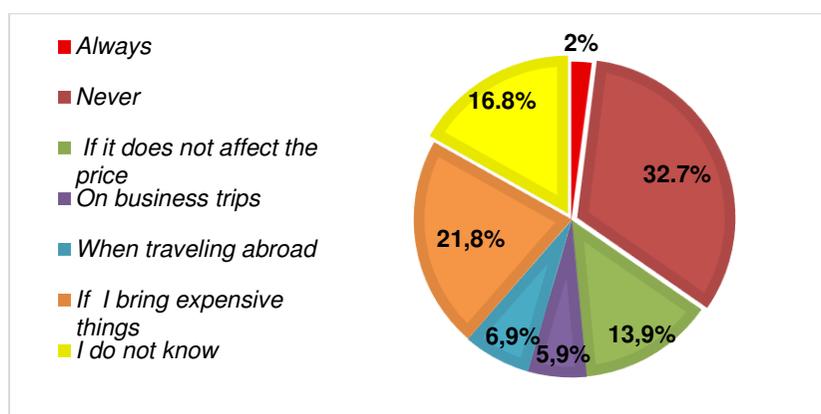


Figure 2. Answers to the question "At what occasions would you use furniture with hidden compartments in which to hide your valuables and belongings when you are a hotel guest?", N = 102

When asked "At what occasions would you use furniture with hidden compartments in which to hide your valuables and belongings when you are a hotel guest?" nearly 1/3 of the respondents would not use them at all (see fig. 2). However, for 21.8% their use is determined by whether the respondents will carry valuables with them during their trips. Although such situations may be associated with business trips (when carrying a laptop, flash drives, jewelry, watches, etc.) and when traveling abroad (when carrying passports, more cash, etc.), the percentage of people who would use hidden furniture compartments is relatively low. The percentage of the respondents (13.9%) who state that the price of the hotel service is a factor for the use of such furniture is also low. The collected data analysis once again provides evidence for no statistical relationships between (1) the age of the respondents, (2) the number of current visits to the resort by the respondents, (3) the duration of their stay, and the tourists' opinion on when they would use furniture with hidden compartments. There is a strong statistically significant relationship between the nationality of the respondents and their opinion on when they would use such kind of furniture (Cramer's V: 0.801, $p < 0.05$). However, not all conditions for the Chi-square test application are fulfilled. There is also an average statistical relationship between the funds that respondents spend daily and the use of furniture with hidden compartments (Cramer's V: 0.364, $p < 0.05$). Again, not all conditions for the application of the Chi-square analysis (χ^2) are met, so it is a reason to be skeptical when accepting such a statistical relationship.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Although the use of hidden compartments in people's home furniture is seen as an alternative form of protection of money and valuables, this approach is still insufficiently studied in the hotel industry. Despite the possibility of such furniture to be used for marketing purposes, managers of hotels in the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, do not consider that it would be of interest to their guests and they will not use the compartments for hiding stuff. In this case, the investment is not considered to bring the expected financial return. However, managers do not pay attention to other forms of benefit for the hotel. For example, the hidden compartments can be used by hotels as a way of innovative interaction with guests, by placing in them complimentary gifts, funny notes, etc.

The analyzed data from the interviews, conducted among tourists in Borovets, show that 50.5% would use furniture with hidden compartments (always or under certain conditions, especially when carrying valuables, when this will not affect the price of the hotel services, during business or when traveling abroad). However, the percentage of respondents who would not use such furniture is relatively high (32.7%). Although a large percentage of respondents state that this type of furniture can protect their belongings and prevent possible theft, a significant proportion of tourists would prefer not to carry valuables with them when traveling. This lowers the functionality and the efficiency of the use of such furniture. In addition, around 1/4 of the respondents believe that the hotels are safe enough and that the hotel's safes have the same effect as the hidden compartments in the furniture. The willingness to use furniture with hidden compartments by tourists is influenced by the nationality of the respondents and the funds they spend daily during their visit to the resort.

As a limitation of the study and possibilities for future researches in the field is the fact that the paper does not focus on the positive and negative sides of the use of furniture with hidden compartment in places often visited by different people (such as hotels). Despite the psychological attitude of having guests' valuables secured by the use of such furniture, the paper does not take into account the need for frequent changes in the places of the compartments (in order not to be known by potential thieves). The research does not analyze the possibility of thefts committed by hotel staff members (who are aware of the locations of the secret compartments). The author of the present study does not underestimate the possibility of such furniture to be used for hiding objects, which are for committing crimes. However, this is not a subject of research in the current paper as well.

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