

“Creation of a Model Hotel Classification System”

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Abstract: Hotel classification systems are tools for maintaining the high quality of hotel industry. Also, the classification of hotels presents heterogeneity. Common points are the range of ranking categories and the marks used, but if the requirements of the criteria of each category are analyzed, very different conditions are discovered, sometimes even within the same country.

The inability of existing classification systems to provide reliable information affects both customers and businesses. Thus, confidence in star class implementation coming from official classification systems is limited.

Nevertheless, the introduction of a classification system for hotels is a complex matter due to the diversity of classification systems, accommodation types and the cultural, environmental and economic context in which the systems operate each time in individual countries.

This study results, in a proposed model hotel classification system, which will directly contribute to reducing the risk of not meeting customers' expectations and providing hotel services more efficiently, depending on the type and category of accommodation.

Effective management of customer expectations is crucial to ensuring the viability of the tourism business.

The new classification system will be a tool of hotel management that can be implemented worldwide thus filling an obvious gap.

Keywords: Hotel Stars, Official Hotel Classification System, Hotel Rating System, Hospitality Industry, Customer Satisfaction, Registration Standard, Accommodation

1. INTRODUCTION

The official hotel classification into star categories symbolizes and ensuring, recognized quality and creates a sense of trust and transparency for consumers internationally. These issues are vital for both hospitality industry and consumers alike. Hotel classification systems are therefore important because they provide significant advantages (SufiT, 2017), (UNWTO, 2015).

Although the “official rating” is a global phenomenon with a direct impact on hotel management, the scientific literature has hardly deepened into it. So far, scientific analyses of this phenomenon have been done for:

- The feasibility of existence or non-existence of an official hotel classification system (UNWTO, 2015), (<https://www.hotrec.eu/industry-projects/hotel-stars/>).
- The presentation of national classification systems (Barcala et al 2009, Minazzi R. (2010).
- Comparison of individual criteria of some hotel classification systems (Minazzi R. 2010).

So, there is a need for a broader overall analysis at the global level. Despite the existence of classification systems for many decades, no attempt has been made to export a model of wider acceptance on the part of the scientific community. Efforts (such as the European Hotelstars Union initiative) have been made by public as well as collective bodies in the hotel industry (Aguar Quintana & Henning, 2013, Cser& Ohuchi, 2008).

Hensens (2015), also reports, that some hotel companies are opposed to mandatory classification systems, explaining that they are often too rigid and bureaucratic. At the same time, however, visitors want the kind of protection provided by a mandatory state system.

Cser K. and Ohuchi A. (2008) report that official hotel rating systems vary from country to country and often use different marks to separate categories creating confusion not only among tourists but also in the tourism industry.

One reason why, official rating systems seem outdated, is that, they do not take into account modern online hotel rating platforms by users, such as Trip Advisor (Sufi T., 2018). Pierret F., (2002) indicates that the issue of hotel classification is difficult for at least two reasons, firstly because of the many types of hotels that exist and are constantly increasing and secondly because of the existence of many different classification systems, which are applied in different economic and cultural environments. Research to date has recognized the need for a unified official hotel rating system. Hotel Stars Union is an association that has proposed a single rating system for seventeen European countries, that allows customers to be accurately informed leading to increased transparency across the industry (Kozłowska M., 2016).

The reliability of the systems awarding hotel stars, has been questioned because they sometimes involve outdated classification criteria (Fuentes E. M., 2016). In addition, the findings of the international survey show that hotel guests have high expectations of two dimensions of official classification systems: (a) the entry criteria and (b) the graded classification criteria. Some of the aspects of the above dimensions, where customers expect more attention, include, staff skills, safety and security issues, structural features, decoration and atmosphere and amenities in the bedrooms. It is also vital that hotels ensure that both the criteria for infrastructure and the level of service provided, remain excellent and are constantly being upgraded by the rating system in which they participate. This will maintain the level of customer confidence and satisfaction (Sepula M., Bello F. 2019).

Classification systems are essentially a "living organism" that is obliged to adapt to the very fluid conditions of the hotel market, especially with rapid developments in online promotion and distribution (Bona Kim Seongseop, Kim Cindy Y. Heo , 2018),(WNT0, 2013).

Hotel classification systems often do not reflect the experience gained by hotel customers, but operate on a production-oriented basis without being customer-centric (Briggs et al., 2007).

Since 1962, the UNWTO has made considerable efforts to establish guidelines for the creation of an international official hotel rating system. The International Hotel Association (IHA) has made similar efforts to develop a globally accepted hotel rating system. However, efforts at global acceptance have not been successful; standards have been used to create customized national ranking systems (LiuZhan-Qingb, Juanita C.Liua, 1993).

This paper identifying the shortcomings in the field of official hotel classification systems, proposes a hotel classification model that will try to address the weaknesses of existing systems and can be applied throughout the world.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research examines the relevant scientific literature and analyses the published and applied official hotel classification systems in various countries around the world. Through a content analysis it captures the exact way in which they work and are applied. It records all the basic principles for the creation and operation of official classification systems, as published in the systems studied. It also identifies the issues that arise, as well as their good practices and innovations. Then a new model hotel classification system is created.

It also identifies the problems presented, as well as good practices and innovations. A new model hotel rating system is then created. This is done after taking into account the relevant literature and current issues that should be included, since it is necessary to take into account that tourism is a phenomenon that is constantly changing according to global and local needs.

39 rating systems located on five continents were analyzed. The analysis was limited to systems published in English. The outflow of this research will be a new model of hotel classification system, which will cover the weaknesses of existing systems and can be widely implemented as it will be more complete, reliable and functional for both business hoteliers and interested tourist customers.

The creation of a model that can be applied more widely will fill a significant gap in international scientific literature.

Finally, the new hotel classification system proposed, will be compared with the analyzed classification systems and the results will be drawn up.

Content analysis was chosen as a research method because it can manage a large amount of data, since it does not affect the behavior of informers, it is systematic, synergy with other methods is possible and finally detects trends (Hsieh H. F., Shannon S. E., 2005). Content Analysis is a method of scientific research used mainly in the humanities and social sciences (Krippendorff K., 2013). It is widely used among researchers who wish to review the literature and research related to a particular issue.

For the purposes of this survey, convenience sampling was selected given the limitations of finding published classification systems in English. Following a systematic search of such systems, the issues were found with the detailed criteria for the classification of hotels in English for the following countries:

Greece	Austria	Belgium	Czech	Denmark
Estonia	Germany	Latvia	Lithuania	Luxemburg
Malta	Holland	Slovenia	Sweden	Switzerland
Bulgaria	Cyprus	France	Ireland	Italy
Hungary	Grate Britain	Poland	Portugal	Romania
Slovakia	Spain	Malaysia	Iceland	Philippines
Lebanon	India	Seychelles	USA (AAA)	USA (Forbes)
Australia	AbuDhabi	Jordan	South Africa	

A special checklist with a total of 203 evaluation points was designed for the processing of data from the analyzed national classification systems. Detailed data from a total of 39 national classification systems were entered in this list.

The checklist was developed in an Excel spreadsheet, in which the data was first quantitatively analyzed and tables and diagrams were exported. The frequency of occurrence of each criterion and each section of evaluation criteria in the 39 countries was then investigated. The MatLab program was used to do the above analysis. The new model for awarding stars, was then compared with the 39 studied through the Excel program.

The survey was conducted between May and December 2019.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the rating systems worldwide found that the following factors are of particular importance for the creation of integrated classification system. The following key factors are published by the competent bodies of the monitoring classification systems as basic principles for the creation of integrated systems. Each country adopts and considers one or more of them to be important.

1. Integrity of the system and the way in which it is assessed
2. Encouraging investment and upgrading the country's hotel capacity
3. Customer satisfaction
4. Quality in structures and services
5. Appearance and maintenance of buildings
6. Easy to use and access the services provided
7. Privacy and security inside the hotel
8. Functionality
9. Accessibility to disabled people

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10. Special marks and certifications
11. Transparency and efficiency that promote tourism in the country, concerned and create international acceptance and trust
12. A system that promotes the creation of specialization and continuous professional training to employees.
13. System that promotes sustainability and environmentally friendly policies and practices
14. System that has recognition within the country and internationally

After the most recently published rating systems of the 39 countries were identified, the basic information on them was recorded, such as:

- the way in which each system operates and is applied,
- the star categories it provides
- the types of accommodation it stars,
- the sectors controlled in each of the systems as well as the
- the analytical criteria used to provide the predefined star categories

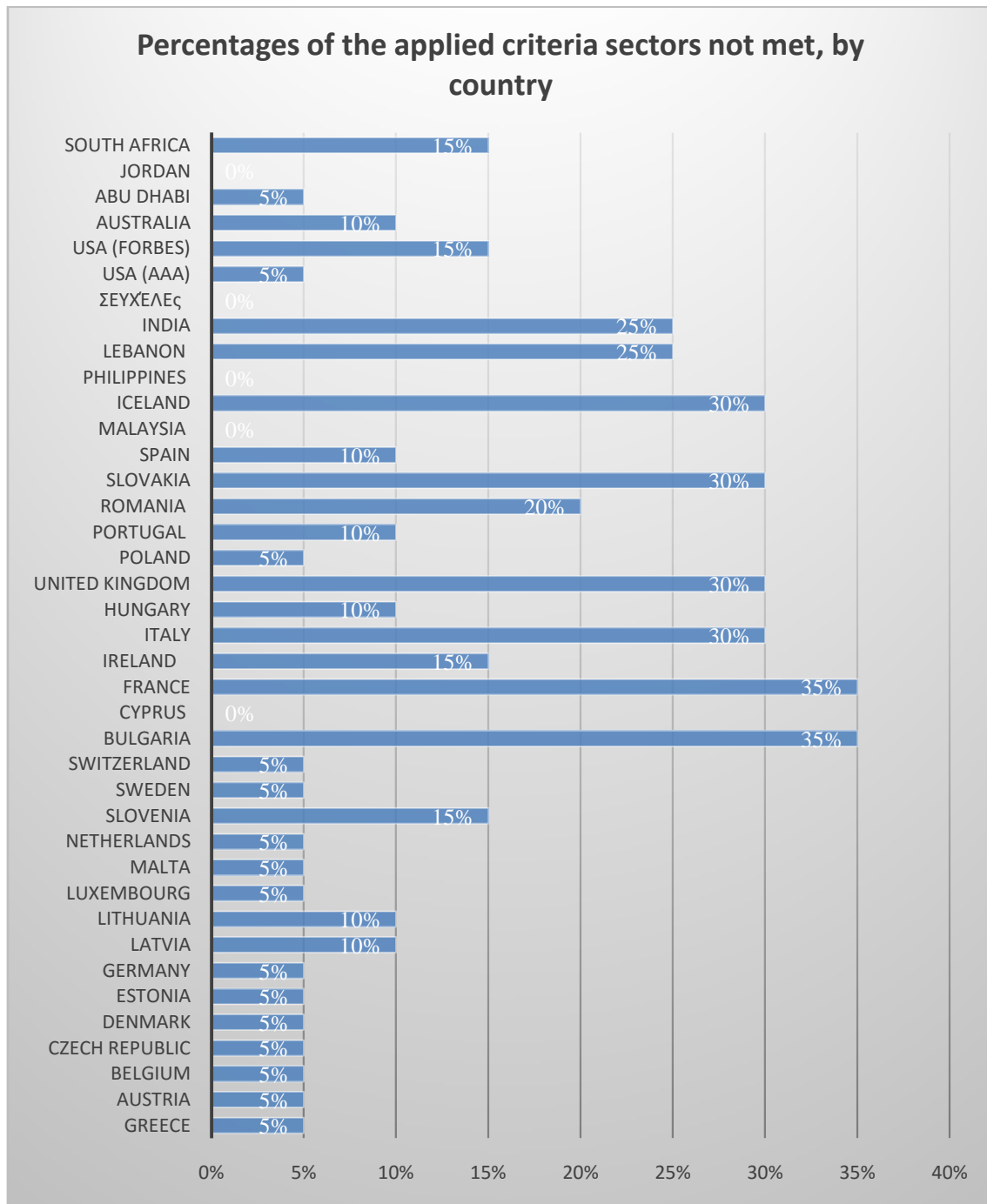
The sectors of evaluation criteria were also recorded. The following diagram captures all the criteria sectors as published in the various ranking systems around the world. The following list essentially groups all the criteria sectors as applied in practice. The quote is made not according to their gravity but in alphabetical order:

Architecture of the hotel building
BackAreas
Building Annexes
BuildingStructureand Design
BusinessCenter
Certifications
Class and Image
Cleanliness and Condition
Communication Facilities
Conferences and Banquets at the hotel
Eco-friendly Practices: [ex. (a) Sewage treatment plant (b) Rain water harvesting (c) Waste management (d) Pollution control method for air, water and light (e) Introduction of non-CFC equipment for refrigeration and air conditioning.]
Exterior and PublicAreas
Food&BeverageOutlets
GuestBathrooms
Guest Rooms and In Room Facilities
GuestSatisfaction
Guest Services
Hospitality and Services
Landscaping
Management and Style of Operation
Recreational and Leisure Facilities
Safety and Privacy at the hotel
Staff

DiagramD-1: Total criteria sectors as applied by the 39 ranked systems studied

It is important to mention that each sector of criteria is analyzed in a set of different sub-detailed criteria, which may which may or may vary widely from one system to another. The survey of 39 classification systems shows that by criteria sector, each country gives weight to different sub-points.

The following diagram, D-2, shows in percentages the lack of sectors for each of the 39 hotel rating systems studied. The deficiency concerns all the classification criteria sectors already applying by the official hotel classification systems and recorded in the previous Figure D-1.



DiagramD-2: Percentages of % of sectors in total, that do not exist in the applied official ranking systems, in the total of 39 studied systems

The sectors mentioned above are part of different classification systems and different countries. In other words, most of the countries studied do not follow all the sectors mentioned above. In addition, the key factors mentioned by the certification bodies for the creation of systems are not adopted in their entirety by all countries. Therefore, the above-mentioned key factors and evaluation sectors are the result of research and collection from different countries (39) for the needs of the study.

Subsequently, innovations and good practices have been recorded, as well as practices that are poor or outdated and should be avoided. The analysis of all these elements contributed significantly to the design and creation of the new model of hotel classification system, proposed by the study.

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Good practices found in the systems studied and examples of countries applying them:

- The classification system incorporates a complete electronic system that maintains all available data for hotels (Abu Dhabi). This makes it easier to identify areas of improvement for hotels and maintains a track record of communications and actions involving a hotel, including its inspection cycles.
- interesting Eco-friendly criteria (India).
- Detailed criteria for staff facilities and establishments /Back Areas (Jordan).
- Detailed description of the cleanliness and maintenance of the premises, (Jordan)
- Exceptional safety data and specifications for safety and exteriors, (Seychelles, Philippines).
- Special areas and rooms for the disabled are available (but without further information given), (Bulgaria)
- Great emphasis on in-room safety (Jordan)
- Hoteliers encouraged to implement Gray Water Policy practices, (Malaysia).
- In each sector evaluated proposals for "best practice access" and "best practices sustainable" (United Kingdom)
- The hotel rating system highlight the excellent 5-star hotels, lifting them to the category "Palace", thus rewarding those who achieve excellence (France).
- After the hotel category is awarded, the system records the customer experience in the Guest Experience Index (GEI), on a monthly basis (Abu Dhabi).

Poor practices recorded in the official hotel classification systems analyzed:

- There are no criteria for employee training, safety rules and there is no general record in the hygiene criteria (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia)
- Minimum information for the evaluation, serious deficiencies in cleanliness, safety, premises and specifications for disabled people, (Spain, Poland, United Kingdom, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden).
- There are no criteria for employee training, safety rules and there is a generalized record of hygiene criteria, (Iceland, Slovakia, Romania, Portugal).
- There are no definite standards for people with disabilities, (Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Cyprus).
- There are serious shortages for lighting, ventilation and staff, (Bulgaria).
- A significant number of accommodations, named “non-main accommodations”, remain optionally classified and thus reduce the reliability of the system (Greece)
- Deficiencies in the safety of guests and staff at the hotel.

Innovations of the studied systems

- Multiple categories. The same hotel can have rooms of different categories! The hotel may have rooms that belong to different categories of stars, (Australia).
- Accolades (South Africa): In addition to the essential requirements for the classification of accommodations, the system, recognizing specialized services and facilities in many hotels, by introducing the “Accolades” marks. Accolades add new value to certified accommodations. Seventeen categories of discrimination represent specialized markets and services and are awarded if the hotel meets a minimum number of requirements e.g. Pet Friendly Accolade, Hunting Accolade, Cycling Accolade, Birding Accolade, etc.

The main differences between official hotel classification systems are (Šuligoj, 2009; UNWTO & IH & RA, 2004):

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- The symbolism of class (starsordiamonds, etc.)
- If they are mandatory or optional
- The purpose of classification (quality improvement, change in level of taxation, etc.)
- Similarity, comparability, connection with other systems, and bodies involved in classification (state, national tourism organizations, private experts)
- Geographical reference of the system (national, regional/local, completely private or a combination thereof).
- Control and confirmation (state, local authorities, independent inspection)
- Period of validity of the ranking (from one to five years).

The basic principle for the creation of the model hotel classification system proposed by the study, is to include as many of the abovementioned factors and sectors as possible. That means, use all the criteria sectors used by now from the studied rating systems, include good practices and innovations and avoid poor practices and deficiencies, add current trends of hospitality industry. This basic principle will enable the proposed system to be widely accepted.

Specifically, in addition to the basic principle, the model hotel classification system will also be based on three fundamental axes:

1. The first axis is relevant to the data from the review of the literature and current affairs for the hotel industry.
2. The second axis relates to the sectors of classification criteria that are important because they are adopted more than others by the studied classification systems.
3. The third axis will concern innovative and good practices shown by the research.

The most preferred criteria sectors of the systems studied were the following:

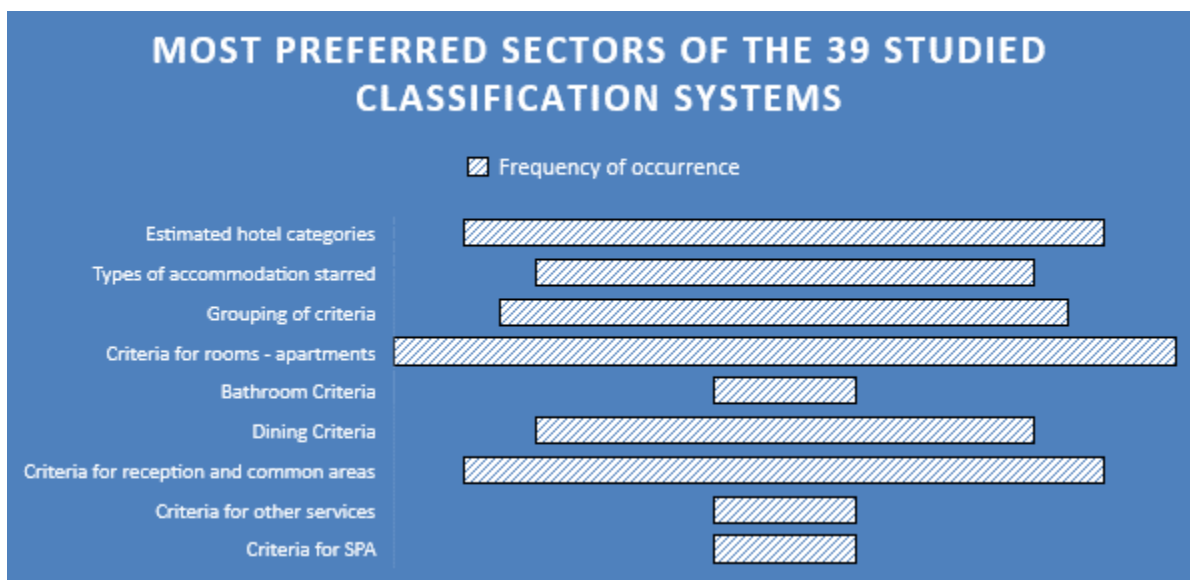


Figure D -3. Frequency of occurrence of preferred criteria sectors

It should be in mind, that similarities in classification systems are few, so some sectors are presenting smaller preference, however they are used by some number of countries, while others are used by only one or two countries out of 39.

3.1. Creating a model hotel classification System

From the study and analysis of 39 classification systems so far, the model has been created in order to be widely accepted. This model is flexible. It describes the main evaluation sectors that meet the requirements of the new model hotel rating system and at the same time enables each country to specialize according to its specific needs. This can happen by enabling each country to add to the core of the system as many individual criteria as it believes are necessary and cover the specificities of the country.

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How to apply and operate the model hotel classification system:

Criteria assessment sectors are proposed on the grounds that in order for such a classification system to be applicable internationally, each country needs to be able to fill in each of the sectors, individual criteria, that it considers most important in its own case.

The research proposes that the model should be **mandatory and exercised by official organizations or bodies and sectoral associations**, e.g. the Ministry of Tourism, hotel associations, etc.).

Apply **at country level** and not at regional level.

The initial classification should be made at the request of the hotelier and checked by system inspectors at a time not known to ensure as best as possible the objectivity of the evaluation.

Also, **hotels to be re-assessed every 2 years**, as tourism is an industry with rapid changes and the requirements are constantly changing. The reassessment should be done with the process of the mystery guest by the certified inspectors of the system.

Inspectors' assessments **will count with predetermined weighting the ratings of users on the internet for this hotel**, which is controlled and for the period since the previous evaluation by the current.

Five categories are suggested from **1* to 5* and an additional of 5+*** for exceptional performance, luxury or special services.

The sectors of criteria proposed in the model hotel classification system are as follows:

Proposed accommodation categories (from 1 * to 5 * and an extra 5 + * for outstanding performance in 5 * hotels)
Types of accommodation that are starred
Obligatoriness of system
Geographical reference of the system (e.g. country, region level)
Implementation and evaluation
Evaluation criteria grouping
Building specifications/Maintenance of facilities - premises
Rooms and apartments
Bathroom
Dining
Reception and common areas
Staff(education, qualifications, benefits and facilities, working conditions, etc.)
Management
SPA-Swimming pool
Cleanliness – Hygiene
Safety and prevention measures (e.g. ban on swimming in the sea in front of the hotel before 10.00) and the existence of a corresponding signage
Signage in parts of the hotel that will warn guests of the existence of artificial or physical hazards or the appearance of any threat.
Medical services
Environmental practices
Crisis management practices and plan existence
Specialized marks for special markets and activities (e.g. Accolades - SouthAfrica) - Business Friendly Hotel
Premises facilities and maintenance
Electronic recording and archiving of the hotel's history in relation to the competent authorities and its inspections
Digitisation of hotel procedures
Special marks and certifications
Location of the hotel
Existence of specialized services (e.g. limousine, airport-port transfer, etc.)
Hotel operating regulation (e.g. 1. Whether or not pets are allowed, swimming, fishing, etc. 2. Prohibit the parking and stay of ambulances on site without a specific incident, 3. Prohibition of garbage disposal in non-

predefined places, etc.)
Quality and online activities (Quality: Quality Systems, Systematic complaint management system, Systematic analysis of guest feedback, Quality checks by mystery guest inspectors, Quality management system according to official standards), (internet: Website with up-to-date information and realistic images and hotel location, Website with direct booking option and space for guest reviews, Active invitation of departing guests to write a review on a portal or on the hotel's website, etc.).
Other services (anything considered important by local authorities and to be added due to local importance)

Table D-4: *Criteria sectors of the model hotel classification system*

The above sectors of criteria cover the important factors for the creation and effective operation of a hotel classification system, as reported by the certification bodies of the systems studied.

3.2. Comparison of the 39 Classification Systems To the new Hotel Classification model

Initially placed in an excel list, vertically the 39 countries and horizontally the set of sectors used in the 39 ranking systems. This development has identified the **criteria sectors that exist in all systems.**

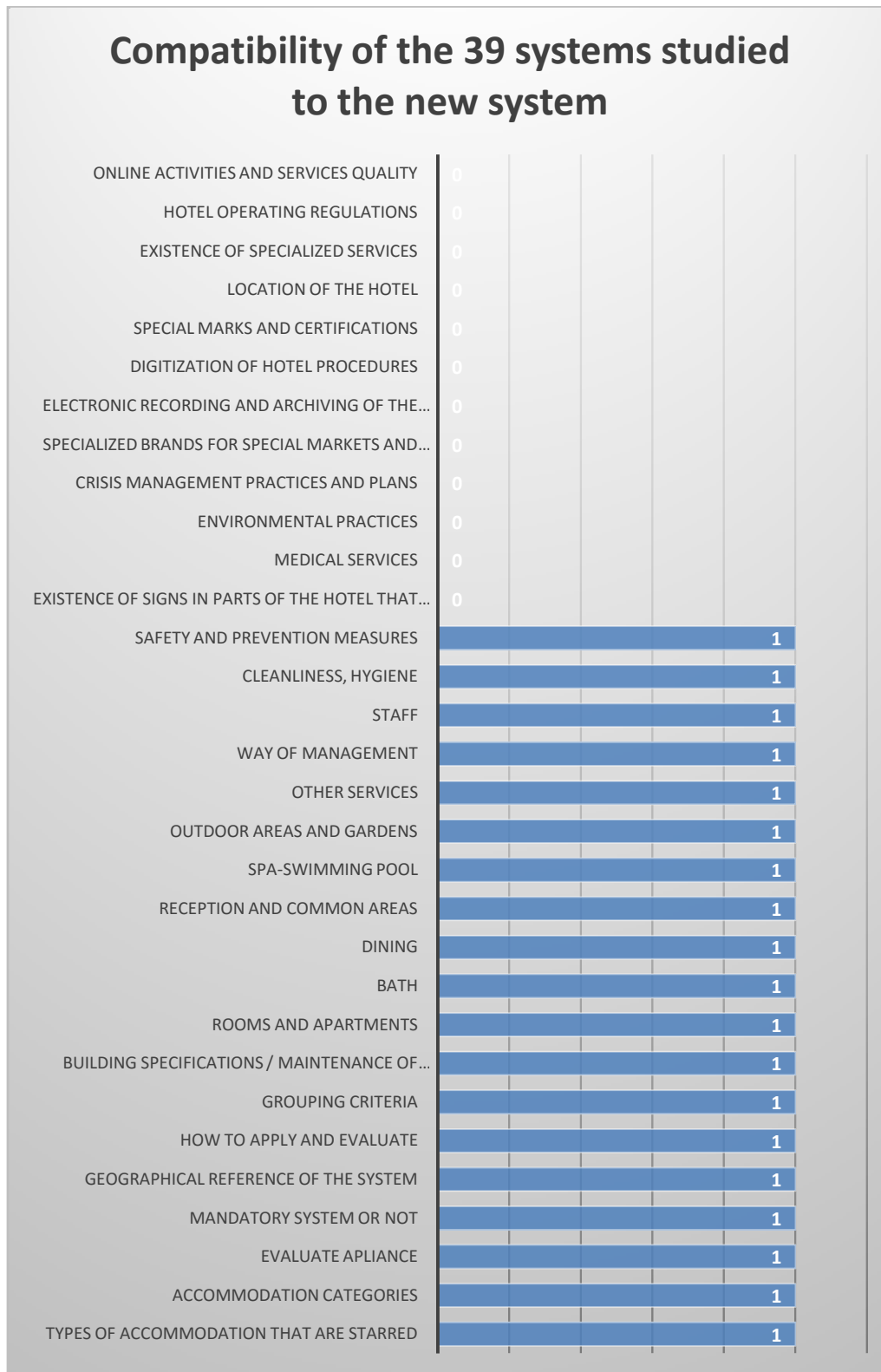
The areas covered by all classification systems are:

- Types of accommodation that are starred
- Hotelcategoriesprovision
- Certifyingbody
- Obligatorinessof the system
- Geographicalreference
- Method of evaluation
- Criteria/how to apply
- Criteria for rooms/ apartments
- Bathroom
- Criteria for dining
- Criteria for reception and public areas

The new hotel classification model proposes 12 new criteria sectors that are not found in any system out of 39. These are:

1. Signage in hotel areas that will warn guests of the existence of artificial or physical hazards
2. Medical services
3. Environmental practices
4. Crisis management practices and plans
5. Special marks for niche markets and activities
6. Electronic recording and archiving of the hotel's history in relation to the competent authorities and its inspections
7. Digitization of hotel procedures
8. Special marks and certifications ex. for hotel procedures
9. Location of the hotel
10. Existence of specialized services
11. Hotel operating regulations
12. Quality in online hotel activities and services

The following diagram D-5 shows the comparison of the new standard system with the 39 systems. Where there is a bar with the number 1, corresponds to a sector of criteria found in the 39 systems studied. Where there is a gap with the number 0, there is a sector of the new model that does not apply to the official rating systems surveyed.



FigureD-5: Comparison of criteria sectors of the 39 systems studied with the new hotel classification model

4. CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to create a new model hotel classification system, widely accepted and globally applicable. For that reason, the sectors audited together with the corresponding criteria of the 39 classification systems of different countries were initially recorded.

Their processing has observed that all 39 systems in the countries studied do not take into account sectors which promote the proper functioning of hotels. Such are:

1. customers convenience
2. developments in the way hotels operate,
3. informing customers about activities outside the hotel;
4. safety at the hotel areas
5. informing and professional retraining of staff
6. safety and prevention measures
7. the existence of a signage in parts of the hotel warning guests and employees of the existence of artificial or physical hazards (ex. a flammable liquid, self-closing fire doors, dangerous weather conditions, wild animals, cliff nearby, etc.)
8. the existence of medical services
9. the existence of environmental practices and crisis management plans;
10. the existence of specialized marks for nice markets and special activities;
11. the electronic recording and archiving of the hotel's history in relation to the competent authorities and its inspections;
12. digitization of hotel procedures.
13. the existence of a sector related to the location of the hotel,
14. the existence of a regulation of the operation of the hotel
15. sector of criteria related to quality in the online activities and services of hotels - a critical issue nowadays and in the future since more and more people are using the online services of hotels.

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