

## ACCOMODATION CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM IN SLOVENIA

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – Slovenian tourism stakeholders are faced with challenges on how best to implement changes to the existing AC system. There is currently a lack of empirical evidence for how tourism stakeholders across the spectrum understand AC systems and the changes they should undergo. This study fulfils that deficiency by investigating the opinions of key tourism stakeholders about the AC system in Slovenia and the changes needed.

**Design/methodology** – Opinions were gathered using an online survey that was sent to the web contact addresses of 1,475 accommodation providers and tourist organizations. The results are presented using statistical methods such as chi-square test and one-way ANOVA.

**Findings** – The results of the ANOVA test show no statistically significant differences in different respondent opinions on the current AC system. The survey revealed that the majority of Slovenian tourism stakeholders want the implementation of the harmonised European Hotelstars classification system but this was not the case for all the groups.

**Originality of the research** – This study is one of the few studies to investigate the opinion of tourism stakeholders on an AC system.

**Keywords** accommodation classification system, Slovenia, tourism stakeholders, hotel industry, Hotelstars.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, hotel classification systems were developed in order to ensure safe and reliable hospitality services for travellers at a time when very few such trustworthy establishments existed. For some destinations, such national or international accommodation classification systems are their only guarantee of communicating quality to their potential guests, making accommodation classification (AC) systems even more strategically important. The main question for tourism stakeholders is what kind of AC system to choose, or how best to modify an existing AC system.

Only a few studies provide empirical insights about AC systems and these mainly focus on the differences between various systems and the managerial aspects of those systems. The main shortcoming of reviewed studies is that they give insufficient data on how to develop or change an AC system. They all focus on a small component of AC system without providing the whole information. Callan focused on the British system and development of classification criteria (Callan 1989, 1994, 1995; Callan & Lefebve, 1997). Minazzi (2010) examined classification systems using case studies in five

European countries, the USA and Canada, but she did not analyse criteria. Foris (2014) analysed systems within the EU, but she also did not analyse criteria. Hensens (2015) wrote a futuristic paper, trying to portray the future of AC systems. In Slovenia, Šuligoj (2009), Rumbak (2009), Uran Maravić (2016) and Cvikl (2008, 2009) conducted major studies. Šuligoj compared different systems; the others made comparison of different criteria. Uran Maravić (2016) compared the national Slovenian AC against Hotelstars, in particular, the system itself and a comparison of all the criteria in a classification form. Studies by ECC-Net (2009), UNWTO & IHRA (2004), UNWTO (2014) and UNWTO (2015) provide more thorough data on classification systems than the academic studies listed. They also give a stronger basis for further research.

Some studies (Talias, 2016; UNWTO&IHRA, 2004) suggest differences between different tourism stakeholders on how they view an AC system, its components and criteria. This creates a tremendous challenge for tourism authorities to achieve consensus between the different stakeholder interests. To achieve that significant goal, authorities need insight on how the various stakeholders view AC system development and implementation.

Seemingly, adopting a different AC system can be a very stressful undertaking for all stakeholders involved since stakeholders usually resist any changes, good or bad (Uran Maravić, 2016). In most countries, legislators lack an in-depth understanding of the accommodation industry. Information on the benefits is essential for tourism stakeholders to choose the appropriate system. Stakeholders in the public and private sectors also have different agendas and roles in developing classification systems (UNWTO&IHRA, 2004). Talias (2016) states that new need to be established AC system with strong incentives for accommodation providers, or be able to secure strong agreement from the stakeholders; otherwise, the systems are doomed to fail. Any research that clarifies the impact that change can have, will go on to help promote the smooth transition and implementation of a new AC system. The present study explores the opinions of tourism stakeholders on a specific AC system and whether, or what kind of changes, are needed.

First, we present an overview of current research on classification systems, followed by the findings of the survey on the AC system in Slovenia, undertaken among Slovenian tourism stakeholders.

## **1. ACCOMMODATION CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS**

The classification of accommodation establishments shows a prescribed and published system within which accommodation is grouped according to type (e.g. hotels, motels, inns, etc.) and conventionally arranged into classes, categories or grades introduced by government, branch organizations or other private bodies according to their common physical characteristics and service (Šuligoj 2009; UNWTO & IH & RA, 2004). Cerović (2003) states that classification determines the quality of the most characteristic offer elements for specific types of hospitality establishments.

AC systems differ. Due to the cultural, economic or national traditions of different countries, there is no one specific classification system, which effectively prevents the implementation of a uniform global system of classification (The European Consumer Centres' Network - ECC-Net, 2009). Minazzi (2010) points out that in such a complex situation, a specific hotel in the same country for example, the Ritz Carlton may be rated as 5\* in one classification, but only 4\* in another, even with the same features. Similarly, this author identifies countries where there are multiple systems, particularly the United States.

The main differences between classification schemes are (Šuligoj, 2009; WTO & IH & RA, 2004):

- graphic symbols (stars, diamonds or other symbols);
- whether they are mandatory or voluntary;
- purpose of the classification (quality improvement, taxation level, etc.);
- similarity, comparability and connection with other systems, bodies that are involved in classification (state, national tourism organizations, private experts);
- level (national, regional/local or wholly private, or a combination of these);
- control and verification (state, local, branch or independent inspection) and
- period of classification validity (from one to five years).

Callan (1994) states that some hotel firms oppose a mandatory system of classification, explaining that they are often too rigid and bureaucratic. This is also noted by Hensens (2015) and Talias (2016). It is also true that guests desire the kind of protection provided by a mandatory state system.

## **2. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ABOUT VARIOUS ASPECTS OF AC system**

A review of a range of studies on AC systems is presented below. There are only a few studies that address this issue (Talias, 2016). On the other hand, studies by consumer organizations such as ECC-Net (2009) and tourism organizations UNWTO & IHRA (2004), UNWTO (2014) and UNWTO (2015) provide more detailed data on classification systems than academic studies.

Callan worked on this topic through the 1990s (Callan 1989, 1994, 1995; Callan & Lefebvre, 1997). He mainly focused on the British system. His focus being how criteria find their way into classification forms. A study by Minazzi (2010) examined classification systems using case studies in five European countries (Italy, France, Germany, Spain, UK), the USA and Canada. Minazzi looked at whether countries had a formal system of classification in place, at what level, whether private or public, which organization was responsible, what kinds of criteria were included in classification forms, or whether the systems were oriented to the customer/guest and how it was administered. Minazzi also compares the systems, but not the criteria in classification forms. She highlights the differences, the increase and importance of e-WOM, classification systems and their associations with quality theory, thus demonstrating a situation that is very heterogeneous. In addition, in each of the countries monitored there were regional differences. She also believes that developing a common European system is possible if there are minimum standards provided in each country. However, until a

unified system exists, hotel brand and guest review portals (like TripAdvisor) will be increasingly accepted over official classification.

A few more countries were covered by Foris (2014) in her study, but her information is largely summarized in a study by ECC-net in 2009, where they dealt with systems within the EU. In Slovenia, studies have been undertaken and published by Šuligoj (2009), Rumbak (2009), Uran Maravić (2016) and Cvikl (2008, 2009). They were all involved in changing the AC system in Slovenia and this reflects their research aims. They were mainly focused on a comparison of different components of AC systems and criteria in different countries in order to gain information on how to change the system.

Šuligoj (2009) presented the diversity of global AC systems and the reasons for them. Clear organizational and conceptual differences have been identified as to the authorship and administration of the systems, mandatory membership, control and finance. Differences between the systems determine differences in hotel offers, which according to the author at this time are also advocated by organizations such as UNWTO, IH & RA and HOTREC. He concluded that (a) copying classification systems between countries is not appropriate or useful, (b) a diversity of systems is welcome (c) that without developing so-called functional quality we cannot expect quality hotel offers. Work by Uran (2004, 2006, 2008) further supports this point.

Hensens (2015) probes into the future of the classification system, by viewing the impact of social networking technologies that enable integration of guest reviews, hotel operations and official classification bodies. His paper predicts a full integration of conventional AC systems with online guest reviews. It goes further by saying those conventional AC systems that do not seek integration will cease to exist. Although the Hensens paper does not have a research part, it is important because it successfully sums up the prevailing discussion on how to implement guest reviews in to the AC systems taking place within academic and hotel industry circles.

Talias (2016) analyses the return of the classification system in Israel. After 20 years, the country introduced a voluntary system along the lines of Hotelstars, which failed in its implementation phase. The main reasons for the failure, was disagreement between its major stakeholders – the Israeli Ministry of Tourism and Israel Hotel Association. The former strongly supported, and the latter opposed a return to a classification system. The study also has practical implications regarding the means of setting up voluntary regulatory regimes. These need to be established using strong incentives, or with the strong agreement of stakeholders, otherwise, according to the author, they are doomed to fail. Talias also emphasises that eminent organisations like HOTREC and UNWTO reject the view that online reviews are a reliable substitute to formal AC systems. UNWTO (2014) also suggests an integrated approach similar to that proposed by Hensens (2015).

The only study covering several countries, and whose content also compares criteria in the classification form, is the study is by Cser and Ohuchi in 2008. The authors researched the correspondence between classification criteria in Switzerland compared to Germany, Hungary, China and Japan. The results reveal that the rate of correspondence to Switzerland was about 50% in the case of Germany, Hungary and

China and around 30% for Japan. The most criteria in common were those related to Rooms, Sanitary comfort, Reception, Lobby and Public area. It should also be noted that Switzerland, Germany and Hungary now have the same system since their implementation of Hotelstars system. This point highlights a very important problem on the usefulness of international comparisons of AC systems. Namely, AC systems are changed frequently and constant follow-up is needed. The limitation of this particular study is that it only compared five countries; that it used statistical comparison tools rather than expert analysis, they did not explore stakeholder opinions and they did not analyse any other AC system components apart from criteria. However, this remains one of the most comprehensive studies alongside UNWTO and ECC-net studies.

The UNWTO & IHRA (2004) study presents the results of two surveys regarding AC systems and a comparative analysis of their findings across 31 countries. They explore opinions on AC systems from the commercial side of the industry, as well as the views of the public sector. The ECC-net study (2009) investigated existing AC systems in all EU Member States, including Iceland and Norway and focussed on system components. The study indicates that AC systems already exist at a national and regional level in most Member States. The AC system is, for the most part, either legislated and enforced by government appointed officials, or managed by national hotel associations, as is the case in Northern and Central Europe. Where the state assumes responsibility for classification, the AC system is generally obligatory (with the exception of France) and the criteria tend to be basic. Where hotel associations are involved, the criteria are more detailed and service-oriented, reflecting a higher proportion of business travellers in the hotel market of those countries. The current national AC systems already give an indication of the level of standard offered by hotel establishments in each Member State, enabling consumers to make an informed choice (ECC-net, 2009). The UNWTO study (2015) analysed classification criteria in four and five star hotels, comparing them across 30 European destinations and 6 global destinations. It also provides a general overview of the types of hotel classifications that currently exist, their benefits and challenges, and offers general guidance on areas to consider when setting up an official classification system. However, it did not give in-depth guidance for tourism stakeholders nor seek their opinion on how to change such systems. The three named studies serve as a framework for this study. The UNWTO & IHRA study (2004) was especially influential and insightful since it was the only one that explored the opinions of different stakeholders.

There are also other studies that indirectly refer to AC systems. The study by Lopez-Serrano Bedia and Fernandes (2004) discusses whether star ratings are a good indicator of hotel quality. Research by Narangajavana and Hu (2008) examines the relationship between the classification systems, service quality improvement and successful business within hotels. Abrate, Capriello Fraquelli (2011) examine the relationship between the quality rating (star) and price. By means of literature review, Tefera and Govender (2015) aim to conceptualize the relationship between AC systems, service quality, guest satisfaction and loyalty. Nunez-Serrano, Turrion, Velazquez (2014) focused on creating a list of objective quality criteria or a hotel quality index, as an alternative method of determining hotel quality, which is based on demand, to determine whether it is a good indicator of quality. The latest trend in research into AC systems is the integration of e-word of mouth (TripAdvisor and similar) and traditional designations for quality (star

rating, category). Guilet and Law (2010) investigated the classification ratings on web-based electronic distribution channels and how these differ from those actually awarded. In their study, Stringam, Gerdes, Vanleeuwen (2010) sought out links between online ratings. Torres, Adler, Behnke (2014) examined how hotel managers obtain feedback from their guests (web portals), experts and internal resources to improve their (service) quality.

While these studies do not directly investigate AC system components or criteria, they do demonstrate the need for quality assurance within internationally recognized quality standards. Most authors are driven by a consumer perspective and lack the practical dimensions needed by tourism authorities when they want to change the AC system. In practice, AC system usage causes formidable opposing views from different tourism stakeholders. While consumers seek greater protection and higher quality, accommodation providers are looking for fewer administrative barriers.

The literature review allows the following conclusions to be made:

- 1) there is a lack of studies examining the AC system;
- 2) limited guidance is available to stakeholders on how to strategically plan, amend and implement AC system,
- 3) amending AC systems requires tracking views of various tourism stakeholders, especially because views vary among different groups of stakeholders,
- 4) finally, more research is needed about the drivers of decision making in the field of AC system design and implementation.

The present study follows these findings and aims to provide additional empirical insights about the views of various groups of stakeholders on AC systems; in particular the aspects of amending and implementing the AC.

### **3. THE SLOVENIAN HOTEL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM AND HOTELSTARS SYSTEM**

In Slovenia, the classification of accommodation establishments operates on the basis of the Hospitality Act, the Regulations on the Classification of Accommodation establishments and Annexes - classification forms for each type of accommodation. The most recent update of the said Regulations was in 2009. Responsibility for implementing classification falls to the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia with the aid of specially qualified and certified auditors of accommodation establishments. The system is mandatory for all types of accommodation. Historically, the development of the classification system in Slovenia has two milestones and two major system changes, namely in 1997 and 2008. In both cases, criteria were based on German standards (of the time).

In a comparative study of the historical development of classification systems, Rumbak (2012) refers to Slovenia as one of the first European countries replacing, in 1997, its former system of letter-based (L, A, B, C, D) hotel classification with a star-based system. Classification forms for specific types of accommodation were harmonised; a quality standard and a speciality standard were also introduced. The system was

revamped in 2008, allowing accommodation establishments rated with three stars and lower to self-assess themselves, while for four and five star category required assessment by trained and licensed auditors. The Market Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia oversees the process. Assessment is maintained using an electronic system, which also provides a register of accommodation establishments.

Worldwide, the idea of the harmonised system was proposed a number of times. Whether this is desirable and feasible, remains an open question, and a problem covered by many authors (Cser & Ohuchi, 2008; Šuligoj, 2009; Minazzi, 2010; Guilet & Law, 2010; Serrat, 2011; Tefera & Govender, 2015; Hensens, 2015; Talias, 2016; UNWTO in 2004, 2014, 2015; ECC-Net, 2009, Uran Maravić, 2016). The only one among those authors who sees merit in a diverse system is Šuligoj (2009).

Attempts at harmonisation have taken place in Europe. In 2010, three major European tourist countries (Germany, Switzerland and Austria) agreed to a standardised hotel classification system as the baseline for hotel classification in different categories was too varied at the time. There is significant tourist migration among these countries, with German guests, for example, representing the largest proportion of foreign visitors represented in Austria and Switzerland. As a result, these countries harmonised with the then German star-based classification, which was then slightly modified. In 2009, seven countries committed to using virtually the same hotel classification criteria, becoming the founders of the Hotelstars Union Association - HOTREC. In 2011, the three Baltic nations and Luxembourg joined the Hotelstars Union, Malta, as the first Mediterranean country joined in 2012, with Belgium, Denmark and Greece joining in 2013 ([www.hotelstars.eu](http://www.hotelstars.eu)).

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

Stakeholders' opinions were gathered through online questionnaires. The questionnaire was sent to the main tourism stakeholders - accommodation providers, local tourism organizations, travel agencies, auditors and officials dealing with classification. The respondents were mostly general or operational managers.

The survey was conducted between 6th - 20th May 2016. The questionnaire was sent to all tourism stakeholders listed in the Slovenian tourism organization register, respectively to the web email addresses of 1,475 contacts. 1050 of these were accommodation (approx. 32 % in hotels, 19 % camps, 14 % private rooms and 35 % others), 200 were local tourism organizations and 225 other tourism companies (travel agencies). The contracting authority of this study collated the mailing list. They did not release more detailed information on the respondents due to data protection laws. After one week, the stakeholders were sent a reminder request to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was clicked by 424 respondents, and partially completed by 46 %. Overall, 156 (36.8 %) mostly completed questionnaires were taken into the analysis stage. Some of the questions presented below were completed by less than 156 respondents.

The questionnaire was drawn up based on three comprehensive studies by the UNWTO (2004, 2014, and 2015). The questionnaire consists of statements that are intended to develop common positions on the design of the national classification system. The whole study consisted of 22 groups of questions, which are available upon request. The questionnaire data thus obtained was then analysed using appropriate statistical methods. Following suggestions made by UNWTO & IHRA (2004), respondents were divided into groups according to their organizational origins: public sector, private sector hotels, private sector other accommodation, others. Chi-square test and one-way ANOVA were used (SPSS standard package for personal computers) to test the differences between the groups.

## 5. FINDINGS

Data on the survey sample is presented below:

Table 1: **Survey sample.**

	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>VALID PERCENT</b>
public sector	28	17.9
private sector – hotels and similar	43	27.6
private sector – camps and private rooms	44	28.2
private sector – other tourism companies	41	26.3
total	156	100.0

In total, the questionnaire was sent to 1,475 addresses, 10.57 % of the online questionnaires were fully or partially completed. Further analysis of fully or partially completed questionnaires received by 20 May 2016 was then undertaken.

The sample size of fully completed questionnaires was 156, consisting of 40% male and 60% female respondents. The majority of respondents were aged between 36-55 years.

The majority of respondents (65%) submitting a fully completed questionnaire completed further education or higher. The largest group of respondents (55.8 %) represent accommodation sector managers. Respondents from local/regional/national tourist organizations and from public sector employees at 17.9% with 26.3% from other tourism-related activities. The sample is not representative.

The first part of the study is intended to gauge stakeholder opinion on the current system of accommodation classification. Questions are designed according to the UNWTO studies (2004, 2014, 2015) and Uran Maravić study (2016). Opinions were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 - Strongly disagree 2 - Disagree, 3 - neither nor, 4 - agree, 5 - I totally agree).

As a first stage, indicators were tested for normality. The distribution of scores was normal. We did not test for other assumptions due to using a standard scale.



Table 2: **Opinion on the existing system of classification.**

	Organization				ANOVA scores	Eta square
	Public sector	Private sector hotel	Private sector – camps and rooms	Private sector - others		
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean		
The existing system for classification of accommodation is good.	3.1	2.9	3.3	3.1	.502	0.02
The work of classification auditors is professional and efficient.	3.2	3.4	3.5	3.1	.201	0.03
Accommodation auditors are business professionals.	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.1	.864	0.01
All hotels be assessed by trained auditors (excluding self-assessed classification less than 4 *).	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.2	.204	0.03
Auditors should not be employed by the accommodation establishment that is being assessed.	4.5	4.2	3.8	4.3	.071	0.05
The validity of assessment for specific accommodation classification should be overseen by the Market Inspectorate.	3.6	2.9	2.9	2.8	.085	0.04
All hotels in the same category shall be subject to the same criteria (no exceptions for building age e.g. before 1999).	3.5	3.0	3.2	3.6	.106	0.04
The current system has appropriate scope for obligatory elements.	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.0	.622	0.01
The current system has an appropriate scope for optional elements.	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.1	.746	0.01

Table 2 shows that the respondents' opinions do not differ greatly even though they are divided into their in respective organizational groups. A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of organization type on opinions regarding the AC system. Respondents do not have strong opinions on the current AC system (average mean around 3). The only clear opinion concerned the fact that auditors should not be employed by the facility being assessed, which was a problem in the past. It should also be mentioned that opinions on a criterion previously required by the hotel industry, that rooms have different floor area depending on when the accommodation was constructed, changed. Interestingly, the stakeholders now agree that this is not appropriate. Namely, the most frequent complaints of the existing AC system have been in terms of flexibility in the size of the rooms, because such changes require the demolition of walls and are costly.

There was no statistically significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level in scores for the four organization groupings. As observed above, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was quite small. The size effect, calculated using eta squared, is considered for all variables as small (Palliant, 2005). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test were not applied, since the overall ANOVA did not show significant differences between groups (Palliant, 2005).

Despite the majority of respondents believing that the current system of classification good, we asked for an opinion on whether changes are necessary. A Chi-square test was applied to calculate differences between different organizational groups. This test is used when one wishes to explore the relationship between two categorical variables (Palliant, 2005).

Table 3: **Changes to the classification system.**

Would you change the current accommodation classification system?	Organization				Total
	Public sector	Private sector - hotel	Private sector – camps and rooms	Private sector - others	
<b>yes, the current system needs significant update</b>	25.0%	16.3%	20.9%	25.6%	21.6%
<b>yes, incorporate new elements of Hotelstars into the current system</b>	35.7%	25.6%	14.0%	20.5%	22.9%
<b>yes, Hotelstars system should be introduced</b>	21.4%	53.5%	27.9%	33.3%	35.3%
<b>no/other</b>	17.9%	4.7%	37.2%	20.5%	20.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22,379 <sup>a</sup>	9	.008
Likelihood Ratio	23.251	9	.006
Linear-by-Linear Association	.986	1	.321
N of Valid Cases	153		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.67.

Most respondents selected introducing the Hotelstars system, or incorporating Hotelstars criteria into the current system. Although the majority of respondents consider the current system as good (Table 3), only 20.3 % did not suggest some change. The Chi-square test shows statistically significant differences between respondents from the different types of organizations. The most obvious difference is between hoteliers and managers of other accommodation facilities in advocating the introduction of Hotelstars. The hoteliers advocate introducing Hotelstars more strongly than public sector employees or managers in the other forms of accommodation. Managers in private sector

camps and rooms were not keen to change the current AC system (37.2 %). Such differences are normal, because there are no Hotelstars criteria for private rooms and campsites yet and stakeholders have little idea of what change might bring, while hoteliers are already familiar with Hotelstars and want to introduce international standards of quality into Slovenian hotels.

Table 4: **Criteria in classification form.**

		Organization				Chi square	Sig.
		Public sector	Private sector - hotel	Private sector – camps and rooms	Private sector - others		
		Column N %	Column N %	Column N %	Column N %		
required floor space in rooms (SKS)	yes	57.1%	51.2%	27.3%	48.8%	11.174	.083
	no	21.4%	18.6%	43.2%	22.0%		
	maybe	21.4%	30.2%	29.5%	29.3%		
required floor space in bathroom (SKS)	yes	57.1%	39.5%	13.6%	34.1%	23.261	,001*
	no	17.9%	34.9%	68.2%	36.6%		
	maybe	25.0%	25.6%	18.2%	29.3%		
obligatory air-conditioning in rooms and communal areas (SKS)	yes	50.0%	51.2%	15.9%	29.3%	20.642	,002*
	no	25.0%	27.9%	65.9%	43.9%		
	maybe	25.0%	20.9%	18.2%	26.8%		
a large breakfast selection (SKS)	yes	25.0%	32.6%	6.8%	24.4%	22.403	,001*
	no	39.3%	32.6%	79.5%	48.8%		
	maybe	35.7%	34.9%	13.6%	26.8%		
specified minimum hours when specialised services are available (SKS)	yes	25.0%	30.2%	9.1%	24.4%	15.540	,016*
	no	35.7%	41.9%	75.0%	53.7%		
	maybe	39.3%	27.9%	15.9%	22.0%		
a large number of obligatory elements (SKS)	yes	35.7%	25.6%	11.4%	22.0%	8.414	.209
	no	46.4%	41.9%	63.6%	51.2%		
	maybe	17.9%	32.6%	25.0%	26.8%		
a large number of optional elements (HS)	yes	50.0%	51.2%	25.0%	46.3%	13.563	,035*
	no	25.0%	18.6%	52.3%	29.3%		
	maybe	25.0%	30.2%	22.7%	24.4%		
bathroom in every room (HS)	yes	57.1%	83.7%	47.7%	56.1%	21.476	,002*
	no	35.7%	9.3%	40.9%	19.5%		
	maybe	7.1%	7.0%	11.4%	24.4%		
accommodation has own website (HS)	yes	53.6%	67.4%	65.9%	58.5%	7.666	.264
	no	17.9%	20.9%	27.3%	26.8%		
	maybe	28.6%	11.6%	6.8%	14.6%		

\*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the .05 level.

The final question referred to the advisability of retaining the individual criteria in the classification form. More than a point of discussion, this issue has been a unique test. If the respondents truly required these criteria, they should actually lean towards to one or other system, either the Slovenian system (SKS) or Hotelstars (HS).

This question has 9 items. The first six are typical for SKS, the last three for HS. Elements in the table may be interpreted as a favouring a single system. Thus, for example, for the first element a "yes" response means favouring SKS. The most important respondents to this survey, hoteliers, lean towards HS (supporting 5 HS items out of 9). While the Hotelstars system is only for hotels, it is expected that Slovenia will harmonize classification listings across other accommodation establishments in accordance with the HS criteria, as it has already done in the past. The biggest difference is noticeable between the opinions of hoteliers and other accommodation facilities in respect of the mandatory elements of the Slovenian system (floor area size, air-conditioning). Interestingly, the majority specified a mandatory minimum room size, a criterion that is part of the SKS, but not HS. This item has been discussed by hoteliers as one of the largest problems requiring change, though this study did not confirm that. Similarly, the majority prefer a smaller breakfast selection, which is a requirement of HS. HS also requires an official website, a requirement supported by the majority of respondents. The same applies to having a bathroom in every room, which, in Slovenia, does not apply to 1\* accommodation. To conclude, Table 4 shows statistically significant differences between groups, especially between managers in camps and private rooms, which is in agreement with the conclusions in Table 3.

In summary, the tests showed that respondents tended towards the Hotelstars system with the exception of obligatory room floor space. At this point, we have to emphasize the issue of the size of the room again. In the past, this was the most important issue in amendments to the Slovenian AC system. Since some hotels do not have enough large rooms and could not economically justify the increase in floor space, the Slovenian AC system remained unchanged. The initiative to implement Hotelstars came about because room floor area is not a mandatory criterion. However, our poll results show that hoteliers want room floor area to remain a mandatory criterion, which is most controversial result of the survey. We further believe that the criteria in the classification form should be based on the opinions of guests and strict expert assessment committees, rather than by a "poll" of the stakeholders themselves.

## **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

Less known destinations are constantly faced with the question of how to ensure internationally recognizable standards of quality for foreign tourists. In addition to the recognizable brand names, there may also be national and international AC systems, as recognized quality systems with complex listing criteria. In such tourist destinations, tourism authorities want to introduce standards that are valuable for tourists but at the same time not to be a burden for accommodation providers.

The focus of this paper is how to change AC system. One of the dilemmas on how to change AC systems are the criteria used in the classification forms themselves. As previously stated, the EU has shown a strong tendency for the complete harmonization of criteria, because there is a general opinion that the differences between national AC systems are large. This opinion is also shared by Slovenian accommodation providers (Uran Maravić, 2016). On the other hand, there is an interesting finding from UNWTO (2015). The study revealed that despite the existence of many types of classification systems, there are many more similarities than differences, both between the geographic groups and between the star categories. It has been demonstrated that the differences are not as great as has concerned various academics (Cser & Ohuchi, 2008; Šuligoj, 2009; Minazzi, 2010; Guilet & Law, 2010; Serrat, 2011; Tefera & Govender, 2015; Hensens, 2015; Talias, 2016).

Another interesting point is that this topic is increasingly encountered in heavily tourism-developed countries such as the US (Torres, Adler, Behnke, 2014; Stringam, Gerdes, Vanleeuwen, 2010), UK (Callan 1993, 1994; Briggs, Sutherland, Drummond, 2007), Italy (Minazzi, 2010; Abrate, Capriello Fraquelli, 2011) and Spain (Nunez-Serrano, Turrion, Velazquez, 2014; Lopez-Fernandes Serrano Bedia, 2004), but is not the case in those countries that do not have such internationally recognisable quality standards. This leaves them increasingly uncompetitive. The current study has relevance in respect of less tourism-developed countries by demonstrating the process change within an AC system and its implications for Slovenia.

A more specific aim of this study takes into account the opinion of Talias (2016), who advocates that new systems, or changes to the systems, require strong incentives or broad stakeholder consensus, or they are otherwise doomed to fail. We wanted to establish whether all groups of Slovenian tourism stakeholders support the same changes to the AC system. Despite the fact that the majority of tourism stakeholders considered the Slovenian system as good, only 20.3 % of respondents thought change was unnecessary. The majority of respondents (35.3 %) would introduce the Hotelstars system in full, and a further 22.9 % would modernize the existing system with selected Hotelstars criteria. There are significant differences among the different tourism stakeholder groups on some issues, since the majority of these groups support switching to Hotelstars system with the exception of camp and private room managers. This group most strongly objects to any kind of change. The studies by Talias (2016) and UNWTO&IHRA (2004) also show differences in opinion between the various stakeholders, although those stakeholders were not divided into as many subgroups as in this study. Exploring the differences between the public and private sector, and, furthermore, between the different accommodation providers has proven to be one of the major benefits for the further development of the AC system. The results have practical implications as well. They suggest that any implemented AC system measures need to address the problems of the various stakeholders and take into account that different solutions may need to be offered to the different stakeholder groups.

Any limitations to this study are due to the relatively small number of responses, and is contingent on the make up of respondents. In Slovenia, there is no reliable registry of accommodation providers and it is difficult to get a representative sample. Another limitation arises from the fact that there are few such studies and therefore it is a little

difficult to compare solutions across different countries, as they do not publish complete information, especially not in a foreign language, as required by HOTREC principles ([www.hotrec.eu](http://www.hotrec.eu)). A third limitation is that this study only examines the system and not the criteria themselves as in the study by Uran Maravić (2016). In this context, the author suggests further research into such classification systems, which were taken as the basis for research by the UNWTO & IHRA (2004) or the comparative research by Minazzi (2010). The UNWTO study (2015) and/or Hotelstars criteria 2015-2020 ([www.hotelstars.eu](http://www.hotelstars.eu)) are considered the basis for studying criteria in classification forms.

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