

THE TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABILITY. A FEEDBACK FOR TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

Adina POPESCU¹

Cristina STATE²

ABSTRACT

In the context of tourism and hospitality dynamic development, in conjunction with a strong evolution of sustainability management, the research of the link between this two vectors of evolution has become essential. In most cases, the studies addressed public or private organizations perspectives. Our goal was to get feedback from a distinguished influential factor, namely tourists. We have noticed that the majority of tourists realize the negative long-term impact conventional tourism has, they tend to prefer sustainable managed organizations, but when it comes to their own actions, most of them are prodigal.

KEYWORDS: *development, sustainability, tourism*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M10, Q01*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism falls within the category of abstract, “invisible”, goods, which can not be defined qualitatively and quantitatively in a direct and complete manner. (Cristureanu, 2006)

Tourism activity involves the movement of tourists to a destination other than the place of residence, in order to satisfy various needs such as rest, relaxation, recreation, etc.

The complexity of tourism services consumption is largely due to the inseparability of production and consumption, and the particularities of consumer behavior.

Being in a continuously process of adaptation to social changes, tourism evolves under the pressure of various factors, with distinctive nature and roles, with general or particular influence on one or more elements of touristic and hospitality activities. Tourism phenomenon is influenced by the content, the time and the place of these factors.

Tourism is an economic and social phenomenon, characteristic for the modern civilization, a vector of globalization and a factor of sustainable development, with a dynamic presence in the economic, social and cultural plans. It is addressed to broad social segments while having a mass character and a complex content. This sector has a strong influence on the economy and society, conducting many human and material resources.

The management of tourism activities requires the consideration of organization as a subsystem of the economic macro system. (Nistoreanu, 2006)

In the industry of tourism and hospitality the management improvement and the constant adaptability of the guidelines are becoming a must for every player of the market. Covering 2.9 percent of World GDB and involving more than 100 million employees, tourism is a subject of great interest from economical, political and social perspectives. (UNWTO, 2014)

¹ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, adinapopescu@outlook.com

² Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, cristina_state88@yahoo.com

Due to its dynamic evolution, tourism, at its global scale, was proven to have, sooner or later, series of impacts both at environmental and social level. (Dumbraveanu, 2007)

In order to limit the negative impact tourism may have, from local to global scale, tourism and hospitality managers are shifting their focus to sustainability. A sustainable management implies the use of resources in such a manner that the future generations have the opportunity to live as or better than the contemporary society. Implying a holistic vision of development, sustainability is based on intergenerational equity and harnessing local conditions and diversity.

2. THE PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

In the words of Najdeska and Rakiecevik (2011), sustainable development refers to *“the use without exploitation of natural, cultural and all other tourist resources from the current generation. It means to preserve them for future use by future generations.”*

“Sustainable tourism does not only mean an environment protection, but also includes the living conditions of the closest environment together with the social and economic dimension of the tourist area.” (Janusz & Bajdor, 2013)

Using a different approach in trying to define what is “sustainable” is to clear up what is not, what is actually “unsustainable”. Marshall and Toffel (2005) indentified the 4 steps sustainability hierarchy, as follows (starting from the most basic sustainability needs):

1. *Actions that, if continued at the current or forecasted rate, endanger the survival of humans.*
2. *Actions that significantly reduce life expectancy or other basic health indicators.*
3. *Actions that may cause species extinctions or that violate human rights.*
4. *Actions that reduce quality of life or are inconsistent with other values, beliefs or aesthetic preferences.*

In the context of globalization and international standards and politics, sustainability is becoming the subject of different rules and legislations. In terms of sustainable management, a basic standardize framework for the development of an environmental management system (EMS) is provided by ISO 14000 series. By adopting an EMS, a tourism organizations will: *“manage and improve its environmental performance (managing negative impacts) and helping to increase resources efficiency; comply with environmental laws and regulations; generate financial savings through well-managed use of resources and efficient practices; improve its standing and reputation with staff, client companies, partner organizations and wider stakeholders; and adapt to a changing environment.”* (IIED, 2009)

The industry of tourism and hospitality management development involves a sustainable holistic approach. Nistoreanu (2011) states that the future of this industry should be based on *“finding harmony between economic competitiveness, nature, culture, history, architectural heritage and environment.”* This sector also depends on attaining appropriate infrastructures aimed to fulfill the economic, social, and environmental purposes.” (Azizi et al. , 2011)

The main categories of factors to be considered by managers in the tourism field are: economic factors (income, price, taxes etc.), technological factors, social factors (leisure, tourism fashion), demographics (number and structure of population, degree of urbanization), natural, cultural and historical factors, psychological, educational and political factors etc. (Oroian & Gheres, 2011) Different authors suggest that the key to sustainable tourism is a good management of the environmental, economical and social vectors.

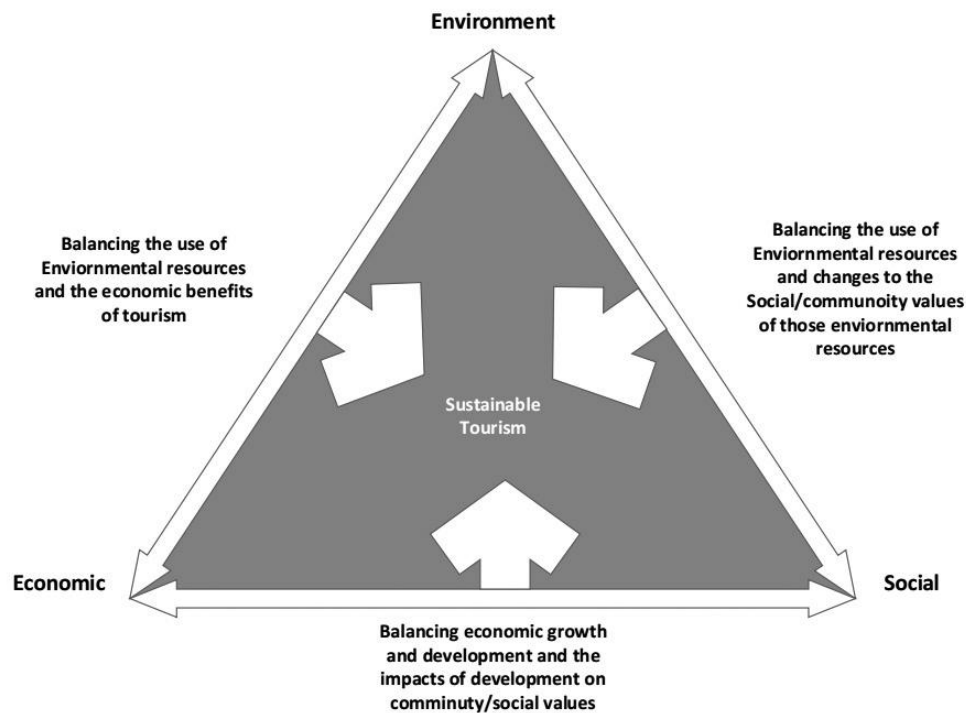


Figure 1 Vectors of Sustainable Tourism

Source: Janusz, Bajdor (2013)

As Billington, Carter and Kayamba (2007) explain, some the concepts of Sustainable Tourism include:

- The base for a good destination stewardship is settled on the “do not harm” principle.
- It is necessary to state a development policy and apply management techniques aimed to sustain natural habitats, scenic appeal, heritage sites and local culture.
- Resources conservation is viewed as a priority.
- Informed and environmentally aware travelers tend to favor businesses that are “eco-friendly” and stand out by minimizing pollution, waste and resources consumption by controlling energy and water usage and avoiding excessive nighttime lighting.
- The local culture and traditions must be respected and promoted.
- Aiming for quality, not quantity. Success indicators should shift from sheer numbers of visitors to length of stay, quality of experience and distribution of money spent.

In it’s “Global Code of Ethics for Tourism”, UNWTO, World Tourism Organization, has defined the following principles of sustainable tourism:

1. *All the stakeholders in tourism development should safeguard the natural environment with a view to achieving sound, continuous and sustainable economic growth geared to satisfying equitably the needs and aspirations of present and future generations;*
2. *All forms of tourism development that are conducive to saving rare and precious resources, in particular water and energy, as well as avoiding so far as possible waste production, should be given priority and encouraged by national, regional and local public authorities;*
3. *The staggering in time and space of tourist and visitor flows, particularly those resulting from paid leave and school holidays, and a more even distribution of holidays should be sought so as to reduce the pressure of tourism activity on the environment and enhance its beneficial impact on the tourism industry and the local economy;*

4. *Tourism infrastructure should be designed and tourism activities programmed in such a way as to protect the natural heritage composed of ecosystems and biodiversity and to preserve endangered species of wildlife; the stakeholders in tourism development, and especially professionals, should agree to the imposition of limitations or constraints on their activities when these are exercised in particularly sensitive areas: desert, polar or high mountain regions, coastal areas, tropical forests or wetlands, propitious to the creation of nature reserves or protected areas;*

5. *Nature tourism and ecotourism are recognized as being particularly conducive to enriching and enhancing the standing of tourism, provided they respect the natural heritage and local populations and are in keeping with the carrying capacity of the sites.*

3. RESEACH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

Sustainability has become one of the main points of interest of 21st century. The theme is usually approached from the perspective of local communities and / or national or regional authorities, business or holiday destinations, or tourism business management, the study of consumer perception being rarely approached . (Dabija & Babut, 2013)

The main challenge for the managers is to establish a sustainable, yet profitable development plan, while offering quality experience for visitors and improved life standards for the host community.

This research aims to highlight the impact that sustainable management exercise over the tourists perception and behavior.

Hypothesis:

- All socio-demographic sectors are preferring sustainable tourism;
- The economical factor has a bigger impact on consumer behavior than the sustainability aspects do
- Most of the tourists demand a sustainable management from the actors of tourism and hospitality industry, but they are less active when it comes to own contribution (eg. They don't limit the water and electrical consumption, they request fresh towels every day etc.)

Research method:

The research method used was quantitative sociological inquiry and the research instrument was a structured questionnaire with 16 questions related to the demographics of the respondents, their perception of sustainability management and their behavior as tourist consumers.

The technique used for this study was self-applied questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by 92 respondents from Romania. Respondents are belonging to different demographic sectors.

Most of them (41.30%) are in the range of 23-29 years old. Those between 30 to 39 years represent 31,52% of respondents, while the 18-22 category covered 11.95%. The seniors recorded a lower rate, the segments of age 40-54 and "over 54" registered 9.78%, respectively 5.43%.

In terms of location, 88.04% of respondents are living in urban areas. The majority of the survey participants are represented by females, covering 68.47%, compared to males, 31.52%, a percentage that corresponds to a number of 29 respondents.

In terms of monthly revenue, 9.78% stated that their income is lower than the minimum wage, 3.26% chose the "100 – 150% of minimum wage" to be their income category, while 12.08% declared they earn more than 350% of minimum wage. The majority, 75% are almost evenly divided between "251 - 250 % of minimum wage", with 38.04%, and the "151 - 250 % of minimum wage" category, with 36.95%.

Regarding the traveling background of the respondents, the results highlighted a more domestically activity, rather than an international one. Business tourism is at great competition with pleasure tourism, at both national and international levels, but without following a clear pattern in terms of activity frequency.

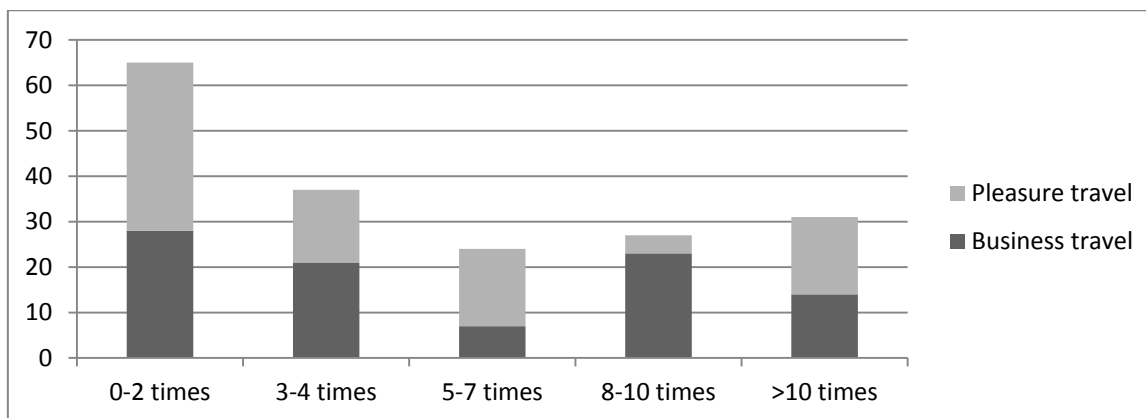


Figure 1: Domestic travel motives per frequency categories

Source: made by authors

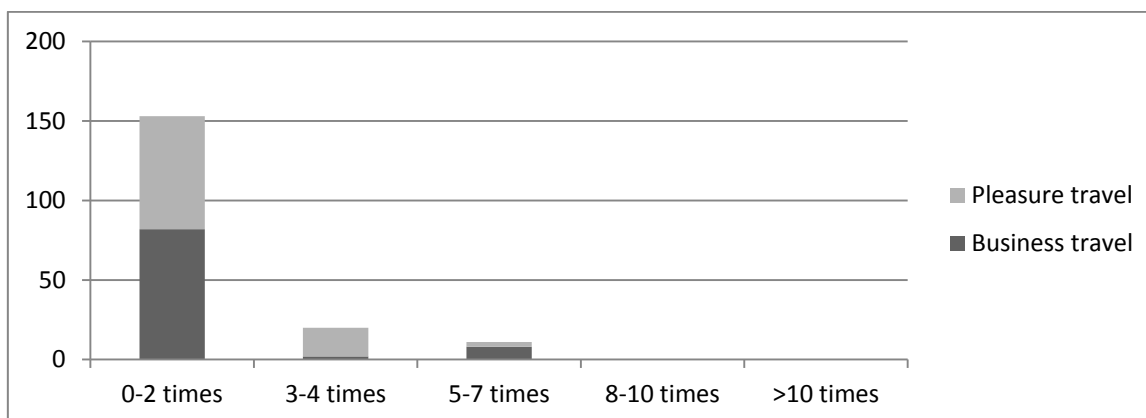


Figure 2: International travel motives per frequency categories

Source: made by authors

In the case of both domestic and international tourism, the majority, regardless of the travel reason, stated that they travel less than 3 times per year. In domestic tourism area, the business tourism category peaked at the level of 30.43% in the category of 0-2 travels per year, while 25% stated that they travel with business purposes between 8 and 10 times per year. 22.92% said that they have 3 or 4 business travels per year, 7.60% travel between 5 and 7 times, and 15.21% are traveling more than ten times per year having business as a motive. Regarding the pleasure tourism, the category of 0-2 travels per year covers 40.21% of responses, being followed by the category of 5-7 travels/year, with 19.56%, and “over 10” travels/year, with 18.47%.

Regarding international tourism, we’ve noticed a “barrier” set at about 7 travels/year, in both business and pleasure tourism. With 89.13% of respondents stating they travel less than 2 times/year in business purposes, there are only 10.87% divided between 3-4 (2.17%) and 5-7 (8.69) travels/year categories. The number of international pleasure travels offered the following results: 0-2 (77.17%), 3-4 (18.47%), 5-7 (3.26%).

When asked about their preferences regarding touristic destinations, 63.4% stated that they would rather go to a new destination, while 36.95% would go to a location where they previously were, “having the past experience as a grant for a great time”.

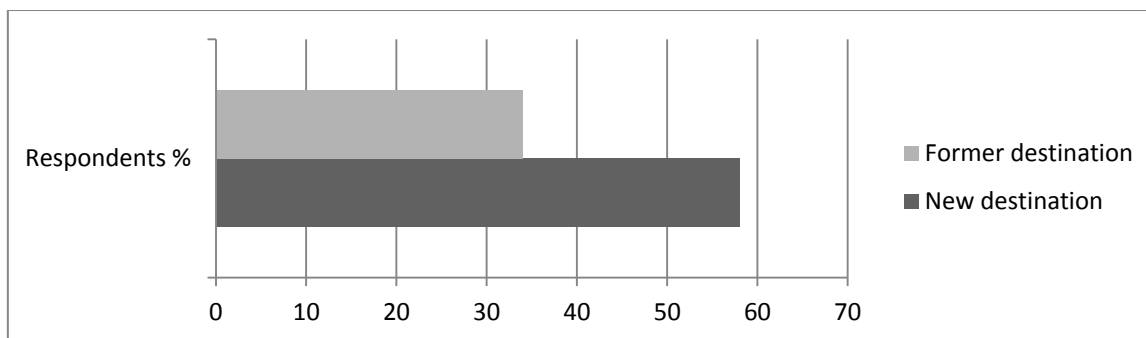


Figure 3: Destination preferences

Source: made by authors

Out of the 92 respondents, 77% said that they like to travel in groups, and 22.82% tend to travel alone.

Section 3 of the questionnaire, regarding sustainable tourism management, started with a question about the general impression of tourism at the current state. We noticed that **a striking 84.78 of the respondents stated that, on the long term, tourism has a negative impact on host communities. Only 15.21% did not agree with that statement.**

The following question, “When planning your touristic activities do you tend to prefer organizations with a sustainable managerial criterias?”, triggered the following results: 65.21% of respondents chose “yes”, and 34.78% chose “no”. We have noticed **there is a gap of 19.57% between the number of respondents that realize the negative impact that long term tourism has, in the present context, and the number of respondents that stated they actually tend to prefer organizations with sustainable managerial criterias.** This means that, for the moment, even though tourists realize the negative side of tourism and hospitality industry development, they are in some cases **passive to sustainability management.**

We looked at the connection between age and the tendency to prefer sustainable managed organizations, and the results highlighted that, even though all socio-demographic sectors are preferring a sustainable tourism approach, the young persons, especially the 18-22 years old, tend to be indifferent to sustainable managed tourism when it comes to their touristic activities. We noticed that the hypothesis “All socio-demographic sectors are preferring sustainable tourism” has proved to be true, but we would like to underline the big number of “sustainable passive” tourist, a percentage way higher than we had expected at the beginning of this research.

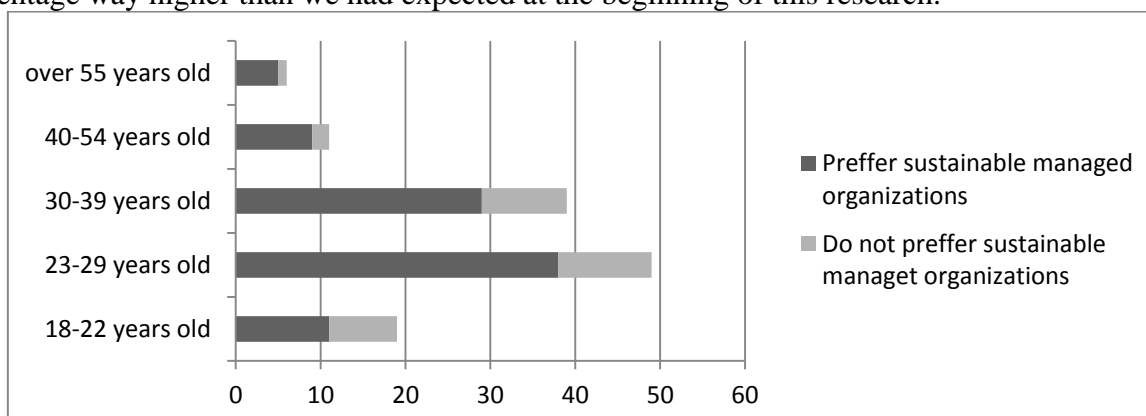


Figure 4: The preference for sustainable managed organization

Source: made by authors

When asked to indicate their agreement with different statements about sustainability, as it regards their touristic experience, the responders offered answers that generated this sustainability effects hierarchy:

1. protects natural heritage – 100% agreed
2. uses resources in a judiciously way – 92.39% agreed
3. enriches and enhances the standing of tourism – 88.04% agreed
4. helps stimulate local culture and crafts – 86.95% agreed
5. creates jobs for local residents – 84.78% agreed

We noticed that the **environmental dimension of sustainability it is better perceived by tourists**, while the economic and social ones are less clear, or are harder to be identified in a empirical way. Regarding “sustainable management certificates”, the majority of respondents, 61.95%, agreed that they are “a quality experience grant”, and 82.6% consider that they “should become mandatory by legislation”

The question “Do you think that, given the good marketing that „sustainability” image offers, there might be some organizations that falsely declare themselves as “sustainable managed” ?” triggered 26.08% “yes” responses, and 73.91% “no” responses. We consider that, as sustainability it is not yet viewed as mandatory for a quality tourism, the majority of tourists do not think the reputation of a sustainable managed organization will make managers “artificially improve” their organizations image.

Regarding question number 13, “In the actual social, economical and environmental context, what is the sustainability dimension that most influences you when choosing a touristic destination/activity?”, that permitted multiple answers, 92.39% respondents checked “economical factors”, 72.82% chose “environmental factors”, while “social factors” were the choice of 16.30% of respondents.



Figure 5: Sustainable factors influence on touristic destination/activity selection

Source: made by authors

An impressive percent of respondents, **96.72%**, consider sustainability to be a major factor of future progress. Almost every person questioned **associated sustainability with our evolution**. The next question, regarding their own influence on tourism impact and development, underlined the fact that most tourist do not support sustainability by reducing their consumption when traveling. **68.47% declared that their action do not embrace a sustainable management vision** (eg. They don't limit the water consumption when taking showers, don't unplug their electrical devices when they are fully charged etc.), **while just 31,52% have showed to be less prodigal**, proving our third hypothesis to be true.

The final question, "4. In the case of price difference between a „sustainable” tourism package and an „unsustainable” one (doesn't have a waste management procedure, endanger species, violate human rights etc.) , with the first one higher on the cost scale, how much more money are you willing to pay in order to support a sustainable tourism approach ?" revealed there is a price limit to which tourists place their support for sustainability above their economical needs. We have noticed **that 85.86% of respondents are not willing to pay more than 120% of the regular price, in order to support a sustainable managed organization**, in the case it offers a bigger price than the regular tourism packages. The results showed that 52.17% are willing to pay between 0 and 10% more to support a sustainable tourism approach, 33,69 will pay up to 20%, 9.78% say that are willing to pay even 21-30% more, and 4,34% stated that they are ready to pay more than 31% in order to stimulate a sustainable tourism development.

4. CONCLUSIONS

1. *The vast majority of tourist realize that, in the actual context, on the long term, tourism has a negative impact on host communities.*
2. *Tourists from all socio-demographic sectors tend to prefer sustainable managed organizations, but almost one third of the respondents do not particularly favor this approach.*
3. *Due to their empirical approach, and the vagueness of sustainability concept, tourist tend to primarily identify sustainability by it's environmental dimension.*
4. *The behavior and consumption pattern of tourists majority do not stimulate sustainability. Only one third of them was shown to be less prodigal.*

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Addendum 1

Tourists Feedback on Sustainable Tourism Management

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participant,

As part of this sustainable tourism management research project, we are asking that you take a few minutes to complete the survey below.

SECTION 1 : DEMOGRAPHICS

1. What is your current place of residence?

- Urban Rural

2. What is your gender?

- Male Female

3. Please select your age range:

- a. 18 – 22 years
- b. 23 – 29 years
- c. 30 – 39 years
- d. 40 – 54 years
- e. Senior (over 54 years of age)

4. Please select your monthly income range:

- a. Less than minimum wage
- b. Between 100-150% minimum wage
- c. Between 151-250% minimum wage
- d. Between 251-350% minimum wage
- e. More than 350% minimum wage

SECTION 2 : TOURISTIC BACKGROUND

5. How many times a year do you travel domestically?

5.1.1 for business:

- 0 – 2 times 3 – 4 times 5 – 7 times 8 – 10 times over 10 times

5.1.2 for pleasure:

- 0 – 2 times 3 – 4 times 5 – 7 times 8 – 10 times over 10 times

6. How many times a year do you travel internationally ?

6.2.1 for business:

- 0 – 2 times 3 – 4 times 5 – 7 times 8 – 10 times over 10 times

6.2.2 for pleasure:

- 0 – 2 times 3 – 4 times 5 – 7 times 8 – 10 times over 10 times

7. Usually, when choosing your touristic destinations you prefer going to:

- a. a new location
b. a location where you previously were, having the past experience as a grant for a great time

8. Usually, you are traveling:

- Alone In a group

SECTION 3 : SUSTAINABLE TOURISM*³ FEEDBACK

9. Do you think that, on the long term, tourism has a negative impact on host communities ?

- Yes No

10. When planning your touristic activities do you tend to prefer organizations with a sustainable managerial criterias ?

- Yes No

11. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements as it regards your touristic experience:

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Sustainable tourism has the following effects:					
a) creates jobs for local residents					
b) helps stimulate local culture and crafts					
c) uses resources in a judiciously way					
d) protects natural heritage					
e) enriches and enhances the standing of tourism					
Sustainable management certificates:					
a) are a quality experience grant					
b) should become mandatory by legislation					

12. Do you think that, given the good marketing that „sustainability” image offers, there might be some organizations that falsely declare themselves as “sustainable managed” ?

- Yes No

³ UNWTO: sustainable tourism can be defined as: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"

- 13. In the actual social, economical and environmental context, what is the sustainability dimension that most influences you when choosing a touristic destination/activity? (multiple answers are permitted):**
- Social factors Economical factors Environmental factors
- 14. Do you consider sustainability to be a major factor of future progress ?**
- Yes No
- 15. Tourists attitude influence tourism development and impact. Do you consider that, when traveling, your actions embrace a sustainable management vision ? (eg. Do you limit the water consumption when taking showers, do you unplug your electrical devices when they are fully charged, you agree to receive clean towels every other day, or more rarely etc.)**
- Yes No
- 16. In the case of price difference between a „sustainable” tourism package and an „unsustainable” one (doesn’t have a waste management procedure, endanger species, violate human rights etc.) , with the first one higher on the cost scale, how much more money are you willing to pay in order to support a sustainable tourism approach ?**
- 1 – 10% 11 – 20% 21 – 30 % 31 – 40 % over 40%

Thank you for your participation in this research.

We value your time and opinions.

In order to get the survey results and their interpretation, please contact us by email at:

adinapopescu@outlook.com

cristina_state88@yahoo.com