



7th International Conference on Globalization and Higher Education in Economics and Business Administration, GEBA 2013

Research on tourists' perception of the relationship between tourism and environment

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Abstract

More than any other field of activity, tourism depends on environment. Consequently, the environmental issues, among which destruction of biodiversity, pollution, global warming, waste increase, natural resources depletion, affect tourism as much as other global issues, like the economic crisis or the terrorism. We believe that the responsibility of lowering the impact of tourism over the environment belongs equally to all the participants in tourist activities.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi.

Keywords: tourism and environment, environmental issues, global issues, tourists' perception

1. Introduction

The relationship between tourism and environment is of interdependence. The environment, by its natural, cultural-historical, social climate potential, represents the motivation of tourists' travels, while a clean and unaltered environment cannot exist without practising quality tourism. The more varied and complex the natural resources (it is recommended to maintain them unaltered as much as possible, with properties as close as possible to the initial ones), the more interesting they are for tourism, and the activities generated by them are more valuable and more attractive. [2]

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The deterioration of the natural environment by daily human activities registers growing proportions, at the same time with the considerable tourism development of the latest decades. This is endangering the tourist potential by the diminution or even destruction of its resources.

Consequently, the specialists consider that tourist activities can lead to the *degradation of biodiversity* by: fragmentation, destruction or deterioration of habitats, competition concerning the natural resources, import of invasive species, tourists' trekking, stressing the wildlife etc.

There is also a series of other activities developing at the same time with tourist activities, which can lead to the *degradation of biodiversity*. Consequently, the transportation by air and by road determines *air pollution*, due to the continuous development and increase of the number of tourists and their mobility. At present, tourism constitutes more than 60% of the air trips realised. It is responsible with an important share regarding harmful gas emissions, as carbon dioxide. The emissions coming from the means of transportation and the emissions resulted in the power energy production are closely related to acid rains. They determine the phenomenon of *global heating*, and the serious local pollution phenomena. *The phonic pollution*, due to the means of transportation by air, and to the automobiles, motorcycles, buses, but also to the vehicles used for recreation (snowmobiles, jet-skis, and ATVs) constitutes an ever growing tourism issue. This issue produces irritation, stress, and even hear loss to the participants in tourist activities. Lately, *waste increase and storage* constitutes a major issue for the areas where tourist activity is determined by the existence of special natural attractions. The improper storage can be a major factor regarding the degradation of the natural environment. *Water pollution* seriously affects the coral reefs by the fact that the waste water stimulates the growth of algae, leading to hypoxia (decrease of the concentration of oxygen). This leads to: a) death of fish, consequently lowering the existent fish resources and leading to ecosystem degradation; b) negative impact over the local residents and over the local tourism, because the water colours itself red or green (according to the type of algae). Consequently, some restrictions appear, like forbidding swimming.

All these issues have a huge impact over the natural environment, which usually represents the element determining voyages.

2. Methods and methodology

We used as work method the enquiry-based research, using techniques of direct data collection: observation, interview, and questionnaire.

The questionnaire provided us information concerning the tourists' perception on: **a)** the seriousness of environmental issues, as compared with other global issues; **b)** the main factors in improving the environmental issues.

The sample group under research is formed by the total population, i.e. the tourists who were at the time of the realisation of the research in the area analysed (February- March 2012 - North- East Region).

The sample group is structured as follows:

- According to gender – 47.8% of the respondents are men, and 52.2% are women (figure 1).

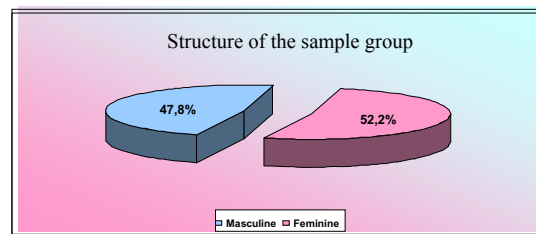


Fig. 1. Structure of the sample group – according to gender

- According to age – 31.5% of the respondents have ages between 35 and 45, while only 3% have ages between 55 and 65 (figure 2).

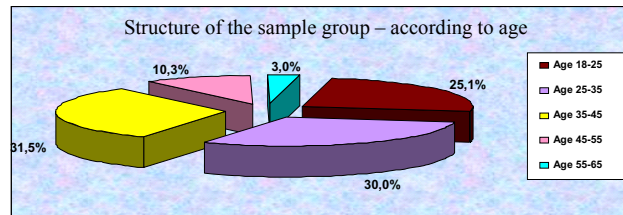


Fig. 2. Structure of the sample group – according to age

The results obtained after the application of the questionnaire were processed and registered in the statistical program EXCEL and SPSS 13.

3. Results and discussions

Tourism is that part of the economy which is made of several activities or branches whose mutual function is to satisfy tourists' needs. [8]

However, tourists do not represent a homogenous group of consumers. Therefore, they interact with the environment of the destination in a multitude of modalities, according to their attitudes, motivations and expectations. [4]

Consequently, at an extreme, tourists can prove completely uncaring towards the environment and its issues. At the other extreme, they can feel a strong connection with the environment of the destination. Therefore, they will try to integrate themselves and protect it, contributing to the improvement of the impact of the tourism over the environment.

In the first stage of our research, we determined tourists' position concerning the seriousness of the environmental issues. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Tourists' perception of the seriousness of the environmental issues

The environmental issues threaten the human existence	73.8%*	13.4%**
The environmental issues are more serious than the economic crisis	49.8%*	25.9%**
The environmental issues are more serious than terrorism	34.3%*	44.2%**
The environmental issues are more serious than personal problems	23.6%*	42.7%**
The environmental issues are influenced by tourism development	39.6%*	
The most serious environmental issue is destruction of biodiversity	25.5%	
The most serious environmental issue is water pollution	43%	
The most serious environmental issue is air pollution	48%	
The most serious environmental issue is phonic pollution	16.5%	
The most serious environmental issue is waste increase	53.7%	
The most serious environmental issue is natural resources depletion	36.5%	
The most serious environmental issue is global warming	45%	

Note: * - percentage of affirmative answers; ** - percentage of negative answers

We notice that 73.8% of the tourists enquired consider that environmental issues threaten the human existence, and almost a quarter of the respondents place environmental issues higher than the personal ones. Nevertheless, a rather high percentage consider that global issues like the economic crisis (49.8%) or the terrorism (34.3) are as serious or even more serious, and 39.6% of the tourists are convinced that tourism contributes to the aggravation of environmental issues (figure 3).

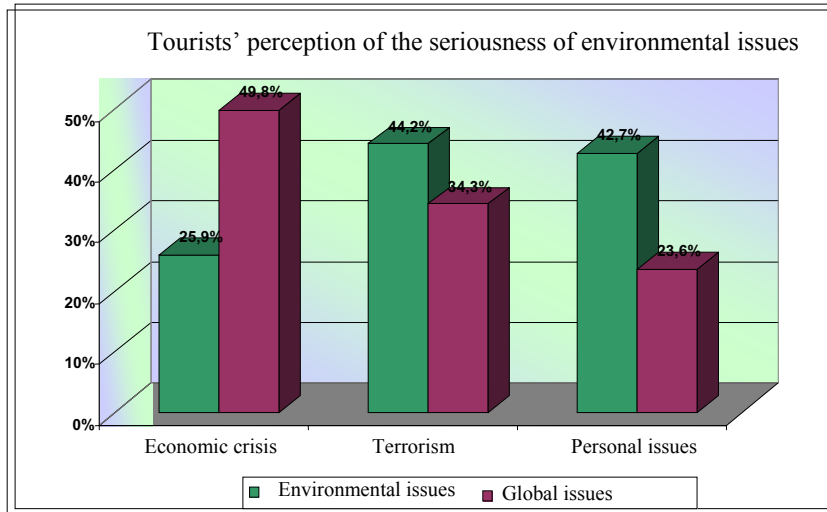


Fig. 3. Tourists' perception of the seriousness of environmental issues

Tourists' perception concerning the environmental issues like destruction of biodiversity, pollution, waste increase, natural resources depletion or global warming is presented with the help of the diagram of the environmental issues in figure 4.

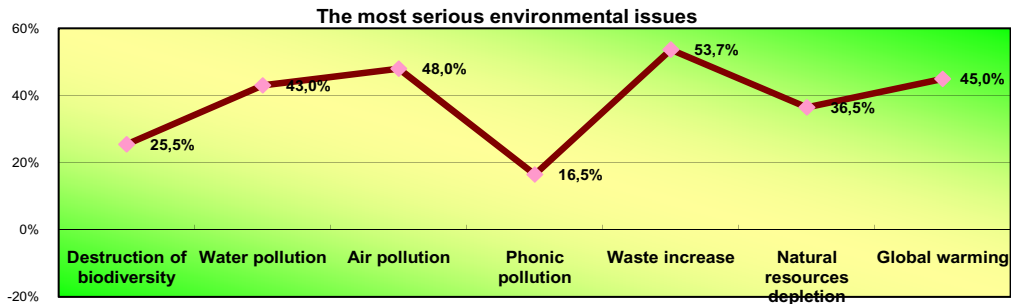


Fig. 4. The diagram of environmental issues

We can see that in the category of the phenomena with negative effect over the environment, the most alarming are waste increase and air pollution. On the other side, according to tourists' opinion, there are phonic pollution and destruction of biodiversity.

The second stage of our research consisted in the identification of the main factors responsible for lowering the negative impact of tourism over the environment (environmental protection from the tourists' point of view).

As a result of processing the data presented in table 2, we can see that tourists consider that the intervention for lowering the negative effects over the environment generated by tourism development belongs first to the Government, through the related Ministries (Tourism and Environment), but also to the entire society. Likewise, an important role is given to the ecological organisations or hotel managers in general, that should implement a system of ecological management.

Table 2 Factors responsible for lowering the negative impact of tourism over the environment

International organisations	46%
Governments (Ministry of Environment, Tourism)	83.7%
Ecological organisations	74%
Society	80.8%
Hotels	63.7%

Figure 5 illustrates the situation presented in table 2.

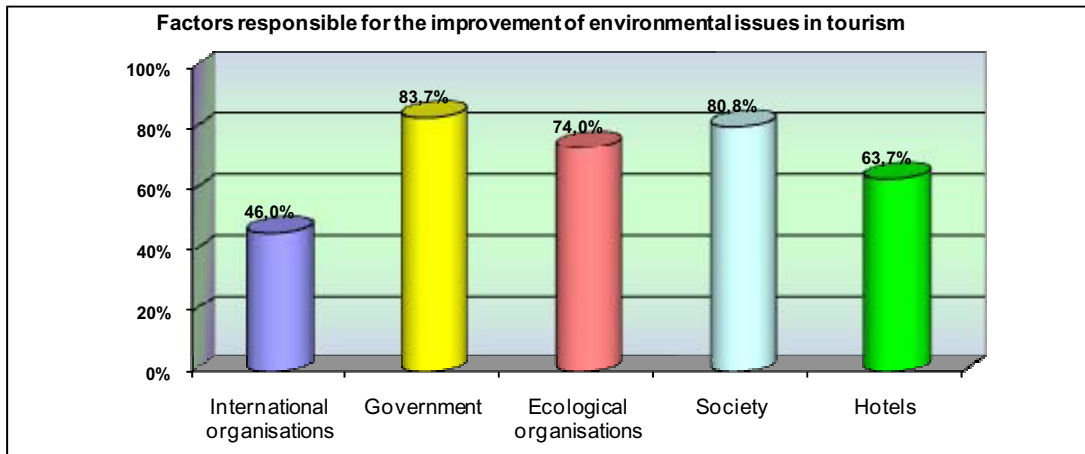


Fig.5 Factors responsible for the improvement of environmental issues in tourism

On the other side, in the opinion of the persons enquired, the improvement of environmental issues in tourism represents a smaller responsibility for the international organisations.

Due to the fact that education has an important role in acquiring a pro-environment attitude, we centralised in table 3 the results concerning the ones who are responsible to involve in tourists' ecological information/education.

Table 3 Implication in tourists' ecological education

Family	63%*
School	76%*
Mass-media	82.6%*
Ecological organisations	86%*
Tourism agencies	78.5%*
Local public administration	80%*

Note: * - total of answers "very much" and "much"

Most of the tourists enquired, over 80%, stated that this role belongs first to the society in its wholeness, to the ecological organisations, and to the mass-media. Also, the local public administration, tourism agencies, and educational establishments have a great responsibility. Only 63% of the respondents consider that the implication in ecological education belongs to the family.

As a result of the research realised, we consider that both the responsibility of lowering the impact of tourism over the environment and the information concerning the environmental issues belongs equally to all the participants involved in the tourist activity.

4. Conclusions

Tourists can contribute to the improvement of the environmental issues by adopting pro-environment attitudes and adequate behaviour during the development of tourist activities, as follows:

- the use of less polluting transportation means in tourist travels;
- an increased attention to the behaviour that could harm the environment when they spend time in the middle of the nature (destroying the plants, disturbing the animals, not storing the garbage in special designed places, noise, etc.);
- an increased attention to lowering the power energy and water consumption, to waste collection when they are the guests of a hotel;
- a greater involvement in beneficial actions over the environment (participation in tree planting, selective collecting of waste, saving water and power energy);
- to agree to pay an ecological tax or to direct a percentage of their income tax to reduce the effects over the environment, to protect the environment in general;
- etc.

All these could be improved as a result of the awareness of the seriousness of environmental issues. This can be realised based on tourists' adequate information concerning the environmental issues and the impact generated by the development of tourist activities over the environment. Consequently, an important role goes to the mass-media, and also to the local authorities, hotels, etc.

Therefore, we consider that protecting the environment represents nowadays an essential condition for tourism development.

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