Identifying Tourists Interested
in Eco-Certified Accommodation Units
from Brașov, Romania

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Abstract. *Ecolabels are key instruments for a sustainable tourism development and implementation of environmental certification of tourist accommodation facilities and services. The present paper aimes to analyze whether eco-certification is considered by tourists in the choice of accommodation in Romanian destinations. We have chosen as a case study the city of Brasov in order to evaluate if certification as a sustainability policy tool is needed for accommodation facilities. A survey was conducted among 940 tourists from the analyzed destination. Data collected in the survey was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and several statistical methods have been used: descriptive analysis, crosstabs, Cluster Analysis. The results of the research outline the necessity for Brasov's accommodation managers to consider the eco-certification of their businesses. However, since some tourists remain unaware regarding the existence of tourism certification programs and far fewer understand their meaning, they would have to consider educating tourists with respect to the utility and scope of tourism ecolabels alongside efforts towards creating or adopting tourism ecolabeling programs.*

Keywords: *accommodation, eco-certification, ecolabels, environmental awareness, tourists*

Introduction

The substantial growth of tourism activity clearly marks tourism as one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomena of the past century. However, tourism has contributed not only to an increase of the economic activity worldwide, but also to climate changes and environmental degradation. With a recent increase in environmental awareness among the general public in the last decade, many industries have seen a growing demand for sustainable products and green marketing. In the last few years, going green has been an attractive trait for a business to possess, giving it an additional edge over its competitors. The term "green" means environmentally friendly, that is, doing business in a way that reduces waste, conserves energy, and generally promotes sustainability and environmental health (Jhawar et al., 2012).

Sustainable development must be seen to be economically rewarding. In particular, businesses need to be convinced of the financial and ethical rewards of sustainable behavior; and education and training need to emphasize holistic thinking (Hall, 2011). According to Kane, Chiru, and Ciuchete (2012, p.158) "from an ecological point of view, our society is in different degrees inefficient, immoral, unhealthy, counter-cybernetic and less ecologically viable habitat. To move forward to a new better society, a changing of people's concepts, thoughts, values, manners, emotions, tastes, customs and habits should be encouraged". Efforts to adopt environmentally sustainable practices are also increasingly evident within the tourism and hospitality industry, particularly in economically developed nations and the sector of the industry focused on ecotourism (Burgin & Hardiman, 2010).

There are many instruments that help reach a sustainable tourism in the context of the environment, and implementing environmental certification in the form of ecolabels is one of them, especially for tourist accommodation facilities and services. Certification and labelling schemes offered internationally, nationally or locally by industrial organizations, governmental and nongovernmental institutions are increasingly growing in popularity (Bohdanowicz, Simanic & Martinac, 2005).

For the last two decades, certification has been a voluntary mechanism to show high standards of performance beyond legislation and it has been thought to be a source of competitive advantage that allows a small number of firms to

stand out from the average (Font, 2002). Tourism eco-certification programs distinguish competing products on environmental grounds (Font, Sanabria & Skinner, 2003). In contrast to "green" symbols or other various sorts of declarations created by producers and service providers, this ecolabel is granted by a third party – in the relation to the particular kinds of goods and services for which environmental criteria are determined independently (Ryglova, 2007). Certification is a valid instrument to gather local stakeholders around the common purpose of defining standards to improve the contribution of tourism to sustainable development (Font, 2002). It is also valid to develop structures to encourage and support improvement of business units, working to a standard that will give them peer recognition, staff morale, eco-savings, peace of mind from beyond legislation compliance, all of which make firms more competitive in the medium term (Font, 2002). An ecolabel scheme defines, tests and summarizes the relative environmental performance of competing products into a easily comprehensible symbol.

While the tourism industry has wrestled with sustainable certification, researchers have begun to examine tourists' ecological attitudes and orientation (Weaver, 2001; Choi & Sirakaya, 2005; Uriely, Reichel & Shani, 2007). Considering these previous researches and the existence of few eco-certified accommodation units in Romanian destinations, mostly located in rural areas, the present paper aimes to assess tourists' interest in the eco-certification of accommodation units in an urban Romanian destination. The results of this study can be useful for both accommodation units in their attempt to become eco-certified and touroperators aiming to include environmentally friendly tourism providers in their packages.

Voluntary certification of environmentally responsible accommodation

Product quality and eco labeling are the main decision drivers when consumers consider environmental impact of their chosen products and services (Kane, Chiru & Ciuchete, 2012). Eco labels provide information on the environmental attributes of a product, reduce information asymmetry between consumer and producer; consumers must be willing to pay a price premium that allows producers to invest in costlier environmental management practices (Delmas & Lessem, 2011).

Ecolabeling is still in its early stages in the tourism industry and few tourists consider ecolabels in product purchasing decisions. Tourism certification has

emerged as a tool to reduce environmental impacts, gain competitive advantage, and promote someone on the basis of efficiency-based ecosavings (Font & Harris, 2004). Honey and Rome (2001, p.5) define certification as: „a voluntary procedure that assesses audits and gives written assurance that a facility, product, process or service meets specific standards. It awards a marketable logo to those that meet or exceed baseline standards".

The proliferation of voluntary certification and labelling schemes for environmentally and socially responsible production is often seen as driven by both companies and consumer demand (Gulbrandsen, 2006). Tourism ecolabeling schemes, promoted by both private and public sectors, are currently most prevalent among developed nations; however their influence on consumer purchasing decisions and corporate environmental performance is largely unknown.

Due to increasing public awareness of environmental issues, more and more customers tend to consider environmentally responsible hotels. Therefore, it is no surprise that the hospitality industry has been interested in joining the eco-certification trend (Nord, 2006). Although choosing an eco-certified hotel may cost more, an increasing trend shows that customers are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products and services (Han, Hsu & Lee, 2009). However, European hoteliers have not perceived their environmental commitment as a major marketing factor, as they believe that guests have a limited interest in environmental issues and that eco-friendly behaviour in hotels involves significant investment costs (Bohdanowicz, 2005). One tactic that companies have used to capitalise on the need to improve performance in environmental sustainability and potentially make themselves more attractive to consumers is to gain accreditation under an eco-certification scheme (Burgin & Hardiman, 2010).

Over the past decade, however, a number of voluntary certification and labelling programmes have been developed by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and industry associations in response to environmental and social concerns in farming, fishing, forestry, tourism, mining and other industries (Gulbrandsen, 2006). There are 7.000 tourism products (ranging from hotels to beaches or tours) certified worldwide, and 6.000 of them are in Europe (WTO, 2002). Two thirds of the programs are led by tourism industry associations and NGOs, and less often private ventures and consultancies. Governmental organizations lead around 20 programs, and provide technical and marketing support to around 30 of them (WTO, 2002). Most of these programs are

resource based, not market led (Font, 2001), and they tend to be small units linked to specific destinations setting up locally relevant standards, with an average of 50 certified tourism firms per program (WTO, 2002).

European programs focus on environmental issues in accommodation regardless of firm size, while developing countries focus on a broader range of sustainability and ecotourism issues, targeting specifically small firms regardless of sub-sector (WTO, 2002). Because tourism is a worldwide industry, international ecolabels might be more useful than national ones. Furthermore, achievement and promotion of internationally recognized environmental awards would be instrumental to the tourism enterprises of developing countries in marketing their services (UNEP, 1998; Mihalic, 2000) to high spending, environmentally conscious western tourists who are no longer satisfied with the traditional 'sun, sea and sand' type of vacation but engage in holidays that are personally rewarding and environmentally friendly (Sasidharan, Sirakaya & Kerstetter, 2002).

A drawback of eco-certification is the high capital investment associated with implementation. According to Chan (2008), the main reason that hotels choose not to undergo eco-certification is the large overhead cost. Fundamentally, the initial costs associated with applying sustainable practices in order to obtain and maintain an eco-certification can be a financial burden for hotels. The additional costs for tourists, entailed with the 'purchase' of ecolabeled services (Hemmelskamp & Brockmann, 1997) may dissuade them from making 'high-priced' purchasing decisions in favor of ecolabeled tourism enterprises. Non-ecolabeled tourism enterprises would ultimately benefit from the growing sensitivity of tourists towards the high prices of ecolabeled services.

Tourists' preference for eco-labelled accommodation services

A forecast of tourist trends for 2015 identified that consumers will be better educated, more sophisticated, aware about many destinations across the world, concerned about the environment and willing for a better quality of life (Kane, Chiru & Ciuchete, 2012).

When a consumer is selecting accommodation, decision-making is affected by several factors. In general, decision-making is affected by factors which are related to the purpose for which the consumer is traveling. The consumer might be a leisure traveler whose decision-making is affected by recreational

activities, children's opinions and price. Student-tourists also have specific peculiarities (Zbuchea & Radu, 2009). Business tourists' decision-making of the hotel affects company's travel policy, regulations of the travel policy and principles. The most important purchase criteria for the company are location of the hotel, classification of hotel and price level (Kettunen, 2012).

Consumers are increasingly searching for green hotels over conventional hotels (Han et al., 2011). Green hotels are defined as environmentally-friendly properties whose managers are eager to institute programs that save water, energy and reduce solid waste – while saving money – to help protect the environment (Green Hotels Association, 2011). As green hotels act in a responsible way towards the environment (recycling, reducing pollution, conserving energy/water), they are more likely to increase customers' perceptions regarding the level of responsibility of business corporations (Han et al., 2011).

While many consumers claim to consider environmental issues and/or state a preference to buy from environmentally responsible suppliers when choosing products or services, there is limited data on the translation of intentions into actual purchase of 'green' products, especially in times of economic downturn (Andereck, 2009; Wearing et al., 2002). Social science research suggests that environmental education of consumers and increasing environmental awareness does not necessarily stimulate environmentally responsible purchasing behavior (Hemmelskamp & Brockmann, 1997). Similarly, despite the environment-oriented educative potential of tourism ecolabels, potential tourists may not respond favorably to ecolabels and the enterprises that market their eco-sensitive tourism services and products (House & Herring, 1995; Morgan, 1999). Most consumers are unfamiliar with hotel eco-certification programs. The rapid increase in the number of eco-certification programs makes it difficult for consumers to familiarize and discern between programs. Many new eco-labels are also untrustworthy, and the consumers' ability to recognize authentic programs is diminishing (Chafe, 2005).

The current demand for eco-certified tourism products is few developed and surveys of latent demand have varying results, although most claim that tourists give high preference to sustainability in their purchasing and that they are willing to pay extra for sustainable holidays despite the perception that certification means higher prices (RA, 2003). According to the 2012 Flash Eurobarometer 50% of European tourists would return to destination for its natural features, such as the weather or the landscape, while a third (32%) mentioned that the quality of the accommodation would persuade them to

return. Over 90% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the natural features and the quality of accommodation at their holiday destination (European Commission, 2012b). Studies like the European VISIT (Voluntary Initiative for Sustainability in Tourism) have demonstrated that consumers in Europe, for example from Germany, United Kingdom and the Netherlands are aware of environmental impacts that can be caused by tourism (ECEAT & ECOTRANS, 2004). They expect a high environmental quality in their destination, prefer eco-labelled accommodation services, would like to see certified products in travel catalogues and have access to all "green" tourism products in Europe (ECEAT & ECOTRANS, 2004).

Word-of-mouth recommendations also influence the growth of the eco-hotel industry. In a follow-up study about greenness of lodging customers, Han *et al.* examined how the environmentally-friendly attitudes of hotel guests influenced their recommendations to other travelers by word-of-mouth (Han et al., 2011). Considering the fact that tourists tend to perceive an eco-label as a sign of an environmentally friendly hotel service quality, it is obvious that eco-labels are becoming a valuable marketing tool to reach environmentally conscious guests (Bastic & Gojcic, 2012).

Romanian tourism eco-certification schemes

There are curently only two tourism eco-certification schemes in Romania: the EU eco-label for accommodation units and the ecolabel of the Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER) for guesthouses and tours. The EU ecolabel is Europe's official environmental label. There are eco-label criteria for 26 product groups and tourist accommodation was the first product group which has been developed for a service. To be eligible for the EU eco-label, a tourist accommodation must provide services which comply with the product group definition and with a series of technical criteria regarding: energy consumption, water saving, general management, waste reduction, environmental education and promotion of the EU ecolabel (European Commission, 2012a). Although there were 356 tourist accommodations certified through the EU ecolabel, only two Romanian hotels have received this award (one in Bucharest, the capital city and one in Saturn, situated on the Black Sea coast). This situation might be explained by the Romanian hoteliers' lack of interest and knowledge concerning eco-certification as well as the implied costs of eco-certification. This assumption outlines the need for further environmental education of accommodation managers and promotion of the European eco-label.

The second eco-certification system available in the Romanian tourism industry was created by the national Association of Ecotourism as a mechanism for putting into practice the basic principles of ecotourism, in order to ensure nature conservation and sustainable development of local communities through tourism (AER, 2012). The Ecotourism Certification System developed by AER has adapted the international experience to the Romanian context. It is based on the *Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (NEAP)* promoted by the Australian Ecotourism Association (NEAP is the first accreditation system in ecotourism) and on *Nature's Best* developed by the Swedish Ecotourism Association (the first accreditation system in ecotourism in the northern hemisphere). The AER Certification System addresses two different categories of applicants: small-scale accommodation structures in rural and natural areas (eco-lodges and guesthouses of maximum 25 rooms) and ecotourism programmes / tours provided by tour-operators (i.e. eco-tours of maximum 15 participants). There are curently 23 accommodation units which have received the AER eco-label, situated in rural areas with special natural assets (AER, 2012).

Material and method

In order to identify tourists interested in eco-certified accommodation we have chosen a quantitative approach using a survey conducted in different accommodation units from the city of Brasov between November 2010 and March 2011. The main objectives of this research were to identify: tourists' level of interest concerning the impact of tourism on the environment; the role of environmental initiatives and eco-certification in the selection of an accommodation; tourists' intention to choose an eco-certified accommodation during their stay in Brasov; the relationship between tourists' interest concerning the impact of tourism activities on the environment and their intention to choose an eco-certified accommodation. Another objective was to find the main tourist segments according to their intentions to choose an eco-certified accommodation and to describe these segments taking into account several socio-demographic characteristics: gender, age, marital status, travel purpose and traveling style (in a group or individually).

The research hypotheses resulted from the literature review are: tourists are aware of the environmental impacts that can be caused by tourism and they are interested to choose eco-certified accommodation services; tourists who are interested in the impact of tourism on the environment are more likely to choose an eco-certified accommodation; there is a significant influence of

socio-demographic characteristics on tourists' expressed intentions to choose an eco-certified accommodation.

The survey instrument comprised a two-page questionnaire structured in three parts. The first part identified respondent travel characteristics (sources of information regarding the destination and booking procedure, travel purpose and frequency) while the second part focused on specific questions about tourists' opinions, intentions and attitudes concerning environmental issues. The questions used in the second part are based on nominal scales, but also on five levels interval scales, which measure tourists' interest in environmental issues. The last part of the questionnaire asked for socio-demographic data from the respondents (gender, nationality, marital status, age).

Tourists were approached in their accommodation location based on a randomly selection and asked to fill a questionnaire. We prepared questionnaires both in English and Romanian hoping to collect information from both Romanian and foreign tourists. The sample size was of 940 people assuring an error of maximum 4%. The final sample has the following socio-demographic and travel characteristics:

 – **Gender:** males (56.3%) and females (43.7%);
 – **Age:** 16 - 24 years old (13.8%), 25-34 years old (38.2%), 35-44 years old (30.9%), 45-54 years old (13.3%) and over 54 years old (3.9%);
 – **Marital status:** single (24.5%), married (47.2%), live in a partnership (22.4%) and separated/divorced/widowed (5.9%);
 – **Country of residence:** Romanian tourists (82.9%) foreign tourists (17.1%);
 – **Visit purpose:** leisure (61.2%), business (24.6%), visit friends-relatives (10.9%) and other purposes (3.3%).
 – **Travel mode:** group (66.3%) and individual (33.7%).

Data collected in the survey was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and several statistical methods have been used: descriptive analysis, crosstabs, Cluster Analysis.

Results and discussions

The results of our investigation (see Figure 1) reveal that over 61% of respondents have shown a high and very high interest concerning the impact of tourism activities on the environment as their answers are concentrated on the 4th and the 5th levels of the interval scale (5 = very high).
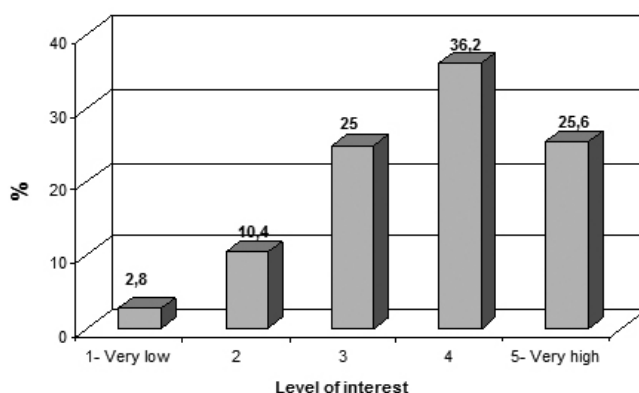
Figure 1. Tourists' interest concerning the impact of tourism activities on the environment

The answers' distribution is almost a normal one, centered on the 4th level, which indicates respondents' high level of environmental concern. Only a small percentage of the respondents have shown a low interest concerning environmental issues (13.2%).

The main research scope was to identify the proportion of tourists interested in choosing an eco-certified accommodation during their visit in Brasov. This information could be useful for the managers of tourism units in taking a decision to improve their activity in order to obtain such a certification. The results presented in figure 2 outline the fact that only 14% of respondents were not interested in choosing an eco-certified accommodation considering similar prices, facilities and location of the unit. Most of respondents declared they were interested to choose an eco-certified location (47%) and a high proportion of tourists (39%) were undecided regarding their decision. The latter consumer segment might be reluctant to purchase eco-certified accommodation services either due to a lack of interest concerning environmental issues or to a lack of information about the role and characteristics of ecolabels. Another reason might be tourists' association of ecolabeled services with a higher price. Undecided tourists could be educated in the spirit of sustainable development with the help of different marketing techniques and hopefully influenced in their future decisions concerning the choice of eco-certified accommodation units.
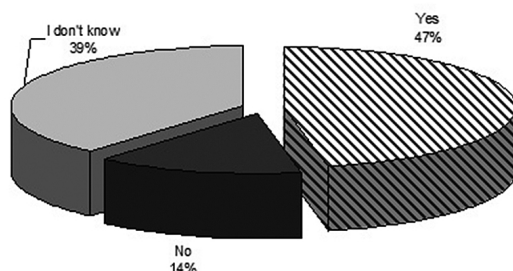
Figure 2. Tourists' interest in choosing an eco-certified accommodation

In order to find a relationship between the above variables we have computed a crosstab with percentages calculated from the rows' total (interest concerning the impact of tourism activities on the environment).

The results presented in Table 1 reveal a high willingness of the environmentally concerned tourists to choose an eco-certified accommodation. Thus, 52.5% of the respondents with a high interest in the impact of tourism activities on the environment (level 4 of the scale) and 64.7% of the respondents with a very high interest (level 5 of the scale) would choose an eco-certified accommodation. This interest decreases for the respondents who are not concerned about environment issues.

Table 1. The relationship between tourists' interest concerning the impact of tourism activities on the environment and their intention to choose an eco-certified accommodation

		Intention to choose an eco-certified accommodation (% within *Interest concerning the impact of tourism activities on the environment*)			
		Yes	No	I don't know	Total
Interest concerning the tourism impact on the environment	1- Very low	15,4%	42,3%	42,3%	100%
	2,00	22,1%	18,9%	58,9%	100%
	3,00	34,8%	17,7%	50,4%	100%
	4,00	52,5%	11,3%	36,2%	100%
	5- Very high	64,7%	12,8%	22,6%	100%
Total		47,0%	14,2%	38,7%	100%

In order to identify the statistical significance of the above relationship we have used the chi-square test. The critical value (Pearson Chi-square = 95.34)

indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the environmentally concerned tourists and the ones who don't intend to choose an eco-certified accommodation. The test is valid as the number of cells with expected count less than 5 does not exceed 20%. (see Table 2).

Table 2. The result of the Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	95,434(a)	8	,000
Likelihood Ratio	95,243	8	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	71,205	1	,000
N of Valid Cases	906		

a 1 cells (6,7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3,70.

Aiming to find the main patterns of tourists' intentions and differences between significant groups, post-hoc segmentation was used. Post hoc segmentation requires the researcher to choose a range of interrelated variables and then cluster visitors into groups whose average within-group similarity is high and between- group similarity is low (Hoek, Gendall & Esselmont, 1996). A Two Step Cluster Analysis procedure was also computed in order to reveal natural groupings (or clusters) within a data set that would otherwise not be apparent. The algorithm employed by this procedure handles with categorical and continuous variables, by assuming variables to be independent. We have introduced in the Cluster Analysis tourists' intentions to choose an eco-certified accommodation along with several socio-demographic characteristics: gender, age, marital status, travel purpose and traveling style (in a group or individually). The algorithm outlined two clusters with different intentions regarding the eco-certified accommodations and socio-demographic characteristics. The results of this analysis are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Clusters' characteristics

Variables	Cluster 1	Cluster 2
Cluster dimensions inside the sample	57.0%	43.0%
Intention to choose an eco-certified accommodation		
Yes	60.7%	39.3%
No	52.9%	47.1%
I don't know	54.3%	45.7%

Gender		
Male	59.1%	40.9%
Female	54.3%	45.7%
Age		
16-24 years	1.7%	98.3%
25-34 years	33.6%	66.4%
35-44 years	86.4%	13.6%
45-54 years	100%	0%
55-64 years	95.8%	4.2%
Over 64 years	100%	0%
Marital status		
Single	12.4%	87.6%
Married	99.2%	0.8%
In a partnership	7.7%	92.3%
Separated,/divorced	100%	0%
Widowed	100%	0%
The main purpose of visit		
Leisure	46.7%	53.3%
Business	79.1%	20.9%
Visit friends or relatives	67.8%	32.2%
Other purpose	44.4%	55.6%
Country of residence		
Romanian tourists	56.2%	43.8%
Foreign tourists	60.7%	39.3%
Traveling in a group		
No	59.7%	40.3%
Yes	55.7%	44.3%

Based on this analysis we have identified two main clusters: Cluster 1 represents 57% of respondents, while the rest of 43% were included in Cluster 2. Considering the patterns of the two clusters, we can conclude that people from Cluster 1 are more sensitive to ecolabels than Cluster 2 members as over 60% of the people who intend to choose an eco-certified accommodation belong to this group.

The percents of the undecided people and the ones that don't intend to choose such accommodation units are smaller in Cluster 1 than the overall percent of this cluster (57%). Cluster 1 includes mainly males and people over 34 years

old. They are mainly people with a stable life status, being married, separated/ divorced or widowed, travel individually for business purposes or for visit friends and relatives. More than half of the respondents who are foreign tourists belong to Cluster 1, but also do Romanians. The differences between the percentages presented in table 3 are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

The high percentage of foreign tourists (mostly Europeans, according to official statistics) confirms the results of other studies which suggest that visitors from wealthier, economically developed countries, especially in Europe, are more likely to influence/be influenced by corporate environmental behavior than those from less affluent countries (Ayuso, 2006; El Dief & Font, 2010; Miller, 2003).

In line with the above results, figure 3 reveals that the mean scores recorded by Cluster 1 are higher than the ones of Clusters 2 both regarding their attitudes towards the role of environmental initiatives in choosing an accommodation and their interest in the impact of tourism activities on the environment.

Thus, members of Cluster 1 could be considered people with a higher interest in environmental issues, being concerned of the impact of tourism activities on the environment. They also prefer eco-certified accommodation. Taking into consideration the percent of undecided people, we can conclude that there is a high latent demand for eco-certified services, which should be stimulated through promotional techniques and other marketing tools.
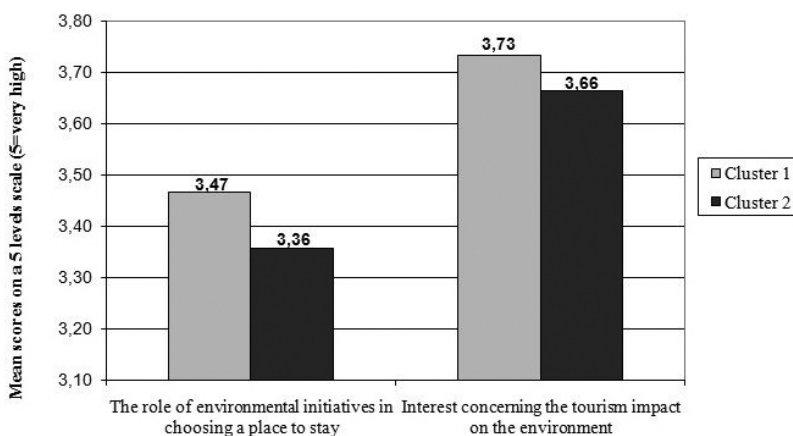

Figure 3. The mean scores reflecting tourists' attitudes towards environmental initiatives and the impact of tourism activities on the environment (5=very high)

While many consumers claim to consider environmental issues and/or state a preference to buy from environmentally responsible suppliers when choosing products or services, there is limited data on the translation of intentions into actual purchase of 'green' products, especially in times of economic downturn (Andereck, 2009; Wearing et al., 2002).

In the attempt to find the best ways to promote the eco-certified accommodations, we have computed tourists' preferred booking methods for the members of the identified clusters (see figure 4).
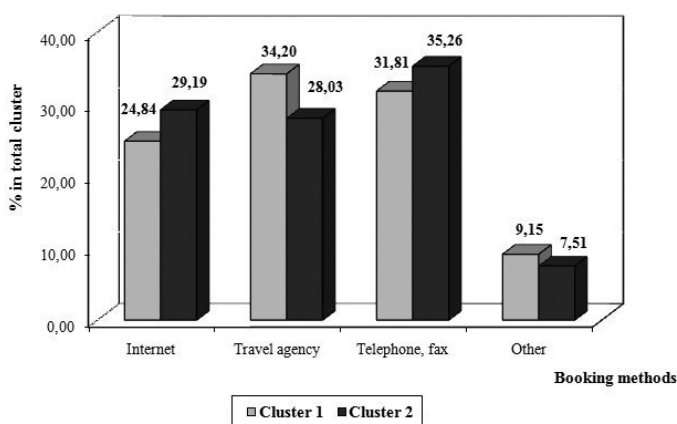

Figure 4. The distribution of answers regarding the booking methods on the two clusters

We have found that the members of Cluster 1 prefer the travel agencies for booking their services while the members of Cluster 2 prefer to book services on their own, using telephone or fax. Nevertheless, the answers' distribution is quite balanced, with very small differences between the two clusters. Thus, the best promotional techniques regarding the eco-certified accommodation units should focus on travel agencies as potential promoters of eco-certified accommodation but also on Internet and word-of-mouth techniques.

The results of this research are in line with previous studies regarding Europeans' attitudes concerning sustainable consumption (The Gallup Organisation, 2009). Almost half (47%) of EU citizens said that ecolabelling plays an important role in their purchasing decisions. Ecolabelling was seen to play a more important role in the purchasing decisions of those respondents: (1) with a higher level of awareness about the environmental impact of the products they buy or use; (2) who said that a product's environmental impact is

important when making purchasing decisions, and/or (3) who always, or at least often, take energy efficiency into account when making purchasing decisions. Two-thirds of respondents for whom the impact on the environment is a *very* important element when deciding which products to buy said that eco-labelling also plays an important role when making such decisions, compared to only 15% of those who said that a product's environmental impact is *rather not* important and 10% of those who said this aspect is *not* important *at all*. The latter respondents were the most likely to say that ecolabels do not play a role in their purchasing decisions or that they never read labels.

Although eco labelling has encountered numerous shortcomings and inconsistencies, it represents an important communication gate to consumers, requiring complementary information instruments and complementary skills (Kane, Chiru & Ciuchete, 2012). Certain researchers have found out that consumers' ecological behaviour is sensitive to promotional activities that have to be added to the "traditional environmental tool kit". In order to be adopted by a large number of consumers, ecologically conscious behavior should be driven by continuous information and informal networking across the world mainly through user created content (Kane, Chiru & Ciuchete, 2012).

Conclusions

With strong support from tourists for green certification initiatives along with a growing market, hotels with eco-certification will definitely play a leading role in the tourism industry in the future (IES, 2005) as eco-certification is rapidly gaining attention worldwide due to the increased benefits for both the environment and businesses.

It is apparent that as environmental issues become better known, it will be more common for tourists to take green practices into account when selecting an accommodation. The 2012 Canadian Travel Intentions Survey found 42 percent of business travellers surveyed saying that practices like recycling and energy efficiency matter to them when choosing where to stay, up five percent from last year. The same percentage of all travellers said they would pay $1 or more to offset their carbon footprint during a stay at a property. Managers may then be motivated to maintain their competitiveness and reputation within the tourism industry by incorporating sustainable practices into their business. These changes can increase their profits by attracting more environmentally friendly tourists, while also reducing operating costs.

The main conclusion of the present study concerns the fact that almost half of the respondents have shown their interest in eco-certification (47%). The high percentage (39%) of tourists who couldn't decide whether they would choose an eco-certified accommodation could be explained by their lack of information concerning tourism ecolabels or by their association of certified services with a higher price. As Delmas & Lessem (2012) have mentioned in a recent study, information policies, which can change the costs and benefits of conservation, have the potential to become a major driver of behavioral change. They refer to a new behavioral innovation - public information. *Public information* publicly discloses information about a specific agent's behavioral impact, allowing environmentally friendly behaviors to act as a signal of "green" virtue. These reputational benefits can motivate conservation amongst consumers. Public information is particularly useful in that it can motive conservation among all consumers, *including* those who are not intrinsically motivated to conserve energy.

This result confirms previous studies which have found that in the absence of a non-aligned, neutral, widely accepted agency for monitoring, controlling and regulating the efforts of tourism ecolabeling schemes in developing countries would raise suspicion and distrust among tourists towards the credibility of ecolabels (House & Herring, 1995; Morgan, 1999). The results of our research can be valuable for managers of tourism accommodations as eco-certification can be used as a tool for sustainable tourism management. Eco-certification is a great option for accommodation managers to look into, especially those that are trying to stand out amongst the plethora available.

This is also the case of Brasov as a tourism destination as currently there are no eco-certified accommodation units in the city. Consequently, our study is based on tourists' statements and is not related to their previous experience as clients of eco-certified units. This could also be considered a limit of our research.

Considering the heterogeneity of our sample, we have considered useful grouping tourists in clusters in order to find the main patterns of tourists' intentions and opinions concerning eco-certification and differences between significant groups. The members of Cluster 1 could be considered people with a higher interest for the environment, being concerned of the tourism impact on the environment. They have also a high preference for eco-certified accommodation. Taking into consideration the percent of undecided people, we can conclude that there is a high latent demand for eco-certified services, which

could be stimulation for tourism managers to start implementing sustainable tourism initiatives. However, small business operators who choose to lead in eco-accreditation should clearly articulate their scheme to potential customers, and target consumers from countries where interest in such schemes is highest.

But, simply adding a certification logo to a business's advertising is not going to increase occupancy rates. There are, however, two other important early gains that accommodation units can receive from certification: 1) improved standards through compliance with recognized norms of best practices, whether for quality, environmental protection, or social responsibility, and 2) cost savings. Cost savings derived from reducing energy and water consumption can compensate for the cost of implementing certification in accommodation units.

These trends should motivate Romanian tourism managers to minimize the negative effects of tourism activities using an environmental management approach. In the case of a successful completion of sustainable tourism criteria, the eco-certification of their services is recommended, especially using a European ecolabel. Small business operators who choose to lead in eco-certification would, however, be wise to ensure that they clearly articulate their scheme to potential customers, and target consumers from countries where interest in such schemes is highest. If small accommodation units wish to become eco-certified, they should also choose an international brand with wide recognition, rather than regional schemes. A European brand is advisable as (Burgin & Hardiman, 2010) European tourists (especially from northern European countries) have been shown to have a relatively high environmental concern, and European eco-labels have relatively high credibility.

Considering the lack of popularity of eco-certification systems in Romania, further promotion of both national and international schemes should be undertaken as well as additional environmental education for both accommodation managers and tourists concerning sustainable tourism principles.

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