

## **TOURISM, NATURE PROTECTION AND RESPONSIBILITY**

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***Abstract:** Sustainable and responsible tourism are the highest challenges that tourism faces in the present and also an opportunity for many regions. Definitions and characteristics of sustainable, responsible, eco tourism are presented. Results of a study focused on the perception of hotel managers on the role of organic food and various sustainable actions in hotels are discussed. They indicate a highly positive appreciation of these two elements as contributors to responsible behavior.*

***Key words:** sustainable, responsible, eco tourism, perception, corporate responsibility*

### **Tourism – trends and potential for sustainable development**

Tourism role in the national and global economy is important for decades and the trends for the future and positive not only because of economical reasons, but also for social and environmental ones. In 2008, the World Tourism Organization calculated that international tourist arrivals at 924 million and for 2010 estimated the international arrivals worldwide to 1 billion, to which added around 2 billion of domestic tourists. In 2009, the World Travel and Tourism Council, calculated that the contribution of Travel & Tourism to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be expected to rise from 9.4% (US\$5,474 bn) in 2009 to 9.5% (US\$10,478 bn) by 2019 (see Fig. 1) and that the contribution of the Travel & Tourism economy to total employment was expected to rise from 219,810,000 jobs in 2009, 7.6% of total employment, or 1 in every 13.1 jobs to 275,688,000 jobs, 8.4% of total employment or 1 in every 11.8 jobs by 2019 (see Fig. 2) (\*\*\*, 2009, Global SWOT Analysis).

Fig. 1: Contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP, in 2009 and 2019

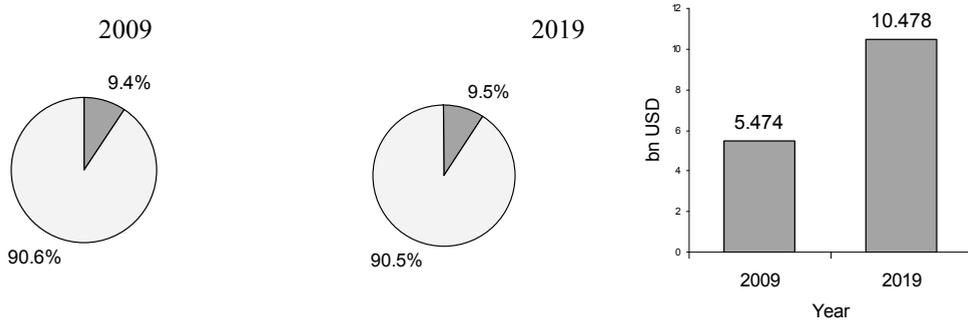
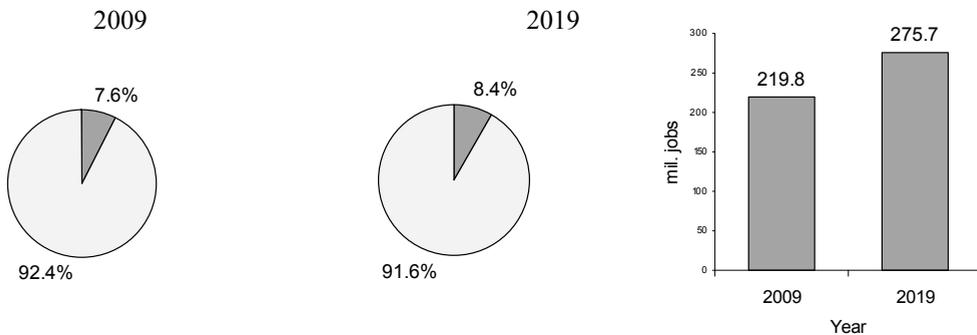
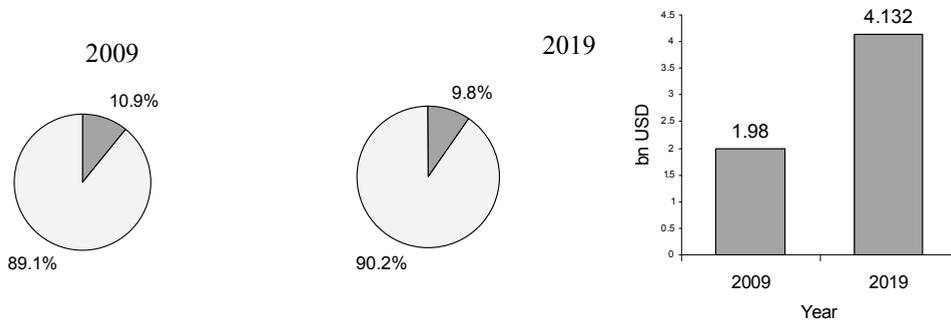


Fig. 2: Contribution of Travel & Tourism to total employment



The World Travel and Tourism Council also estimated that export earnings from international visitors and tourism goods were expected to generate 10.9% of total exports (US\$1,980 bn) in 2009, growing (in nominal terms) to US\$4,132 bn (9.8% of the total) in 2019 (see Fig. 3) (\*\*\*, 2009, Global SWOT Analysis).

Fig. 3: Export earnings from international visitors and tourism goods



In Europe, tourism will continue to have a significant contribution. In 2020, according to World Tourism Organization (2001), Europe will be the biggest arrival

region, followed by East Asia and Pacific, Americas, Middle East and South Asia (\*\*\*, 2001, Tourism Market Trends).

Tourism can be a preferred alternative to other activities such as intensive agriculture, mining etc within the context of sustainable development. Sustainable development grants equal concern to economy, society and environment, to present and future needs, and tourism has the potential to respond to all these challenges. In order to do so, new forms of tourism have emerged like sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, eco tourism.

### **Sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, eco tourism**

Tourism, in its traditional, general form, has significant impacts on natural resources, consumption patterns, pollution and social systems. Therefore, the need for sustainable/responsible planning and management is imperative for the industry to survive as a whole. The pressure of tourism on nature can be reduced through the adoption of sustainable visions and practices.

*Sustainable tourism* is about re-finding the balance, adapting to human and environmental needs and limitations, taking into account the interest of all stakeholders (including indigenous people, local communities, visitors, industry, government), re-thinking the problems and solutions in order to include the future and to take into account cumulative, gradual and irreversible changes.

In 1996, the World Tourism Organization defined sustainable tourism 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.” (\*\*\*, 2005, Making Tourism more Sustainable). “Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.” (<http://sdt.unwto.org/en/content/about-us-5>)

*Responsible tourism* and sustainable tourism have an identical goal, that of sustainable development and most of the time they are considered synonyms, but there is a nuance that differentiates them. The term of Responsible tourism was defined in the Cape Town Declaration (2002). Often everyone expected others to behave in a sustainable and so not much progress was made on realizing sustainable tourism since the Earth Summit in Rio (1992). Therefore, Responsible tourism was created in order to stress the role played by the stakeholders: in responsible tourism, individuals, organisations and businesses are asked to take responsibility for their actions and the impacts of their actions. The emphasis on responsibility in responsible tourism means that everyone involved in tourism – government, product owners and operators, transport operators, community services, NGO’s and CBO’s, tourists, local

communities, industry associations – are responsible for achieving the goals of responsible tourism. Responsible tourism is not another form of “niche tourism”, it is about the legacy and the consequences of tourism – for the environment, local people and local economies. Any tourism business (big, small, located in a city or a village, in a desert or on sub-tropical island) can be a responsible tourism operation.

Responsible tourism has the following characteristics:

- minimises negative economic, environmental, and social impacts;
- generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- provides access for physically challenged people; and
- is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence. (\*\*\*, 2002, Cape Town Declaration)

**Ecotourism** is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy, study and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present), that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations. Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism.

The main characteristics of ecotourism are:

- Involves travel to natural destinations
- Minimizes impact
- Builds environmental awareness
- Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Respects local culture
- Supports human rights and democratic movements (Honey, 1999, apud Hundloe, 2002, p.12)

However, it is hard to reach a consensus among tourism practitioners, ecologists etc on where it lies the border that separates ecotourism from conventional tourism in relation to biodiversity preservation, local social-economic benefits, and environmental impact. Environmentalists, special interest groups, and governments define ecotourism differently. Environmental organizations have generally insisted that ecotourism is nature-based, sustainably managed, conservation supporting, and environmentally educated. The tourist industry and governments, however, focus more on the product aspect, treating ecotourism as equivalent to any sort of tourism based in nature.

From the need to address specific environmental aspect or to gain an economical advantage, many other terms related to nature are in use: nature tourism, low impact tourism, green tourism, bio-tourism, ecologically responsible tourism.

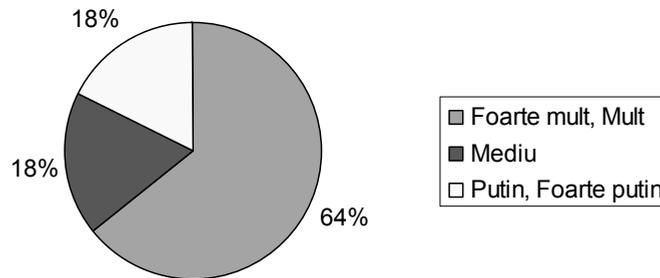
In almost any touristic business, to generate revenue a high number of traffic, tourists is needed, which inevitably means a higher pressure on the environment. Thus, ecotourism often becomes just the opposite of what it was intended to be, due to the consumption of virgin territories, deforestation, disruption of ecological life systems, various forms of pollution. The construction of roads, the use of motor vehicles, the introduction of invasive species, the increased evaluation of some species that leads to their overproduction, the transformation of local people and their images into commodities, the construction of water networks, sanitation facilities, wastewater treatment facilities, that consume non-renewable energy, the utilization of already limited local resources put a un-eco pressure on the environment. At the same time, the lack of adequate facilities harm the environment: disposal of campsite sewage in rivers, contaminating the wildlife, livestock, and people who draw drinking water from it, abandon of garbage and creation of other pollution in the visited areas. Meals of tourists, their drink water, sanitation facilities etc have an impact that, along with the increase of ecotourism, transforms it into an unsustainable activity.

### **Preference for organic food as an indicator of sustainable attitude**

One of the many ways to contribute to sustainable tourism is the use of organic food (bio or ecological) at destination. Both parts of the transaction (seller and buyer) can play a role in increasing the consumption of organic food: sellers through the availability and adjustment of the organic menu to clients' needs and desires and buyers through the demand of such food and its preference over conventional one. In order to determine the perception of the hotel managers on organic food, they were interviewed face to face. The study was made on 28 hotel managers or persons with decisional power regarding the menu, in hotels of 3, 4 and 5 stars from Cluj-Napoca, in 2011.

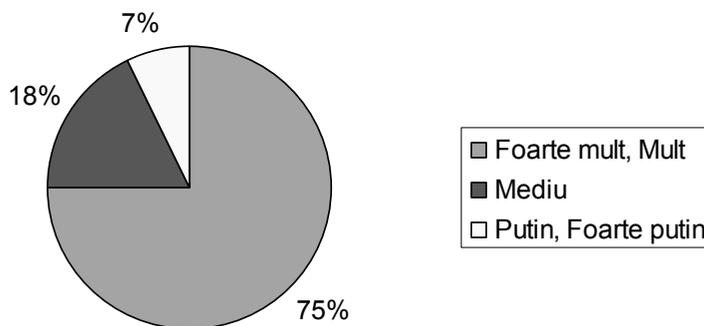
The subjects were asked to evaluate the contribution to their corporate responsibility of two elements: the presence of organic food in the menu and the performance of various eco-friendly activities, such as selective disposal of garbage, the use of bio products, water saving etc (see Fig. 4 and Fig. 5).

Fig. 4: Perception on the contribution of organic food to corporate responsibility



Most of the subjects (64%) see the organic food as having a high contribution in assuming corporate responsibility, which is a positive aspect because this perception is the first step towards acquiring a responsible behavior.

Fig. 5: Perception on the contribution of various eco-friendly activities to corporate responsibility



Three quarters of the subjects (75%) see the eco-friendly actions as having a high contribution in assuming corporate responsibility. This is even more encouraging because many of these actions are easier to be implemented than the introduction/increase of organic food in the menu, because they are less expensive and the risk to be rejected by the customers is lower.

Studies have showed a significant gap between declaration and actual behavior (McKinsey, 2008, apud \*\*\*, 2008, Sustainable Consumption; Petrescu, 2011, p. 250-255). Therefore, on one hand, the results can be seen as positive as they support the organic food and eco-friendly actions and do not represent a rejection in a high degree of the two tested elements; on the other hand, they are not a guarantee

that the behavior will follow the declarations. Constant and long time efforts from all the stakeholders (tourists, industry, government, local communities etc) are needed in order to turn the opinions into actions.

## Conclusions

Sustainable and responsible tourism are highest challenges that tourism faces in the present and also an opportunity for many regions. Both tourists and service/products providers play a role in shaping the tourism into a more sustainable one and the adoption. One way of doing it is by the adoption of organic food and of sustainable practices in hotels. Within the tested population, the perception towards organic food and eco-friendly activities as contributors to responsible behavior is good, at least at declarative level. However, we must take into account that on action level various factors interfere and decrease the chances to transform this perception into a real behavior.

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