

ASSESSING SUSTAINABILITY AND ECO-TOURISM CONSCIOUSNESSES AMONGST STUDENTS AND TOURISM SERVICE PROVIDERS

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This study is focused on assessing the sustainability and eco-tourism consciousness amongst students and tourism service providers. It develops a conceptual framework that starts with presenting trends of sustainability development and customer behavior, analyses the concept and definition of ecotourism and presenting segments of eco-tourists, and then it proceeds to the presentation of the concept of consciousness of eco-tourism. Based on the review, it hypothesizes a positive relationship between eco-tourism consciousness and responsible/sustainable behavior of tourism service providers (provider side of the relationship). It further distinguishes between current service providers (tourism agencies and tourism boards) and future service providers (students) and assesses whether there are significant differences in eco-tourism consciousness and responsible/sustainable behavior between these groups. Quantitative study is conducted in order to test the propositions, on the sample of 82 respondents. Results are presented and theoretical and managerial implications discussed.

Keywords: *eco-tourism, sustainability concept, responsible behavior, environmental awareness*

INTRODUCTION

Trend of sustainability in different areas, starting with sustainability of business strategies, market positions, different industries, sustainable tourism to the planet sustainability dominate in contemporary society and economy. In that context ecotourism as a part of sustainable tourism became the topic of theoretical reviews and empirical research more and more.

Several factors impact the increasing of importance and interest for sustainable tourism and, according to the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST, 2012) there are caused by trends typical for modern economy, such as urbanization, needs for connecting with the nature, increasing trend of green business, requests for authenticity, searching for achievement and raising experience tourism which significantly impact the changes of customers' life style and positive attitude toward responsible tourism.

TRENDS OF SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENT AND CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR

Research papers provided in last decades by different organization and association in tourism area are showing trends of increasing numbers of potential tourists who are interested in environmental responsibility, sustainability, "green offer" and ecological responsible offer and providers. In these studies one can find data about customer attitudes regarding responsibility: Lonely Planet in the study from 2007 claim that 70% of respondents are ready to try to prevent environment damaging by their own behavior; TripAdvisor (2010) has been stressing that 38% of passengers in the world think about environment responsible tourism during the planning of travel, 34% are ready to pay more for staying in a environment responsible hotel (25% are ready to pay 5-10% extra, and next 12% - 10-20% higher prices). According to the Travel Horizons (2009) at the USA market situation is quite the opposite – only 9% of customers are ready to pay higher for "the option of green traveling" and disappointing 3% are ready to choose type of transport which have lower percentage of carbonating (carbonate) emission; in the same research 78% of respondents perceive themselves as environmental responsible (Travel Horizons, 2009). Deloitte (2008) has been shown that 38% of customers search for information about environmental responsibility of the hotel in which they are staying; 28% of these visitors are ready to pay 10% higher prices for staying at "eco" hotel. Obviously the highest discrepancy exists among expressed attitudes about responsibility regarding the business and the nature, on one side and respondents buying behavior, on the other, among American customers.

Similarly as in some other researches (those that are related to customer behavior in the process of buying of convenience goods or shopping goods), in most cases, customers express readiness to buy responsible products and support responsibility. But these statements often do not confirm in their buying behavior (Cohen et al., 2014). At the moment when customers are deciding about buying, their "readiness to be responsible", to choose "responsible companies and products" are comparing with the prices. This dilemma in most cases will end with the choice of cheaper products or services. In the case of tourism it probably will be a destination that offers better value (when the offer compares to the price), more precisely the one which create higher perceived value among visitors (Kotler and Keller, 2009).

In the studies focused on tourism sustainability (Buckley, 2012; Robinson, 1999; Scheyvens, 1999) and its effects in developed and developing countries several attributes of responsibility are identified: (a) Ecological attributes – include efficiency in resources usage, protection of biodiversity, using of alternative and recovering sources of energy and public transport, extended staying, and compensation for CO₂ emission through promoting alternative types of transport or with different kinds for humanitarian activities; (b) Social attributes – imply holistic understanding of cultural heritage, integration and respect of local

community, elimination of discrimination in local community, communication, fair work conditions, equal distribution of income and other activities which will positively affect the society; (c) Economic attributes – are connecting to using local products and services, regional employment and economic wellbeing, reducing poverty, diverse and flexible infrastructure.

By the analysis of identified attributes and their mutual relations authors concluded that local aspects in different attributes are the most important attributes of sustainable tourism for keeping tourism incomes in tourist destination such as integration of local products and services or protection of interests of local community and local culture. On the other side, accepting of this strategy will create opportunities for reducing negative ecological externalities through decrease number of transport connections, but also opportunity for connecting tourists with local people, culture and customs.

In the researches and analysis about tourism and tourists behavior, conclusions are consistent: tourism can be extremely important trigger for economic development, but tourism activities have to be also analyzed as the possible cause of environmental destruction. In most cases it can be found in countries whose economic development is dominantly based on tourism (Cohen, 1978; Krippendorf, 1991).

ECOTOURISM – CONCEPT AND DIMENSIONS

Ecotourism as the part (segment) of the sustainable tourism increases exponentially. Starting with the voluntary choice of the organizations and institutions to be responsible and to protect environment, local community and local culture, one can assume that development of ecotourism can help in the process of making a balance between opposite interests of traditional business and natural environment.

Looking from the wider context of business responsibility in regard with environment and local community, ecotourism can be connected with the growing trend of corporate responsibility or corporate social responsibility (CSR) that is more and more important to different stakeholders (MacMillan et al., 2004; Brammer and Millington, 2005; Fombrun, 2005). Challenges and dilemmas that arise in these cases are especially expressed in the context of market and marketing analysis and orientation of different organizations, companies and tourist destination for accepting, advocating and implementing of responsible business. Business decisions are primarily financially determined and motivated, while responsible behavior imply inclusion of stakeholders' interests and environmental protection. When it comes to defining priorities it is very hard for the companies to keep the balance among financially oriented goals and responsibility orientation, especially in the cases of limited resources. That is the assumption which can cause negative reaction on the company's responsible activities by different stakeholders; sometimes they blame companies for using "responsibility" more as a market motivated practice than real commitment to social causes (Mullerat, 2009; Aras & Crowther, 2010).

The practice of some companies which are too focused on the communication and announcement about responsible activities (sometimes even more than activities by themselves) Dimance and Smith (1996) classify as over-marketing responsibility. In their explanation, ecotourism present a category which is overstressed and overused for marketing purposes. Consequently that practice will increase risks of similar approaches of competitors and negative reactions of target segments. Moreover they insist on the fact that ecotourism itself (i.e. providers in area of ecotourism) and tourist behavior in the process of

buying tourism services cannot solve problems of environmental protection and low level of the responsibility; especially without support of national tourism organization and government institutions on tourism destinations.

Despite the fact that different terms such as responsible, sustainable, nature, eco-tourism and similar variations of the expressions use for several decades still the unique definition of the concept of ecotourism didn't accept. In most cases definition of the First World Congress on Tourism and the Environment (2016) have been using. "Ecotourism is travel that promotes conservation. In addition, those involved in ecotourism (as providers, travelers, hosts) seek to minimize negative environmental and cultural impacts while working to achieve authentic, intimate, meaningful, and educational encounters between visitors and local natural and cultural phenomena." Obviously ecotourism, except the responsibility towards environment, includes also responsibility toward local community and culture.

At the similar way The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as responsible travel to natural destination /area that contributes to protection and improvement of local people wellbeing. According to this definition ecotourism includes three interrelated dimensions of environment: active learning, sustainability of socio-cultural and also natural environment (Weaver 2001). Developing further the concept of ecotourism Weaver (2001) use three core elements for the explanation:

- Focus of attraction is natural environment. In the context of the explanation of this category Buckley (2002, 2004) stresses that ecotourism is connected to the nature, means it is the type of tourism that integrate education, recreation and adventure elements.
- Ecotourism emphasizes importance of learning as the result of interaction between eco-tourists and natural environment.
- Many definitions emphasize relationship with the nature but also economic and socio-cultural dimensions claiming that is impossible to separate each other or separate all of them from ecological sustainability (Hall, 2000).

SEGMENTS OF ECO-TOURISTS

As the consequence of different approaches in the sphere of defining ecotourism one can also find different categorization and types of ecotourism depending on the concept advocating by some authors. In the next tables some of them are noticed. Gradual development and identification of additional segments over the time can be seen.

Table 1: Segments of eco-tourists

Maric and Hunt (1998)	Weaver (2001)	Singh et al. (2007)
Hard-core nature tourists	Hard class of ecotourism	Hard eco-tourists
Dedicate nature tourists	Soft class of ecotourism	Soft eco-tourists
Mainstream nature tourists		Structured eco-tourists
Casual nature tourists		

Segment of "hard eco-tourists" defined by Weaver (2001) and Singh et al., (2007) imply active ecotourism and include small number of environmentally consciousness tourist applying relatively long travelling organized for specific goal. Tourists belonging to that segment do not expect a lot of services during the trip and develop direct contact with natural environment. This is the group of tourists who are supporting and committing to

sustainability and improvement of physical conditions at the destination and environment where they are staying through donation or voluntary work. On that way they make their staying to commit to the improvement the condition and sustainability of the destination. These type of behavior is connected to the emphasizing an active role that tourists have in the mission of strengthening of sustainability and development.

“Soft eco-tourists” are starting with the journey where the experience in ecotourism area is only a part of their interests since their travelling has different motives. These tourists expect high level of services and comfort, and in many cases need information and help for creating contact with natural attractions. Contrary to the “hard eco-tourists” they accept current status in a sense of sustainability of destination leaving it in the same condition as it was when they came (Weaver, 2001).

CHALLENGES OF ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

When it comes to the more precisely determination of the ecotourism concept and category, obviously it is a form (subcategory) of sustainable tourism (Dimanche & Smith, 1996) which demand careful planning of tourist destination’s offer, clear separating of protected areas, and also defining measurement for protection and management of the capacities of local community and the region. This includes unpopular measures of limitation number of visitors and tourists at tourism destination in certain periods of time. This is the point where the importance of previously explained need for integrating and coordinated action of different subjects in ecotourism offer comes at the scene.

The problem of managing of tourism destination in the context of environment, local community and culture protection in contemporary tourism development is especially expressed if one takes into consideration the fact that third world countries (Dimanche & Smith, 1996), i.e. economically underdeveloped countries are leaders in the ecotourism development. Namely, ecotourism is developing as the alternative of mass tourism and it doesn’t request extensive development of the expensive infrastructure.

According to the previously mentioned facts, in the choice of type of tourism which is possible to develop, the only thing that underdeveloped countries can offer are tourist services from the area of sustainable and natural tourism such as rural, ethno-tourism or ecotourism; these types of tourism do not request significant investments so underdeveloped countries can offer them. The risks typical for applying that strategy are related to the fact that plans for tourism development and tourism destination management in most cases are not supported by development of necessary legal regulation in the area of environmental protection, “infrastructure management” and increasing awareness, consciences and knowledge about environment and sustainability.

Negative consequences of disproportion in the supply and demand for ecotourism services have been manifesting as degradation and destroying of essential resources and assumptions for further ecotourism development (Wight, 1993; Jenner and Smith, 1992; Price, 1995) from one side, and uncontrolled expansion of tourist influx, on the other. Under the influence of these changes the potentials for ecotourism development will be destroyed and advantages of its development in comparison with the mass tourism will be lost. As the result, certain kind of hybrid tourism is emerging (Cater, 1993).

More and more companies having business in ecotourism are leaving the initial goal which is essence of ecotourism – to be focused on sustainable economic development, support and promotion on the conservation of the environment accepting by niche segments;

and move to the market opportunities which are resulted from trends of accepting ideas of sustainability among more segments of customers. Parallel with the increasing number of potential eco-tourists, business orientation of those companies/providers are transforming in the traditional business focused on profit and increasing of number of visitors.

Rapid development and diversification of the ecotourism destinations' offer such as hiking and bike trails, different sports facilities, national parks building or some other activities are changing nature and environment, which are the base for creating offer on eco-destinations. On the other side, problems caused by increasing number of tourists are also expanding; visitors' concentration and crowd at the most popular places, fast building of tourist infrastructure such as hotels and roads around protected areas and increasing pollution of destinations, which are obviously the same as the problems that mass tourism destinations face with. Therefore, one can concludes that ecotourism are slowly but surely are transforming to mass natural tourism (Dimanche & Smith, 1996).

In the case that number of tourists at eco-destinations is higher than the level of destination capacities (Patterson, 2002), which are significantly lower for eco-destinations than it was for traditional ones, environmental protection is necessary, not only for the tourists, but also from/of them (Cohen, 1978). On the other hand, changes of tourist demand structure, life style of potential tourists, as well as their growing requests regarding the level of quality are implicating the conclusion that tourist can also be the subjects of protection of destination. The level of awareness and consciousness about ecology, the way how tourists travel and use of potentials of destination, as well as how spread the information about positive aspects of responsible behavior, can significantly improve people attitudes about protection of eco-destinations, local communities and nature generally. In these processes education about responsibility and also "preparing of tourists and individuals" to the roles and commitment that they should "invest in sustainability" has huge importance.

Sustainable development of tourist destination requests controlled growth, integration of natural, economic and socio-cultural environment, and long-term planning and strategies that integrate key stakeholders in ecotourism: visitors, tourist agencies and operators, local people, hotels and supplier of services at destination. "Sustainability" comes into the question when the planning of development and supply are reduced at the level of individual subjects and service suppliers, no matter if it is the case about local or international "players". The concept of "environmentally", "ecologically", "natural" have been using often for marketing purposes, as it was the case with responsible and socially responsible behavior or business (Crook, 2005; Thilmann 2007). Thus the companies and destinations which are trying to get the part of the "responsible tourists" segment are often provoke skepticism (Webb & Mohr, 1998) and negative reaction even toward those that seriously accept and implement this business philosophy.

The behavior focused on the efficiency, i.e. costs control and price competition is typical for vertically integrated systems that include travel agencies, tour operators, airline companies and resorts which sustainability depends on the costs and prices of tourist offer. On the other side, exactly the same systems have the biggest responsibility for the overcrowding of destinations and using prices as the key instruments of competitions (Josephides, 1994). That makes them the biggest "enemies" of the responsible tourism and ecotourism.

LEVEL OF AWARENESS AND CONSCIOUSNESS OF ECOTOURISM CONCEPT

In the context of dilemmas and challenges that tourism subjects have been facing of and threats which threatening the tourism generally, for the tourist destinations and kinds of tourism which depend on the natural and social resources' sustainability, education and informing of key stakeholders in tourism, business, regulators and finally tourists as a customers have crucial role.

Depending on the phase in economy development, the impact of the tourism to GDP (gross domestic product), the phase in development of tourism destination, behavior of key players at destination and their readiness to accept the responsible behavior have critical role in the development of the ecotourism offer at tourist destination. Obviously the main roles in these processes have national tourist organization, tour operators, hotel chains at the destination and definitely local people. Their mission is to motivate tourists and initiate positive reaction to the companies' orientation towards sustainability and responsible behavior. It is supposed that tourists' reaction will be manifested as acting on the protection of natural and built resources, such as local values and culture typical for certain tourist destination.

Bosnia and Herzegovina includes development of ecotourism and rural tourism among five priorities in the tourism development for next several years. Therefore, the level of knowledge, ecological consciousness and attitudes toward responsible behavior of different subjects in tourism area is extremely important. The importance that tourist agencies, hotels and suppliers of tourist services give to the principles of strategy of sustainable development impact the orientation but also building the bases for the creation of strategy of sustainable development. In that context it is important which of dimensions are dominant in the tourist services suppliers understanding of ecotourism.

Level of the local people education about and understanding of the concept and advantages of responsible tourism and ecotourism as well as their choices to accept and implement those concepts, or not, are extremely important for future development of tourist destination. This factor is additionally amplifying if one takes into consideration the fact that members of the local community are potential customers of tourism services at some other destinations. Finally, in the cases when local people are in any way connected to the tourism offer or are preparing for the jobs in tourism area those attitudes are even more important. Their readiness and propensity for accepting the principles of ecotourism development will increase the quality of interaction with other stakeholders, but also impact on their behavior and decision making at the positions on which they will work (Gursoy, et al., 2004; Jurowski and Gursoy, 2004).

On the other side, when the same people "play" the roles of potential tourists they can contribute or support development of ecotourism at the other tourism destinations. Furthermore, tourists' preferences of the sustainable tourism and choice of sustainable alternatives of the tourism offer will impact suppliers' readiness to engage resources and increase investments in order to provide and promote responsible behavior. Vasgas-Sanches et al. (2011) are found positive relationships among personal benefits of local people which are resulted of the tourism development and perception of positive, economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of sustainability. These issues have strong effect on the future development of the tourism generally, especially sustainable tourism.

The subject of this article and research is the level of awareness and support towards the responsible tourism and ecotourism among the students of the study program in the field

of Tourism and Environmental Protection, as well as future participants in the creation of touristic offer in the destination or legislation in the field of tourism. Another group includes current tourist services providers (hotels and restaurants), representative organizations for the promotion of tourism (tourist board) and ministries (economy, tourism, environmental protection, by sector - assistants).

Based on the detailed literature review and conceptualization, we hypothesize following:

H1: There is a positive relationship between the level eco-tourism consciousness and responsible/sustainable behavior of current and future tourism service providers.

H2: There is a significant difference between the attitudes of current, (a) tourist board, (b) tourism agency, and future, (c) students, tourism service providers when it comes to the level of eco-tourism consciousness and responsible/sustainable behavior.

METHODOLOGY

In order to empirically verify proposed hypotheses, we conducted a quantitative study with focus on measuring the level of eco-tourism consciousness and responsible/sustainable behavior. The study was conducted in B&H, encompassing students of tourism orientation as well as tourism providers located in tourism agencies and in tourism boards. Questionnaire was developed based on the existing scales (Sander, 2012) where eco-tourism consciousness was measured on the 9 item Likert scale, while responsible/sustainable behavior on the 7 item Likert scale (5 points Likert scale is used). Demographic controls were also included in the questionnaire.

When it comes to sampling, we aimed at three distinct groups. First group was a student sample Geographical department enrolled at the tourism focused program - "Tourism and environmental protection" in one university was selected. They are future participants in the process of creation of tourism offer at the destination, in different business or regulation organizations. Second group is consisted of actual suppliers of tourism services (tourism agencies) while the third group consisted out of policy representatives (organization for tourism promotion and tourism boards). After several reminders, a total of 82 respondents returned filled in questionnaires, namely: 25 respondents representing tourism boards, 27 respondents representing tourism agencies and 30 respondents representing students. Sample demographics are presented in the Table 2 below.

Table 2: Demographics

	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	Students
Sex			
Male	40%	40,7%	46,7%
Female	60%	59,3%	53,3%
Age			
Less than 25	4%	3,7%	96,7%
25-35	36%	74,1%	3,3%
35-45	36%	18,5%	-
45-55	24%	3,7%	-
Completed education			
High-school	12%	25,9%	100%
Undergraduate	56%	63%	-
Master or higher	32%	11,1%	-

Further, descriptive statistics information about the measures are presented in the Table 3.

Table 3: Sample descriptive statistics

Items	Mean	Std, Deviation
Eco-tourism consciousness		
I enjoy participating in outdoor activities.	1,95	0,77
I enjoy exploring new areas.	1,66	0,63
I approve hunting as a sport.	3,87	0,81
I prefer well-kept lawns to wild forest.		1,92
I prefer passive vacation in the nature.	2,18	0,80
I care if the lodge I am staying at protects the environment around it.	2,76	1,51
I think the environment is important but only if conserving it doesn't hurt the economy.	3,02	1,09
It is OK to hike off a trail.	3,46	1,14
Responsible/sustainable behavior		
I donate money to the conservation organizations.	3,76	0,98
I vote for elected officials who support environmental protection.	2,52	1,07
I write letters to legal representatives about environmental issues.	3,90	0,94
I participate in environmental organizations/rallies.	2,55	1,10
I avoid items because of their environmental impact.	2,33	1,13
I recycle at home/work.	2,63	0,99
I read about the environment.	1,95	0,93
Demographic variables		
Sex	0,57	0,50
Age	30,61	9,09
Education	2,65	0,71

Notes: n = 82

RESULTS

In order to test the hypotheses, we first aimed at establishing the relationship between eco-tourism consciousness and responsible/sustainable behavior at the overall sample. We used aggregated measure (average) for this purpose, and established that the two concepts are moderately correlated ($\rho = 0,410$, $p < 0,001$). Then we tested the directional effect by using the OLS regression (Table 4).

Table 4: Regression results

Independent variables	Model B(S.E.)
Eco-tourism consciousness	0,716 (0,177)***
<i>Sex</i>	-0,146(0,143) ^{NS}
<i>Age</i>	0,010 (0,008) ^{NS}
<i>Education</i>	0,142 (0,111) ^{NS}
R ²	0,23
F(df)	5,763(81)***

Notes: dependent variable = responsible/sustainable behavior; *** - $p < 0,001$; B = unstandardized regression coefficient, S.E. = standard error;

Regression results demonstrate that there eco-tourism consciousness has a strong and positive effect on responsible/sustainable behavior ($B = 0,716$, $p < 0,001$), regardless of demographics characteristics of respondents, since control variables of sex, age and education are not significant in the model. We can further conclude that eco-tourism

consciousness is able to solely explain relatively high percent of variance (23%). These results confirm our Hypothesis 1.

In order to test the Hypothesis 2, we conducted a multiple comparisons ANOVA test using a Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) method for multiple comparison, in order to include all pairwise differences between item-level means (controlling for the individual error rate) at the 5% significance level. Results are shown in Table 5. We might see that they vary in the consistency, and that out of 48 possible comparisons, 17 mean differences are significant. Furthermore, only 2 significant differences pertain to differences between tourism service providers (boards vs. agencies), while other noted differences are between providers and students' attitudes. In that sense, it could be noted that when it comes eco-tourism consciousness, it is mostly higher amongst students than amongst providers, while for the responsible/sustainable behavior it is vice-versa, tourism service providers (boards/agencies) exhibit higher level of means in responses to those items than students, e.g. with the statement "I participate in environmental organization/rallies" mean difference between tourism boards and students is 0,753 ($p < 0,05$), while between tourism agencies and students is 1,070 ($p < 0,05$) which shows that service providers are report more active behavior than students. However, due to the fact that results mix, we cannot confirm or reject our Hypothesis 2.

Table 5: Pairwise mean comparisons for three groups of tourism stakeholders

Dependent Variable	(I) GROUP	(J) GROUP	Mean Difference (I-J)	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
<i>Eco-tourism consciousness</i>					
I enjoy participating in outdoor activities.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	0,037	-0,39	0,47
		Students	0,100	-0,32	0,52
	Tourism agencies	Students	0,063	-0,35	0,47
	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	0,470**	0,13	0,80
I enjoy exploring new areas.		Students	0,073	-0,25	0,40
	Tourism agencies	Students	-0,396**	-0,72	-0,08
I approve hunting as a sport.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	0,145	-0,31	0,60
		Students	0,127	-0,32	0,57
	Tourism agencies	Students	-0,019	-0,45	0,41
I prefer well-kept lawns to wild forest.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	-0,043	-0,44	0,35
		Students	0,053	-0,33	0,44
	Tourism agencies	Students	0,096	-0,28	0,47
I prefer passive vacation in the nature.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	0,040	-0,39	0,47
		Students	-0,427**	-0,85	0,00
	Tourism agencies	Students	-0,467*	-0,88	-0,05
I care if the lodge I am staying at protects the environment around it.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	-0,096	-0,86	0,67
		Students	1,300**	0,56	20,04
	Tourism agencies	Students	1,396**	0,67	20,12
I think the environment is important but only if conserving it doesn't hurt the	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	0,053	-0,50	0,61
		Students	-0,880**	-10,42	-0,34
	Tourism agencies	Students	-0,933**	-10,47	-0,40

economy.	agencies				
It is OK to hike off a trail.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	0,369	-0,25	0,99
		Students	-0,287	-0,89	0,31
	Tourism agencies	Students	-0,656**	-10,24	-0,07
<i>Responsible/sustainable behavior</i>					
I donate money to the conservation organizations.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	0,673**	0,15	10,20
		Students	0,280	-0,23	0,79
	Tourism agencies	Students	-0,393	-0,89	0,11
I vote for elected officials who support environmental protection.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	-0,335	-0,92	0,25
		Students	0,180	-0,39	0,75
	Tourism agencies	Students	0,515	-0,04	10,07
I write letters to legal representatives about environmental issues.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	0,274	-0,23	0,78
		Students	0,567**	0,07	10,06
	Tourism agencies	Students	0,293	-0,19	0,78
I participate in environmental organizations/rallies.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	-0,317	-0,88	0,24
		Students	0,753**	0,21	10,30
	Tourism agencies	Students	1,070**	0,54	10,60
I avoid items because of their environmental impact.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	-0,313	-0,94	0,31
		Students	0,147	-0,46	0,76
	Tourism agencies	Students	0,459	-0,14	10,06
I recycle at home/work.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	0,216	-0,32	0,75
		Students	0,587**	0,06	10,11
	Tourism agencies	Students	0,370	-0,14	0,88
I read about the environment.	Tourism boards	Tourism agencies	-0,182	-0,68	0,32
		Students	0,407	-0,08	0,89
	Tourism agencies	Students	0,589**	0,11	10,07

Note: ** - $p < 0,05$; n(tourism boards) = 25, n(tourism agencies) = 27, n(students) = 30

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to provide additional evidence on the importance of eco-tourism and sustainable behavior, from the aspect of current and future tourism service providers. Since there is a trend of increased number of potential tourist who are interested in environmental responsibility, sustainability, “green offer” and ecological responsible offer and providers, gaining more insights into this issue represents a contribution in theoretical and practical terms.

When it comes to theoretical contribution, it is seen is developing and testing the link between eco-tourism consciousness and responsible/sustainable behavior of tourism service providers. Namely, most of the previous research has developed this link amongst tourists themselves, while this research had the goal to develop this link further and apply it to the supply side - tourism providers. Empirical evidence show that positive significant link exists and that the more conscious tourism providers are, more responsible/sustainable their behavior is in the terms of eco-tourism. Our further aim was to test whether there are differences in consciousness and behavior amongst different groups, in particular, between current service providers (tourism boards and tourism agencies) and future service providers (tourism stream students). We find that the results are mixed and that no consistent patterns could be confirmed, however, that student group has higher eco-tourism consciousness,

which could be attributed to their natural belonging to the "new", "Millennial" generation that is proven to be more conscious. However, when it comes to the concrete behavior reported, tourism boards and agencies representatives show higher degree of concrete activity than students.

Having the above stated in mind, a concrete managerial implication would be to increase trainings and education on the topic of eco-tourism consciousness for the employees of tourism service providers organizations, while on the other hand, to improve or boost participation in different kinds of actions that pertain to responsible and sustainable behavior for students.

This research is not without its limitations. A primary limitation is in the sample size which limits the generalizability of the results. Hence, this study may serve only as the pilot one with preliminary evidences on the topic, while for the more conclusive results a wider study should be conducted. Furthermore, in order to gain a full perspective on the topic, tourists themselves should be included in the research design and results joining both sides should be presented, since it would be interesting to see how different aspects of service providers' behavior affect tourists.

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