

Sustainability in the eyes of the tourists - results from a recent survey in Germany

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Abstract (preconference version)

Consumer Behavior matters when it comes to sustainability in tourism. Most sustainable objectives would be reached easier if tourists shared the basic ideas of sustainability. Given the different challenges tourism will have to face in the future, sustainability seems to be at least a very good idea. But sustainability, in general and in tourism, is a difficult concept and in several ways a questionable issue. Definitions are broad and – at a closer look - not very convincing. It's about choosing options with no or with lower risks for the world as it is and for the future, it's about fairness and respect. Problems include the relational character of the concept, the requirement of a holistic view which seems to be unfeasible in real life, and the impossibility of identifying "sustainable" behavior with objective criteria. These problems do not mean that sustainability is a bad thing - but a difficult concept. Nevertheless, nowadays sustainability is a core part of many development strategies in tourism. The direction is clear: Less impact, smaller footprints. And one of the main success factors is the consumer. Thus, one has to take into account the consumers' perspective.

In a recent survey ["Reiseanalyse 2014", random sample with n = 7,500 face-to-face interviews, more information on www.reiseanalyse.de] we have studied German tourists, their awareness, beliefs, attitudes, and motivation with respect to sustainability. All these are antecedents of behavior, individual sign posts in the travel information, choice and decision process. They may be an obstacle or a facilitator for a more sustainable tourism development in a destination or in a tourist segment.

Results show that sustainability is an issue for German tourists, both with respect to ecology and social responsibility. But not for everybody: Around one third want their holidays to be ecologically sound and resource- and environmental-friendly and/or socially responsible, respectively. On the other end of the scale, another third does not see any relevance of these aspects with respect to their vacation trips. On one hand, sustainability is important for a huge part of tourists, and this should be reflected in travel products. On the other hand, the majority of tourists seem not to see the point. Is there a chance for some sort of education? Or a need?

With deeper analyses of the data we hope to gain a better understanding of the different travel consumers' backgrounds. So we tried segmentation (behavior based as well as attitude based) and asked additional questions (e.g. on perceived responsibility and with respect to acceptance of behavior options labeled as "sustainable").

Results live on stage in Innsbruck!