Developing a Typology of Green Tourists. Empirical Study From Romania

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Abstract: *This study seeks to develop a typology of tourists according to their attitude and behaviour in relation to the natural environment. A survey was conducted on a sample of tourists in one of the representative natural tourist areas of Romania based on a face-to-face questionnaire. The typology of green tourists has been created based on 28 items measuring consumer or participatory behaviour. The study provides a segmentation of tourists into three eco-types: eco-destructive, eco-impartial, and eco-involved. These segments were analysed by gender, age and level of studies in order to observe specific similarities or differences set for each criterion. The main findings on the impact of tourist activity on the environment underline the importance for tourists to be more careful and concerned about solving the environment and enhancing green behaviour.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Starting with the second half of the twentieth century, people have become more interested in their holiday destinations (Seddighi & Theocharous, 2002), turning tourism into one of the most important business activities worldwide (Suhel & Bashir, 2018; Lew, 2011). At that time also started the expansion of green and ecotourism practices (He, He & Xu, 2018; Cheung & Jim, 2013). Nowadays, there is a significant global tourism flow to natural areas, as well as to less-known or unusual destinations that are perceived as exotic (Rainero & Modarelli, 2020).

In this context, green tourism has mainly been an appeal for the inhabitants of big urban agglomerations (He, He, & Xu, 2018). People practising this type of tourism appreciate more ecotourism products, and could be seen in parks and natural reservations in different parts of the globe (Stefanica & Vlavian-Gurmeza, 2010). Also, they try to integrate themselves into a natural environment without bringing any harm to it through their tourist activities.

This study aims to develop a typology of tourists considering their attitude towards environment as it is reflected in their behaviour in relation to nature. Specifically, it aims to outline an index-based typology of tourists (ECO-AT-BEHAV –ECOlogical-ATtitudes-BEHAViour), built using the responses of the interviewed subjects and to define the profile of segments/categories/ types of tourists by age, gender and level of studies.

To reach the aims of this study, after the introductory section, the literature review overviews studies on green attitudes and behaviour of tourism consumers, and presents several typologies found in the literature. Then, the authors describe the data and the research methodology. Finally, the empirical study results are presented and discussed. The paper ends with the most impor-

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tant conclusions which are used to provide guidelines for increasing the awareness of tourists for enhancing green behaviour. Additionally, the study discusses the research limitations and future lines of research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Green behaviour is a set of attitudes, actions, habits, manners and customs that characterise the daily conduct of an individual (Kaiser & Gutscher, 2003). This definition views green behaviour as a character trait. Green behaviour interferes with green attitudes (Gaspar, 2013). According to Arnold et al. (2018), behaviour is a cognitive, affective and voluntary manifestation that is rooted in opinions, moods and manners. It is an outcome of learning that takes place in formal (school), informal (family) and non-formal (organisations, mass-media) environments.

According to Ştefănica & Butnaru (2013), a significant role in the education of tourists is played by the development of behaviour codes and guides showing tourists what they should do or not for not harming the environment when they practise tourism (Li & Wu, 2020).

The literature on the field presents several typologies of tourists, which focused on the relationships of tourists with the environment, being built over time using such segmentation criteria as perceptions of environment (Holden, 2000), motivation for going on a holiday (Theobald, 1998), behaviour and requests (Tapper and Cochrane, 2005).

Holden (2000) develops a typology of tourists by their perception of the environment:
The environment viewed as a stage for practising tourist activities – tourists consciously or subconsciously disregard the environment and show lack of interest for learning and understanding more about it;
The environment viewed as a social system – tourists perceiving the environment as a place where they can interact with family and friends;
The environment seen as an emotional territory – tourists perceive the environment as an important part of tourist experience making they have strong feelings;
The environment blended with the tourist – the tourists are deeply concerned about the environment and any harm caused to it is perceived as their own.
Theobald (1998) describes four behavioural types of tourists segmented by their motivation to go on a holiday, which are specific to destinations with intense natural attractions:
Hardcore (kind) – tourists interested in protecting nature, feeding animals, planting trees (for ex., researchers);
Dedicated – tourists visiting protected areas and wishing to understand the local cultural and natural history;
Mainstream (unusual) – tourists visiting unusual, strange destinations (the Amazon, Rwanda national Park, etc.);
Casual (occasional) – tourists taking part in such travels occasionally as part of their holidays.

Tapper and Cochrane (2005) develop a typology of tourists by motivation, behaviour and requests. They developed the following classification of tourists:
Explorer – the tourist researching nature, an individualist, a loner, an adventurer, not asking for special conditions;
Backpacker – the tourist whose holiday could be interpreted as a travel experience, a long-time traveller;

Backpacker plus – the tourist wishing to get as much knowledge as possible about nature and interested in getting professional information, open to spending more, who belongs to the category of highly-paid professionals;

High Volume – the tourist enjoying nature if it is easy to reach, lacking travelling experience, who prefers to travel in a big group with over the average income;

General Interest – the tourist for whom nature and wildlife, and the culture are a passion, who travels alone, using well-set itineraries arranged by specialised travel agencies, and prefers security and the company of a big group of tourists;

Special Interest – the tourist for whom nature is a hobby or is a subject of research, adventurous, travels alone or in a group, needs special facilities and services (specialised guides), accepts lower comfort.

3. DATA AND METHODS

To conduct this study, we opted for a survey carried out using a questionnaire applied to Romanian tourists. The sample is divided by gender – 47,8% male respondents and 52,2% female respondents, most aged between 55 and 65, and by level of study, most respondents having secondary or undergraduate education.

A green typology of tourists was built using the following algorithm:

Step 1: For each item on the attitude and behaviour of tourists in their relationship with the environment (consumption and participatory behaviour), the responses have been grouped into the following three categories: (a) – high and very high; (b)- moderate; (c) – not at all or little;

Step 2: For each of the 26 items, we calculated the frequencies of responses for the three response categories;

Step 3: The responses were aggregated for the entire set of items and therefore the ECO-AT-BEHAV index was created.

Step 4: We calculated the frequency of the responses for the three response categories of the following items: *The environment should be protected even if it brings high economic costs* and *the development of economy should be a priority even if the environment could be harmed*

Step 5: Based on the frequencies of the ECO-AT-BEHAV index and of the two items considered in Step 4, the respondents have been classified into three groups of tourists: ***eco-destructive (uninterested), eco-impartial (neutral), and eco-involved (supporters)*** (see Table 1).

Table 1. ECO – AT – BEHAV index

Items	Eco-destructive %	Eco-impartial %	Eco-involved %
Your tourist activities lead to the destruction of biodiversity	10,4(a)	21,3(b)	64,8(c)
Your tourist activities lead to water pollution	20,3(a)	17,3(b)	61,9(c)
Your tourist activities lead to air pollution	21,7(a)	22,2(b)	55,6(c)
Your tourist activities lead to noise pollution	11,4(a)	28,2(b)	59,4(c)
Your tourist activities lead to more waste	31,7(a)	16,3(b)	52(c)
Your tourist activities lead to depletion of natural resources	14,4(a)	21,8(b)	62,4(c)
You generally travel by car or by bus	65,4(a)	22,3(b)	12,4(c)
You generally travel by plane	8,7(a)	11,2(b)	80,2(c)
Would you go to your destination by bike or public transportation to reduce the carbon footprint	31,8(c)	20,9(b)	46,8(a)

Are you careful not to destroy plants?	1,5(c)	22,9(b)	75,6(a)
Are you careful not to disturb animals?	5,5(c)	22,4(b)	72,1(a)
You are not making noise	11,4(c)	34,3(b)	54,2(a)
You do not leave waste behind	2(c)	6,9(b)	91,1(a)
You put waste in specifically designated places	1,5(c)	4,9(b)	93,6(a)
You do not make fire, you do not smoke	17,4(c)	28,9(b)	53,7(a)
You do not go in nature by car	38,8(c)	33,3(b)	17,8(a)
You protect the areas protected under law	3,5(c)	15,5(b)	80,5(a)
Have you taken part in actions protecting the environment?	24,4(c)	38,3(b)	37,3(a)
Would you pay at destination an eco-fee to reduce the carbon footprint?	31(c)	33(b)	35(a)
Would you transfer 1% of your income tax to protect the environment?	35,8(c)	20,4(b)	43,3(a)
Have you participated in tree planting?	27,8(c)	37,6(b)	34,1(a)
Do you collect waste selectively?	22,3(c)	32,2(b)	45,5(a)
Do you reduce, reuse and recycle when it is possible?	25,6(c)	31(b)	42,9(a)
Do you save energy?	19,3(c)	39,1(b)	41,6(a)
You save energy/do not waste energy	21,3(c)	34,2(b)	44,5(a)
Would you pay more for the services of an eco-hotel?	27,2(c)	39,6(b)	20,8(a)
ECO – AT – BEHAV index	20,47	25,23	53,04
The environment should be protected even if it brings high economic costs	1,5(c)	23,6(b)	74,4(a)
The development of economy should be a priority even if the environment could be harmed	16(a)	40,8(b)	43,3(c)
Eco-types	12,66	29,88	56,91

Note: (a) – percentage of tourists who responded high/very high to the asked questions; (b) – percentage of tourists who responded moderate to the asked questions; (c) – percentage of tourists who responded not at all or little to the asked questions.

Source: Authors' calculation

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By the attitude and behaviour of tourists towards the environment that is reflected by the responses to the questionnaire questions, we segmented the studied population into three eco-types:

1. **Eco-destructive (uninterested)** – the tourists who believe that economic development should be done no matter how much the environment is affected, and whose attitude and behaviour lead to the worsening of the environmental problems;
2. **Eco-impartial (neutral)** – the tourists with a neutral attitude towards environmental issues and who have a moderate behaviour in their relation with nature;
3. **Eco-involved (supporters)** – the tourists saying that the environment should be protected even if it means high economic costs and an-environmentally friendly behaviour.

The structure of the sample according to the three ecotypes are shown in Figure 1 (a). At first sight, the environment seems to be a concern for more than a half of the studied tourists who are willing to get involved in actions that could have an impact on environmental protection. Still, we believe that the results should be interpreted with caution as Romanian tourists believe that the positive effect on the environment is more a collateral benefit than their main motivation for engaging in such activities.
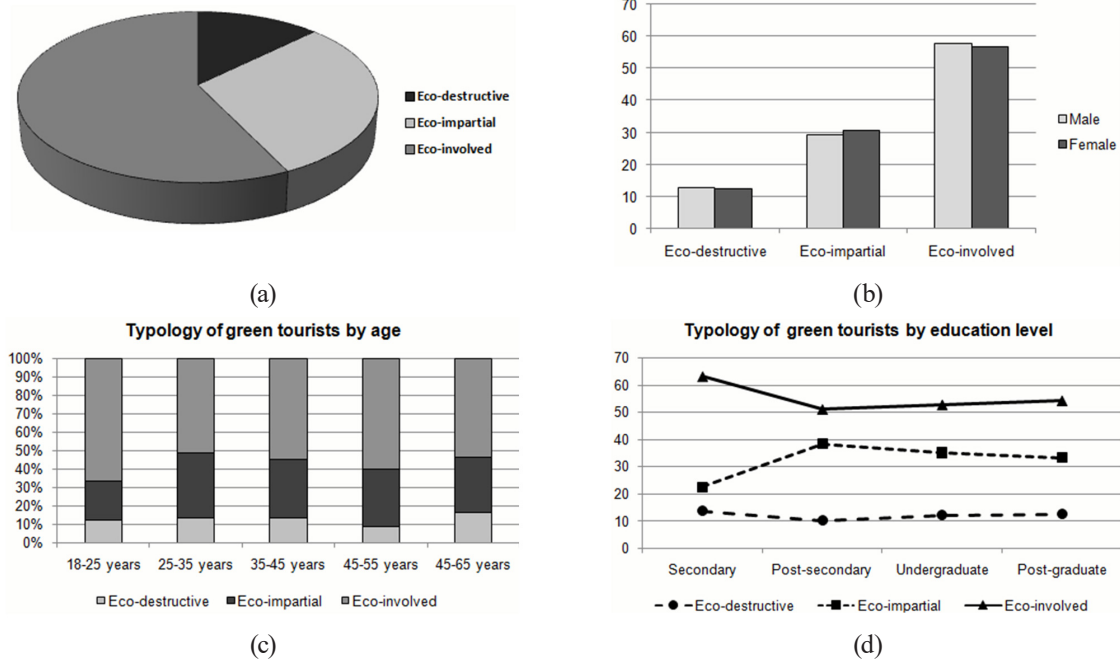
Figure 1. Typology of green tourists (a) – overall sample;
(b) – by gender; (c) – by age; (d) – by education level
Source: Authors' calculation with SPSS and Excel

As for the gender of respondents, it could be noted that the differences in attitudes and behaviour are insignificant (Figure 1 (b)). In other words, the distribution between eco-types remains the same for women and men.

The three eco-types slightly differ by age of tourists (Figure 1 (c)). Nevertheless, more involved are the subjects aged between 18 and 25, and more impartial are the ones aged between 25-35, and less destructive are the subjects aged between 45-55.

As for the typology of green tourists by level of studies (see Figure 1 (d)), we observe that the share of the eco-involved individuals is higher among the subjects with secondary education, while the subjects with post-secondary, undergraduate and post-graduate education are more eco-partial. Such results could be explained in two ways: all types have been equally influenced by the same message delivered by the media and have developed awareness of the environmental protection, although no category has committed to what it calls for.

5. FUTURE LINES OF RESEARCH

A future line of research could repeat the study in a couple of years as to discover the changes that might appear in the attitudes and behaviour of tourists towards the environment. Also, the study could be extended as to include other tourist areas that are rich in natural resources, which may enable us to make a cross-national comparison of tourists and identify similarities and differences in their attitudes towards the environment. Also, another line of research could focus on developing a green typology of accommodation facilities, which could show the degree to which these get involved in solving the environmental problems. It would be interesting to discover the attitude of local public authorities or local communities towards the environmental protection in specific tourist areas.

6. CONCLUSION

From a theoretical perspective, the conducted study is a contribution to the literature in the field as it suggested a classification of tourists considering their attitude towards the environment, and the behaviour they adopt when spending holidays in areas rich in natural resources.

In conclusion, we believe that this phenomenon could be explained in two ways: all types of tourists have been equally influenced by the same message delivered by the media and have developed awareness of environmental protection, although no category has committed to what it calls for. Also, considering the above factors, it is apparent that only by increasing environmental responsibility and engaging all stakeholders: tourists, authorities, mass-media, etc., the relation with the environment could become sustainable and solutions could be found for the environmental problems.

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