



Sustainable Tourism Development: Exploring the Relationship of Travel Agents' Education and Experience to Their Attitudes on Environmental Issues

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Abstract

This study explored the nature of environmental attitudes of travel agents and investigated the relationship of educational level and business experience to their views on 27 environment related issues that are connected with sustainability. Data were collected from 1620 travel agents in Turkey. It was found that considerable numbers of travel agents had environmentally friendly views in respect to the factors contributing to the environmental problems, outcomes of environmental protection activities, importance of environmental criteria and environmental sensitivity of public sector, private sector and NGOs. Chi-square analyses to test the two hypotheses did not provide support for all 27 items. However, travel agents with higher education and long business experience in tourism sector hold generally more sensitive views toward environmental issues and sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism; travel agents; environmental attitudes; education; business experience.

Introduction

This study investigates the opinions of Turkish travel agents in terms of sustainable environmental practices. The basic theoretical framework of the study is based on the concept of sustainable tourism that is not a certain type of tourism, but a theoretical approach which is based on the conceptual framework of environmental, socio-cultural and economic sustainability that (a) encompasses optimal use of environmental resources so that next generations will not be negatively affected, (b) respects and conserves cultural heritage and traditional values of host communities, (c) contribute to international understanding and tolerance, (d) ensure viable, long term economic operations while providing socio-economic benefits to parties involved and alleviating poverty. This theoretical paradigm has its roots in the development theory of modernization. The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) provides the basic principles of sustainability as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to

meet their own needs". Hence, the theoretical approach of sustainable tourism is a framework of understanding, behaviour and business practice for all parties involved. However, principles have no meaning in terms of inducing change in prevailing opinions and practices if they are not used or used only for image making or false justification. Significant change can only result from genuine recognition of the present and future problems, adaptation of sustainable principles and sufficient involvement in environmental actions initiated or supported by leading parties such as the tourism sector, governments and local and international nongovernmental organizations. Regarding the industrial side of the issue, the nature and success of sustainable environmental management in tourism depend on the character of organizational structure, managerial opinions, attitudes, commitment, responsibilities, policies, daily practices, and procedures and use of resources that lead to achieve and maintain specific environmental conditions. Furthermore, the effective co-operation of all the stakeholders including suppliers, intermediaries, public sector, private sector, tourists and NGOs play crucial roles. Regarding travel agents and tour operators, their modes of daily practices can enhance or restrict environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts. It also means that the nature of daily business practices of travel agents and tour operators and determinants of the practices ranging from opinions to personal interests are important not only in terms of their contribution to sustainability efforts, but also in terms of studying their characters, roles and effects.

Tourism sector as one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world occupies vital place in local and global sustainability: It grew about 3% in 2011. International tourist arrivals grew by nearly 4% in 2011 to 983 million (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2012). Travel & Tourism's total contribution in 2011 was 6.3 trillion dollars in GDP, 255 million jobs, 743 billion dollars in investment and 1.2 trillion dollars in exports. This contribution represented 9% of GDP, 1 in 12 jobs, 5% of investment and 5% of exports. Longer-term prospects are even more positive with annual growth forecast to be 4% over the ten years to 2022. (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2012:11). According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (2012) in 1994, there were 6.670 million visitors, generating revenues of 4.321 million dollars, which had almost quadrupled by 2011 to 31.456,76 and an estimated revenue of 17.798 million dollars.

As the tourism sector continues to grow at fast rate, there is an ever-increasing interest in learning the structural character, sustainability of daily practices and environmental impacts of the sector. Such interest has been boosted by the experiences of negative effects on destinations and danger signals for the future sustainability. Then, environmental outcome of tourism sector has formed a part of the global agenda of management and sustainability and the need for sustainable tourism and development (Torres-Delgado and Palomeque, 2012; Budeanu, 2009).

Meantime, impacts of travel agents and tour operators on the environment have emerged as main topic of long debates (Curtin and Wilkes, 2005; Jackson, 2007; Kasim, 2007; Seales and Stein, 2012; Erdogan, 2012). Travel agents and tour operators are expected to play significant role in the sustainability of environment and tourism sector, because (a) they occupy crucial positions in this process, acting as information brokers between tourists and tourist destinations, and (b) their businesses are diverse and the way in which they manage suppliers depends on the size of business, nature of destination, type of product and the character of market. Consequently, all these factors influence the extent of practices of sustainability. Since travel agents and tour operators are the central link in the distribution/supply chain of the package holiday (Uygur and

Turgut, 2012) and since they make the connection between the service providers and tourists, their position, buttressed by prevailing economic trends toward horizontal, vertical and diagonal integration, market segmentation and globalization, present them enormous potential to influence the decisions of tourists and service providers (Baloglu and Mangalolu, 2001; Cavlek, 2002, Seales and Stein, 2012). They influence business operations such as facilities, operational management and strategies, including pricing, product policies and promotional activities (Aguilo et al., 2001; Medina-Munoz et al., 2003). As Trivun et al., point out (2008:175) they “create final product to be offered to market, transforming attractions and services into products with tailored personality. Specialization in this field of travel has changed the structure of travel industry and hospitality”. All these issues, in addition to aggressive competition and prevailing policies, create the basis for attributing to them many of the undesirable impacts of tourism development and sustainability problems. They are frequently considered responsible for the intensive and most often uneven development of tourism and threat to sustainability (Bianchi, 2004; Bastakis et al., 2004; Budeanu, 2005; Cavlek, 2002; Dodds and Kuehnel, 2010). However, they think/claim that they are not ones which cause conspicuous large-scale damage to the environment (Miller, 2001). Probably due to such self-perceptions as well as profit maximization motives and managerial opinions, they have been fairly slow to respond to the need for environmental management.

The tourism sector has also been increasingly affected by changes taking place in environmental laws, issues and practices. 1990s and 2000s have witnessed remarkable changes in the business and regulatory environments, which have placed corporate social responsibility firmly on the business agenda (Cramer, 2005), and travel agents and tour operators are not excluded (Schwartz et al., 2008). Particularly when linked to sustainable tourism development, there has been an increasing demand for managerial policies and daily practices to be assessed for environmental consequences (Claver-Cortes et al., 2007; Sigala, 2008). Debates, as well as initiatives, have long been started about the environmental responsibilities, protection policies and practices in the developed countries, and gradually spread to the developing nations. A growing number of studies have dealt with the impacts of tourism development on sustainability and environmental quality, including effects related to diminished biodiversity, erosion, pollution, degradation of water and other natural resources and human health (Erdogan, 2009; Kasim, 2007; Seales and Stein, 2012; Sigala, 2008). It is also recognized that the important steps towards environmental action are the proper managerial opinions, attitudes, formal adoption of a written policy and daily practices based on sustainability. A great deal of studies has been devoted to the assessment of environmental opinions, attitudes, perceptions and concerns (Bohdanowicz, 2006; Dodd and Kuehnel, 2010; Weaver and Lawton, 2004), because opinions, attitudes, perceptions and concerns on environment and tourist destinations are important indicators for managerial policies that shape their daily practices that are intimately related with environmental protection and sustainability.

Despite the mounting studies, there is a continuing need for research on the indicators of sustainability such as sensitivity training of managers and employees, proper policy formations and implementations, and assessment of and changes in views and practices in the tourism sector all over the world. Environmental views and attitudes have been widely assumed to lead to environmentally conscious behaviour. It is

generally accepted that opinions and attitudes of travel agents and tour operators affect the nature of their own decisions and relations, and consequently effect the natural and human environment (Erdogan, 2012). However, research results regarding the relationship between views/attitudes and behaviour are inconsistent. While numerous research results have provided support for the existence of causal relationship between environmental views/attitudes and prevailing practices/environmental behaviours (Weaver and Lawton, 2002), others have come up with different results (Bamberg, 2003; Mohai, 2003). It is generally accepted that those who engage in environmental action tend to possess environmental knowledge, awareness, concern and proper views/attitudes, but these factors themselves do not always lead to appropriate environmental action (Olli et al., 2001; Pelletier et al., 2006), because there are situational and personal variables (such as commitment, capacity, self and corporate interests, cost and benefit) that affect causal ties (Bamberg, 2003; Iwata, 2004).

The growth and diversification of tourism market has also resulted in an expansion of travel agencies in terms of increasing number of agencies and types of services they provide. The role of travel agencies in many countries has changed from the traditional reservations job to offering travel and promotion packages for clients, and advice and consultancy services for corporations (Alamdari, 2002; Chu, 2001), product sourcing, purchasing process management, and accounts payable management (Tsai et al., 2005; Uygur and Turgut, 2012). Travel agencies/operators supposedly have certain roles compatible with high principles of sustainable tourism: They are expected to provide services without causing ecological, social, cultural and economical damages. The sector commonly views environmental concerns as both a constraint and an opportunity. Travel agents/operators belong to those groups who are responsible for policy formulation, communication and the operational management of tourism destinations, thus, they are expected to understand the complex interplay of the forces that are at work to conserve tourism resources (Herzberg, 2006).

Development in tourism sector has always been considered as an academic and public policy issue in Turkey, too. Turkey has rich natural, historical and cultural resources for tourism activities that are steadily increasing in number and scope. Besides mass tourism, demand for nature-based tourism, especially botanical tourism, highland tourism, rafting, and bird watching have increased in 2000s (Alaeddinoglu and Can, 2011; Erdogan, 2009; Kozak and Martin, 2012). Yet, studies in environmental practices and performance of tourism agencies in terms of sustainability are rather new and limited in quantity and quality in Turkey. That is why there are lots of areas to be studied in sustainability issues in Turkey and similar countries. The present study is designed to provide new insights to the prevailing issues, add new information to the accumulated knowledge and help in closing the gap in the research needs in Turkey. Since there is no comprehensive study on the views and practices of travel agents in Turkey, we need to know character of their views on environmental issues before we engage in constructing relational and causal/inferential study designs. Firstly, we should know the views/opinions, attitudes, justifications or rationale behind the daily business practices in order to provide any explanation about sustainability. Based on this need for knowing, the following research question was put forward: What are the views of the travel agents in Turkey about the environment related issues?

Sustainability can only be achieved through proper industrial practices that are outcome of decisions of those managers with certain type of views and education. The

previous studies highlight the importance of education as an important factor related to the nature of views and attitudes (Bastakis et al., 2004; Garrigos-Simon, 2008), sensitivity to the environment and strategic responses to it in decision-making process (Tihanyi et al., 2000) and effective management for survival and growth (Bayraktaroglu and Kutanis, 2003; Sullivan, 2000). Character and lack of education are seen as significant determinants for reluctance to explore new methods and the poor use of knowledge in management (Bastakis et al., 2004). Besides education, some studies focus on the importance of work experience as variable that affects managerial views, attitudes, knowledge, decision and success (Garrigos-Simon, 2008; Seibert and Kraimer, 2001). Managers acquire the understanding of competencies and strategies needed for advancement in business and develop a capacity for better decision making and interpretation through education and experience (Herremans et al., 2005; Song et al., 2002). Besides education, business experience can increase knowledge of the destination and need for environmental protection and sustainable development, supportive attitudes towards resource management issues, environmental behavioural intentions and philanthropic support of conservation. However, some studies found that experience can act against knowledge, change and creativity (Geletkanycz and Black, 2001; Sullivan, 2000). Based on such accumulated knowledge about the relationship of socio-demographic variables to self-identified positions on environmental issues (Theodori and Luloff, 2002), the following hypothesis connecting the education and business experience with the environment-related views: Education and business experience are positively related to the views about environmental issues. Hence, travel agents with higher education are expected to hold more sensitive views on environmental issues. Similarly, those who have more experience in the sector expected to differ in their opinions from those who have less experience, since they have more experience and are aware of heightened expectations in environmental practices.

This study was designed as exploratory research to explore the characteristics of views of Turkish travel agents on selected environmental issues and as bivariate relational research to test the relationship of education and business experience with the views of travel agents. It is designed to make contribution to the accumulated knowledge on the subject studied, provide new information to sharpen our understanding of the pathways and mechanisms through which well-planned tourism activities can build conservation support, improve sector's and tourists' connectivity to environment and ultimately improve the sustainability of human race, environment and tourism on earth. Because, knowledge on the views and practices of travel agents and tour operator can help the interested parties gain insights into the nature of prevailing business practices, and thus identify important issues related to policy and strategy formulation and developing new capabilities geared towards sustainable tourism.

Method

Study Population and Sampling

In accordance with The Law Concerning Travel Agencies and the Association of Travel Agencies (Law no 1618) travel agencies are divided into three groups according to the services they provide: Group (A) Agencies offer and perform all services specified in Article 1 of the Law. Group (B) agencies sell tickets for international land, sea and air transport and tours arranged by (A) group travel agencies. Group (C) agencies organize and sell domestic tours for Turkish citizens. Group (B) and (C)

agencies can also carry out the services which are entrusted to them by (A) group travel agencies (Association of Turkish Travel Agencies, 2012). Study population was comprised of 4602 group (A) agencies that were listed in Association of Turkish Travel Agencies web page. Group B agencies legally cannot organize tourism activities, thus, these agencies were excluded from the population. The list of travel agencies in the Association's web site was used to determine the sample frame which is 4602. Sample size of 1578 was calculated at the .02 confidence interval (margin of error) and .05 confidence levels. 42 agencies (about 3 % nonresponse, non-access or unavailability rate) were added for any unexpected data collection problem. Thus, the sample size was comprised of 1620 agencies. The systematic random sample of 1620 agencies was selected from the list of 4602 for the study.

Measurement and Analysis

The data collection was performed by means of questionnaire. The content of questionnaire was formed according to the aim of study. It was also based on a comprehensive literature review. It was comprised of 22 closed-ended questions and divided into some functional sections: The first section of the questionnaire aimed to identify some of the basic characteristics of the travel agencies (agency data) and respondents (respondent data). The agency data included (a) age of establishment which was measured by the year it was founded; (b) number of branches, number of employees and type of (domestic and foreign) tourists served. The respondent data included (a) education which was categorized under two groups and (b) business experience which was measured by number of years worked as travel agent. The second section of the questionnaire was related to the types and extent of tourism service the agencies provide. The third section of the questionnaire dealt with the existence of a formal written policy on the environment, the number of personnel assigned for the environmental practices, membership to NGOs and environmental awards received. The fourth section of the questionnaire sought the views of the travel agents on four issues: (1) factors contributing environmental problems, (2) probable outcomes of environmental protection activities, (3) importance given to environmental management criteria in tourism accommodations, and (4) environmental concern of public sector, private sector and NGOs. The specific statements were used in order to measure the views of the travel agents. Each statement was rated on an ordinal scale. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each statement corresponds to their personal views by circling the appropriate number on the scale. Regarding the research question, frequency distributions were used to explore the views of the travel agents in Turkey about the environment related issues. Testing the hypothesis was done by means of chi-square test since all of the measurements were either categorical or ordinal. Pearson product moment correlation (r) was used for the statistical significance at .05 level.

Findings

This section was structured according to the research question and hypothesis. The first subsection presents findings in order to provide answer to the exploratory research question: What are the views of the travel agents in Turkey about the environment related issues? The second and third sections introduce findings on the relationship of educational and business experience to the views of travel agents according to the bivariate hypothesis that posited positive relations with each indicator tested.

Findings on the Research Question

Agency: The oldest travel agency in the sample was established in 1939. The great majority of agencies (85.2%) were established in 1990s (43.8%) and 2000s (41.4%). Only a small percent (12.4%) were older than 20 years. Of all agencies, 55.6% have only single office (main office), 72.2% has two, 92.5% has five and 97.2% has ten offices. Only 6.7% agencies have over 10 offices operating in different locations. Nearly half of the agencies employ less than six persons (45.9%). Three thirds (74.6%) employ up to ten and only 10 % employs over 20 persons. Close to one-third (30.4%) of the agencies have no person in charge of environmental protection. Although 62.9% reported one personnel in charge, in all cases, this is still an additional duty, typically for managers, salesperson, technical, administrative or tour staff.

Travel agents: On the whole, majority of agents were well educated: 2.1% primary school, 31.5% secondary school, 3.7% two year vocational school and 62.6% college level. Considerable majority of travel agents (24.5% five years and 44.1% six to ten years) have been working in the sector not more than 10 years. Only 5% have over 20 years work experience.

Existence of environmental policy: In respect to existence of environmental policy, travel agents have very poor record: Of the respondents, 88.3% reported to have no environmental programs, 89.9% have no budget allocated for environmental protection, 91.6% have no membership to any environmental NGOs and 96.4% have received no award for any environmental management.

On the factors contributing to environmental problems: Findings shown in Table 1 demonstrate that majority of respondents think that all seven factors contribute to environmental problems to a considerable extent. When ranked according to the extent of contribution to the environmental problems, “non-enforcement of environmental laws” (75.6%) has the highest contribution as much to very much, followed by “Inadequate environmental education” (74.3%).

Table 1. Views about the factors that contribute to environmental problems

Factors	N	Extent of contribution (%)				
		Very little	Little	Medium	Much	Very much
Inadequacy of environmental education	1535	2.5	4.7	18.6	33.6	40.7
Inadequacy of environmental awareness of tourists	1511	10.6	13.9	29.9	28.4	17.2
Inadequacy of environ. awareness of enterprises	1524	3.0	7.5	27.0	35.1	27.4
Inadequacy of environmental laws	1522	2.6	5.5	26.3	35.8	29.8
Non-enforcement of environmental laws	1517	1.7	5.0	19.6	38.3	37.3
Concern with cost of environmental management	1496	3.1	8.9	26.5	35.2	26.3
Insensitivity of local administration	1441	2.2	6.0	24.7	36.3	30.8

On the outcomes of environmental protection activities: Most respondents agreed that environmental protection activities are important for the future of tourism sector (88.6%), do not hinder the development of economy” (72.5%), make positive effect on marketing (71.6%) and do not deprive local population of their livelihood (66.3%). However, the differences decrease in respect to the statements indicating that environmental protection activities “create competitive advantage” (33.0% agree and 19.6% strongly agree) and “engender financial burdens” (15.3% agree and 9.7% strongly agree) (Table 2).

Table 2. Views on the outcome of environmental protection activities

Statements	N	Distribution of responses (%) ^a				
		1	2	3	4	5
Environmental protection activities:						
Create competitive advantage	1461	5.7	13.8	27.9	33.0	19.6
Engender financial burdens	1478	13.8	34.4	26.8	15.3	9.7
Make positive effect in marketing	1482	3.0	5.6	19.8	41.0	30.6
Deprive local people of their livelihood	1465	35.8	30.5	18.4	9.1	6.1
Hinder the development of economy	1469	42.8	29.7	13.5	8.6	5.4
Are important for the future of tourism sector	1489	2.1	3.0	6.2	21.8	66.8

^a 1= Strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neutral 4=agree 5=strongly agree

On the importance of environmental criteria in tourism accommodations: Majority of respondents consider all 10 environmental criteria important (Table 3). Most respondents consider that criteria related with air pollution (71.9%), noise (78.8%), facility architecture (67.9%), blue flag project (74.6%) and contribution to local life (65.7%) are important for environmental concerns. However, when it comes to type of energy used, energy saving activities and building-construction materials used, the extent of importance decreases.

Table 3. Views concerning the importance of environmental criteria in tourism accommodations

Environmental criteria	N	Distribution of responses (%) ^a				
		1	2	3	4	5
Wastewater treatment	1446	3.7	9.5	25.1	32.6	29.1
Air pollution in destination	1439	1.7	5.8	20.6	40.4	31.5
Separation of paper, plastic, metal, glass, organic waste	1390	4.4	12.6	33.7	29.2	20.1
Type of energy used	1406	5.2	12.2	33.0	32.3	17.3
Energy saving activities	1406	6.6	13.4	32.5	30.0	17.4
Noise control in the facility	1437	1.4	3.7	16.1	39.7	39.1
Building-construction materials used	1411	6.1	11.1	31.5	31.2	20.1
Environmental suitability of hotel architecture	1429	2.8	5.2	20.1	37.9	34.0
Blue Flag project	1435	2.7	5.2	17.6	32.0	42.6
Socio-economic contribution to the local community	1223	2.5	7.8	24.1	36.0	29.7

^a 1=very unimportant 2=unimportant 3=moderate 4=important 5=very important

Agents' self-evaluations of their own environmental practices: Managers generally view their agency's daily practices as environmentally sensitive and in the direction of environmental protection (Table 4). The negative evaluations in all 16 items range from 5.6% (sensitivity towards local life and traditions) to 40.0% (existence of environmental information in their brochures). The great majority of them (81.8%) think that their daily company practices do not have negative impacts on environment. Similarly, they state that they are sensitive to environment in their tours to protected areas (76.9%) and they have positive effects in social (67.2%) and economic (64.7%) development of destinations. On the other hand, significant number of them report that they do not participate in environmental meetings (36.5%) and do not provide environmental training to their personnel (28.6%).

Table 4. Agency managers' self-evaluation of their environmental practices

Environmental practices	N	Distribution of responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
We are sensitive to local life and traditions	1501	2.5	3.1	15.7	39.2	39.4
We are sensitive to environment in our tours to protected areas	1525	3.1	4.0	16.0	39.5	37.4
Our activities have positive effects on social development of destinations	1482	3.8	6.3	22.7	36.7	30.5
Our activities have positive effects on economic development of destinations	1482	5.3	6.3	23.8	37.0	27.7
We employ local people in our tours	1489	7.5	12.6	27.2	30.3	22.5
We encourage tourist to use public transportation	1479	10.8	12.7	27.7	31.0	17.8
Our agency contributes to the environmental protection of destinations	1526	7.5	11.1	37.0	32.4	12.0
We convey the views of tourists to our personnel	1464	11.1	14.6	31.2	30.7	12.4
We keep the number of tourist less in our nature tourism tours	1429	11.8	15.4	34.5	25.5	12.7
We provide environmental training to our personnel	1486	10.4	18.2	35.5	23.4	12.6
We collect tourist opinions about our environmental activities	1474	11.7	16.9	32.3	27.7	11.3
We provide environmental training to our clients	1478	12.4	20.0	34.2	22.3	11.1
We provide environmental training to local people	1450	15.8	21.4	32.9	20.1	9.8
Our agency participates in environmental meetings	1523	13.1	23.4	35.5	20.4	7.5
We have environmental information in our brochures	1460	15.8	24.2	29.8	20.0	10.1
Our agency activities have negative effects on environment	1561	55.2	26.6	7.8	6.5	4.0

1=Absolutely disagree 2= Disagree 3=Neither disagree nor agree 4=Agree 5= Absolutely agree

On the environmental sensitivity of public sector, private sector and NGOs: Findings show that there are more respondents who consider public sector (40.4%), private sector (39.9%) and NGOs (40.5%) as inadequate to very inadequate in their sensitivity toward environmental activities, as compared to those who think otherwise.

Hypothesis on Education

Chi-square correlations of education with the views on environmental issues showed significant relations for 16 items out of 27 at 0.05 level (Table 5), thus, findings provided partial support for the hypothesized relation about education. Regarding “factors contributing to environmental problems,” majority of travel agents think that all six factors contribute considerably to the environmental problems. However, educational level was found to be positively related to only two statements (inadequacy of environmental education and of environmental awareness of tourism enterprises). Travel agents differ in their educational level, but do not significantly differ in their views on the remaining items. College-educated travel agents tend to see that the inadequacy of education and environmental awareness considerably contribute to environmental problems (76.8% and 63.4%, respectively). In regard to “outcome of environmental protection activities,” it was found that education is significantly related to 4 of 6 items. More travel agents with college education agree that environmental protection is important for the future of tourism sector (91.9%), environmental protection activities makes positive impact on marketing (73.2%), do not hinder economic development (65.8%) and do not deprive local people of their livelihood (72.0%). Majority of travel agents give proper importance to all 11 items related with the important environmental criteria. However, six items were significantly correlated with educational level. As it is seen from the distributions in the Table 7, majority of college educated respondents give importance to wastewater treatment (62.9%), air quality in destination (74.4%) and facility architecture (75.1%), whereas majority of less educated respondents give importance to energy type used (51.9%), energy saving

activities (49.4%), blue flag project (36.1%) and contribution to local economy (67.9%). Views of travel agents about the environmental sensitivity of public sector, private sector and NGOs significantly differ according to educational level. More college educated respondents consider that public sector (45.0% vs. 34.7%) is inadequate in their environmental sensitivity, while more respondents with less education consider private sector (46.5% vs. 34.8%) and GNOs (43.4% vs. 37.6%) are inadequate.

Table 5. Correlation of education with the views on environmental issues

Issues	Education	Distribution of responses (%)					Test results	
		1	2	3	4	5		
Factors contributing to environmental problems^a								
Inadequacy of environmental education	< college	3.6	5.1	20.3	33.9	37.1	N=1424 df= 4	X ² =10.3 p= 0.04
	≥ college	1.9	4.1	17.1	32.7	44.1		
Inadequacy of environmental awareness of tourism enterprises	< college	4.4	9.7	25.4	35.3	25.2	N=1416 df= 4	X ² = 10.3 P= 0.04
	≥ college	2.1	6.4	28.0	34.2	29.2		
Outcome of environmental protection activities^b								
Make positive effect on marketing	< college	3.4	6.3	20.8	43.9	25.7	N=1380 df=4	X ² = 9.53 p= 0.03
	≥ college	2.9	5.5	18.4	39.2	34.0		
Deprive local people of their livelihood	< college	29.8	30.2	20.2	11.8	8.0	N=1363 df= 4	X ² =25.0 p= 0.001
	≥ college	40.1	31.9	15.6	7.0	5.4		
Hinder economical development	< college	35.5	30.3	15.4	11.4	7.4	N=1366 df= 4	X ² = 29.6 P= 0.001
	≥ college	48.0	30.1	10.6	7.1	4.3		
Are important for the future of tourism sector	< college	2.9	3.7	7.8	23.5	62.1	N=1386 df=4	X ² = 9.9 p = 0.04
	≥ college	1.6	2.1	4.4	20.4	71.5		
Importance of environmental criteria in tourism accommodations^c								
Wastewater treatment	< college	2.8	11.9	26.6	32.4	26.4	N=1342 df= 3	X ² = 3.38 p= 0.336
	≥ college	4.6	8.4	24.1	31.5	31.4		
Air quality in destination	< college	1.2	7.6	25.1	39.8	26.3	N=1339 df=4	X ² = 18.5 p = 0.001
	≥ college	2.0	5.1	18.5	39.2	35.2		
Type of energy used	< college	5.6	12.3	30.1	36.7	15.2	N=1310 df=4	X ² = 10.6 p = 0.03
	≥ college	5.5	12.4	35.4	28.5	18.2		
Energy saving activities	< college	5.4	12.9	32.3	34.2	15.2	N=1309 df=4	X ² = 9.6 p = 0.05
	≥ college	8.0	14.2	32.7	27.1	18.0		
Suitability of facility architecture to environment	< college	3.3	7.9	21.0	38.3	29.5	N=1331 df=4	X ² = 17.3 p = 0.002
	≥ college	2.5	3.7	18.7	38.0	37.1		
Blue Flag project	< college	2.2	6.3	20.2	33.9	2.2	N=1335 df=4	X ² = 15.9 p = 0.003
	≥ college	3.3	4.6	15.0	30.1	3.3		
Contribution to local economy	< college	.9	7.0	24.2	38.6	29.3	N=1136 df=4	X ² = 9.5 p = 0.05
	≥ college	3.5	8.5	24.5	34.0	29.5		
Environmental concern of sectors^d								
Public sector	< college	10.4	24.3	36.2	21.5	7.6	N=1369 df=4	X ² = 39.5 p = 0.001
	≥ college	14.9	30.1	39.0	13.2	2.8		
Private sector	< college	14.3	32.2	31.2	15.9	6.4	N=1381 df=4	X ² = 21.9 p = 0.001
	≥ college	8.8	26.0	40.5	17.2	7.5		
NGOs	< college	16.8	26.6	34.3	15.0	7.3	N=1355 df=4	X ² = 12.6 p = 0.01
	≥ college	12.3	25.3	37.2	20.1	5.1		

^a 1=very little, 2= Little, 3=moderate, 4= much, 5=very much

^b 1=strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree

^c 1= very unimportant, 2= unimportant, 3= Neutral, 4= important, 5=very important

^d 1= very inadequate, 2=inadequate, 3=Neutral, 4=adequate, 5=very adequate

Hypothesis on Business Experience

Testing the second part of the hypothesis, chi-square results showed that the business experience in the sector is significantly related to eight items (Table 6). More respondents with longer service in the sector think that inadequacy of environmental awareness in the tourism enterprises contributes relatively less to environmental problems, while inadequacy and non-enforcement of environmental laws contribute much. They think that environmental protection activities create competitive advantage, make positive effect in marketing, and are important for the future of tourism sector. Similarly, they also consider that Blue Flag project is an important environmental criterion in accommodation sector and environmental sensitivity of public sector is inadequate.

Table 6. Correlation of years of service with the views on environmental issues

Issues	Experience	Distribution of responses (%)					Test results
		1	2	3	4	5	
Factors contributing to environmental problems^a							
Inadequacy of environmental awareness of tourism enterprises	1-5 years	7.2	13.0	31.5	29.3	18.9	N= 1412 df= 8 X ² =19.3 p= 0.01
	6-10 years	10.6	14.3	30.0	26.8	18.3	
	11 and over	15.0	15.5	27.9	27.9	13.6	
Inadequacy of environmental laws	1-5 years	1.3	7.2	29.6	35.4	26.5	N= 1426 df= 8 X ² =18.0 p= 0.02
	6-10 years	3.4	5.9	25.9	34.8	29.9	
	11 and over	2.5	3.4	23.1	37.7	33.3	
Non-enforcement of environmental laws	1-5 years	0.9	5.4	22.7	35.5	35.5	N= 1421 df= 8 X ² =16.0 p= 0.04
	6-10 years	2.1	5.2	20.1	38.7	33.9	
	11 and over	2.0	4.5	16.1	33.9	43.4	
Outcome of environmental protection activities^b							
Create competitive advantage	1-5 years	6.1	14.2	31.7	30.3	6.1	N= 1365 df= 8 X ² =23.7 p= 0.002
	6-10 years	6.5	15.2	28.8	32.9	6.5	
	11 and over	3.6	11.5	23.3	36.5	3.6	
Make positive effect on marketing	1-5 years	2.7	8.3	21.3	41.1	26.5	N= 1388 df= 8 X ² =24.1 p= 0.02
	6-10 years	4.4	5.0	19.3	42.0	29.3	
	11 and over	1.4	4.2	17.2	40.6	36.6	
Are important for the future of tourism sector	1-5 years	6.1	14.2	31.7	30.3	6.1	N= 1396 df= 8 X ² =22.7 p= 0.004
	6-10 years	6.5	15.2	28.8	32.9	6.5	
	11 and over	3.6	11.5	23.3	36.5	3.6	
Importance of environmental criteria in tourism accommodations^c							
Blue Flag project	1-5 years	2.6	7.7	18.4	30.0	41.4	N= 1347 df= 8 X ² =19.9 p= 0.01
	6-10 years	2.0	4.2	19.7	28.7	45.4	
	11 and over	3.3	4.1	13.4	36.5	42.7	
Environmental concern of sectors^d							
Public sector	1-5 years	10.9	27.8	39.8	15.6	5.9	N= 1380 df= 8 X ² =16.7 p= 0.03
	6-10 years	12.9	23.5	40.2	18.3	5.0	
	11 and over	14.9	32.6	33.9	14.9	3.7	

^a 1=very little, 2= Little, 3=moderate, 4= much, 5=very much

^b 1=strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly agree

^c 1= very unimportant, 2= unimportant, 3= Neutral, 4= important, 5=very important

^d 1= very inadequate, 2=inadequate, 3=Neutral, 4=adequate, 5=very adequate

Conclusion and Recommendations

The natures of daily practices from production to consumption create and sustain certain human and environmental circumstances that form the prevailing and changing character of human and environmental conditions. The views and work practices of the travel agents are integrated parts of such circumstances, making important negative and positive contributions to the formation, continuation and development of such conditions. Regarding general nature of the travel agencies, findings indicate that only very few Turkish travel agencies have environmentally oriented structural

characteristics. It means that Turkish agencies are in need of structural adjustment to the new tourism environment based on sustainability. The feasibility of structural adjustment seems to be very low since most travel agents/operators, like in many countries (Clarke, 2002), are not large enough to pay attention to sustainability issues beyond their own economical sustainability as well as be able to afford any contribution to environmental, social and cultural sustainability efforts. As Budeanu (2005) pointed out, even large tour operators have taken a more proactive view and have started to develop environmental policies and plans only in recent years.

Environment related views consist of information, ideas and dispositions travel agents possess on the environmental issues. Views regarding beneficial and harmful environmental behaviours are obvious prerequisites for environmentally conscious activities, only if there are no strong intervening variables that eliminate such relationship in a specific situation. This study suggests that travel agents cannot be considered a homogeneous group in terms of their views on environmental issues. However, their views about the factors contributing to the environmental problems, outcomes of environmental protection activities, importance of environmental criteria, and sensitivity of main sectors of society are generally environmentally friendly, since their answers demonstrate environmental awareness. This findings are in accord with the related studies which indicate that tourism operators and travel agents perceive advantage in environmental protection and sustainability (Curtin and Wilkes, 2005; Seales and Stein, 2012; Tepelus, 2005).

In general, travel agents with college education and longer years in the sector are more likely to see a positive outcome and benefit from environmentally oriented issues and behaviours when compared to travel agents with less education, despite the fact that these differences are not outstanding. Supporting the previous studies (Herremans et al., 2005; Carmona-Moreno et al., 2004), this finding suggests the importance of education and experience. The proper education for knowledge and experience are needed to contribute to the creation of environmentally sustainable views among travel agents. Knowledge of environmental problems and initiatives, business ethics and social responsibility principles and their application is needed to foster the understanding that it is possible to be responsible and profitable and environmentally sustainable organizations are necessary for sustainability. Comprehending the importance of taking personal responsibility for one's environmental decisions and actions is facilitated as travel agents become aware of the environmental consequences of their behaviours. Findings of this study support the conclusion of previous studies that travel agents and operators seem to realize in general that sustainable tourism practice might improve their profit margins and improve the business environment, business growth can only be realized by the sustainable use of natural resources (Cavlek, 2002). However, the findings here also confirm previous research in which travel agents/operators have been found to lack involvement, planning, strategic vision (Bastakis et al., 2004), and strategic initiatives focusing on sustainability and improving their social and environmental responsibility (Dodds and Kuehnel, 2010; Wijk, 2006).

It is expected from travel agencies and tour operators that they make tourism and conservation compatible, support the preservation of wilderness and biodiversity, use natural resources in a sustainable way, minimize consumption, waste and pollution, respect local cultures, historic and scientific sites, educate their staff, provide clients with information about the environment and conservation, and follow safety rules.

Realization of such expectations depends on various factors related with economics, politics, business culture, personality traits, education, awareness, views, attitudes and behavioural characteristics. Findings of this study show that, at least in term of views, travel agents hold some assuring opinions.

The most agencies offering tourism and ecotourism for their clients claim to provide more or less all popular kinds of tourism activities. For instance, a typical tourism agency claims to provide mass tourism and ecotourism services including rafting tours, trekking, bird watching, botanic tours, historical places, scuba diving, photo safari and camping. All these are activities that require specialized knowledge and experience that they possible cannot have unless they are multi-service large companies. This means that it is hard to expect that these agencies do business in a professional and environmentally responsible manner. It is most likely their awareness is primarily determined by the economic interest, because they have no discrimination in their activities based on ecotourism principles, sustainable development and environmental protection.

Even though the nature of views among travel agents about the environmental issues and environmental consequences of activities are appropriate to encourage them to make a corporate commitment to sustainable development and to make considerations for environmental, cultural and social impacts an integral part of the conduct of their daily business activities, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that the extent of behaving according to one's view/attitude in daily business practices is not known, since it depends on numerous intervening variables and the structural environment of economical and political decision making is marked by personal and organizational power relations and dominance. We should also keep in mind that there are numerous structural obstacles in the way of proper and improved performance of translating their views and principles of sustainable tourism into concrete operational changes. Additionally, as Budeanu (2009) rightly indicated the fragmented structure of the tourism sector is also a negative factor for achieving consensus and developing coherent sustainable tourism strategies. At least, findings of this study demonstrate that travel agents are already realizing that they depend on the environment's health for their own existence, they are part of the problem and there are important problems to deal with. Awareness is an important step toward change.

The research agenda of tourism is beginning to acknowledge the importance of understanding issues around entrepreneurship and perceptual and behavioural manifestations especially in terms of sustainable development in the developing world. Further empirical studies are needed into the travel agents' and tour operators' views and daily tourism activities especially in the countries like Turkey in order to understand and find ways for existing sustainability problems. There is a need not only to provide further data, information, analysis and suggestions by means of exploratory and descriptive research based on bivariate study designs with multiple variables in sustainable tourism issues, but also to design and conduct causal/inferential studies that can be functional for public policies, policy evaluation and revisions and betterment of industrial activities, products and services in order to obtain sustainable objectives. Similarly, we need more (a) exploratory and descriptive studies to understand the basic nature of the phenomenon, (b) comparative studies in order to share and enhance the accumulated knowledge in the word, (c) focus on the various aspects and crucial problems in the question of sustainability, (d) emphasis on closing the serious gap

among the parties involved, (e) consideration on the fact that studies in sustainable tourism are not limited with the activities of tourism firms and state regulations, (f) concern in differentiating normative rules, ideal expectations and sustainable principles from actual conditions and practices, and (g) attention in reconnecting the theoretical abstractions and findings to the whole that the abstractions were extracted. We should also include personal and organizational goals and interests and structured power relations in design, analysis or concluding remarks.

This study finds that basic problem is not related to the views/opinions, rather there is a serious lack of commitment in the sustainable development. Then, we should first find the factors that determine travel agents' policies which are not congruent with their opinions. The existing studies inform us about that such factors include personal interests, lack of commitment and organizational and general structural constraints. In terms of the scope of the present study some primary recommendations can be as follows:

- a. The travel agents should educate or train themselves in such a way that their own and their heirs' biological and financial sustainability depend on the business policy and daily business activities that upholds the principles of sustainable development.
- b. Enhancing the awareness of the fact that daily activities for short term gains can bring up long term irreversible loses.
- c. Travel agents should be active in finding the ways of changing unsustainable practices that cause them loses.
- d. Travel agents should be active in finding the ways, at least, to install the principles of sustainable practices that are beneficial for their own interests.

One problem with state policy and enforcement issue is protected and enhance the quality and condition of national resources which are essential also to tourism. Unfortunately, gap between the policy and daily practices in governmental bodies shows itself in collaborating in or ignoring the misuse of resources. It seems that only feasible solution is the effective existence of supra-governmental structures, international agencies or organizations. The NGO's and especially trade/business associations in Europe and the USA are highly involved in the promotion of sustainable tourism development by means of, e.g., setting standards and principles to improve sustainability performance in tourism sector. They establish joint initiatives with other concerned parties and engage in setting policies and principles, publishing guidelines and evaluations, setting priorities for proper actions and evaluating progress (Schwartz *et. al.*, 2008; Seales and Stein, 2012; Tour Operators' Initiative, 2005). There are similar associations and concerned NGOs in countries like Turkey, however they generally are in need of genuine activities beyond image making and doing mere public relations of tourism industries.

In sum, countries like Turkey need wide dissemination of data and information, and environmental education and sensitivity training for present and future managerial occupations in order to support the sustainability efforts and gain the participation of travel agents and tour operators to involve in efforts to improve sustainability for the present and for the future of humanity. It is necessary to develop a local, national, regional and international integrated system of policy and practices that involve not only the tourism enterprises, but also all parties concerned with environmental protection and sustainability.

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