

VISITOR EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY IN A MASS TOURISM DESTINATION

Cristina Bernini
Emilio Urbinati
Laura Vici

Received 25 March 2015

Revised 17 April 2015

27 April 2015

Abstract

Recently, the role of tourism sustainability has increased, especially for mature and mass tourism destinations. While the literature has largely focused on residents' evaluations of tourism sustainability, little attention has been devoted to investigate the extent to which tourists either recognize the presence or evaluate the importance and quality of tourism sustainable policies at the destination.

Purpose – This study tries to fill this gap and to improve the knowledge of tourism sustainability in mature destinations, investigating tourists' perceptions of sustainability experienced during their holiday and the consequent level of satisfaction.

Methodology – A sample of tourists (domestic and foreigners) who have chosen the District of Rimini (Italy) as a destination for their holidays in 2014 were interviewed. A mapping analysis is carried out to evaluate the features of the destination.

Findings – In appraising how visitors assess their tourism experience, their expectations on the sustainable behaviour of the destination are not met. Even if Italian and foreign tourists ascribe, on average, the same level of importance in assessing several aspects concerning sustainability, inbound tourists are less satisfied with the solutions adopted by the tourism destination.

Contribution – Tourists in mass destinations consider sustainability a less relevant factor of the holiday and a less satisfactory aspect than others. Sustainability is still a feature that comes after the main and classical ones such as the sea, beach, sun, relax, entertainment. Several managerial implications of this study are drawn and recommendations for future research are presented.

Keywords sustainable tourism; mass tourism destinations; tourist evaluation; environmental impact; Rimini (Italy)

Cristina Bernini, PhD, Associate Professor
University of Bologna
Department of Statistical Sciences
Center for Advanced Studies in Tourism
Via Belle Arti 41, Bologna, Italy
Phone: +39 541 434308
E-mail: cristina.bernini@unibo.it

Emilio Urbinati, PhD
Province of Rimini
Via Dario Campana 64, Rimini, Italy
Phone: +39 +39 7240690
E-mail: e.urbinati@provincia.rimini.it

Laura Vici, PhD, Assistant Professor
University of Bologna
Department of Economics
Center for Advanced Studies in Tourism
Strada Maggiore 45, Bologna, Italy
Phone: +39 0541 434253
E-mail: laura.vici@unibo.it