

Sustainable Marine Tourism: Opinion and Segmentation of Italian Generation Z

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Abstract : Coastal tourism is currently facing huge challenges on how to balance environmental problems and tourist activities. Recent literature shows a growing interest in the issue of sustainable tourism from a so-called civilized tourists' perspective by investigating opinions, perceptions, and behaviors. This study investigates the opinions of youth on what makes them responsible tourists and the ability of coastal marine areas to support tourism in future scenarios. A sample of 778 Italians attending the last year of high school was interviewed. Descriptive statistics, tests, and cluster analyses are applied to highlight the distribution of opinions among youth, detect significant differences based on demographic characteristics, and make segmentation of the different profiles based on students' opinions and behaviors. Preliminary results show that students are largely convinced (62%) that by 2050 the quality of coastal environments could limit seaside tourism, while 10% of them believe that the problem can be solved simply by changing the tourist destination. Besides the cost of the holiday, the most relevant aspect respondents consider when choosing a marine destination is the presence of tourist attractions followed by the quality of the marine-coastal environment, the specificity of the local gastronomy and cultural traditions, and finally, the activities offered to guests such as sports and events. The reduction of waste and lower air emissions are considered the most important environmental areas in which marine-coastal tourism activities can contribute to preserving the quality of seas and coasts. Areas in which, as a tourist, they believe possible to give a personal contribution were (responses "very much" and "somewhat"); do not throw litter in the sea and on the beach (84%), do not buy single-use plastic products (66%), do not use soap or shampoo when showering in beaches (53%), do not have bonfires (47%), do not damage dunes (46%), and do not remove natural materials (e.g., sand, shells) from the beach (46%). About 6% of the sample stated that they were not interested in contributing to the aforementioned activities, while another 7% replied that they could not contribute at all. Finally, 80% of the sample has never participated in voluntary environmental initiatives or citizen science projects; moreover, about 64% of the students have never participated in events organized by environmental associations in marine or coastal areas. Regarding the test analysis -based on Kruskal-Wallis and Mann and Whitney tests - gender, region, and studying area of students reveals significance in terms of variables expressing knowledge and interest in sustainability topics and sustainable tourism behaviors. The classification of the education field is significant for a great number of variables, among which those related to several sustainable behaviors that respondents declare to be able to contribute as tourists. The ongoing cluster analysis will reveal different profiles in the sample and relevant variables. Based on preliminary results, implications are envisaged in the fields of education, policy, and business strategies for sustainable scenarios. Under these perspectives, the study has the potential to contribute to the conference debate about marine and coastal sustainable development and management.

Keywords : cluster analysis, education, knowledge, young people

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