

The challenges of fostering pro-environment behaviours in the Tourism and Leisure sector

Engaging those in the tourism and leisure sector can be particularly challenging. A review of academic literature on interventions that aimed to change behaviour in this sector revealed few studies on this subject. The limited evidence available, however, suggested that encouraging pro-environmental behaviours in a tourism context can be difficult.

A study on sustainable travel conducted by Booking.com (2019), found that 72% of travellers believed that people need to act now and make sustainable travel choices to save the planet for future (*Tourism is 5th largest polluting industry*). Yet, there appears to be a disconnect between what people say, or even do at home, and how they act while on holiday (e.g. Dolnicar et al. 2019; Nam et al. 2020). This may be true in other leisure contexts. There may be several reasons for this disconnect:

- i. People often want luxury and do not want to think about sustainability when on holiday. The level of sustainable behaviour of most people (even those who volunteer for environmental organisations) tends to be lower when on holiday than when at home;
- ii. Hotels' efforts to be sustainable are often perceived as the hotel trying to save costs, e.g. eco-friendly features, such as in-shower dispensers, rather than individual bottles, were perceived by some guests as 'cheap' (Nam et al. 2020);
- iii. There is no 'incentive' to act sustainably when on holiday (this is different in the home context where people can save money, e.g. by reducing water and energy use). For instance, reusing a towel does not save the tourist money. Instead, they get a 'lesser' experience as they may be reusing a damp towel, rather than a clean dry one.

To explore this issue, a study by Dolnicar et al. (2019), aimed to encourage hotel guests to act pro-environmentally by opting out of a room clean (to save water etc.) On arrival guests were given an information pack containing either containing either:

- i. a pro-environmental appeal only (encouraging voluntary opt out)
- ii. a pro-environmental appeal + offer of free drink voucher (if opting out)
- iii. a free drink only (if opting out).

Results indicated that hotels guests were significantly more likely to opt out of a room clean when offered a free drink; the lowest level of voluntary opting out of room cleans was found when using pro-environmental messaging only.

While not a plastic-focused study, this suggests that sharing monetary savings with guests (in this case leading to a 42% reduction in room cleans) may be more effective in tourism and leisure contexts than pro-environmental messaging alone.

Evaluation

It can be important to evaluate how effective activities and interventions are at fostering more sustainable behaviours (it may even be a funding stipulation). Many factors are known to influence pro-environmental behaviours: for instance, increased sustainability knowledge is associated with an increase in making informed pro-environmental choices (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014).

A number of 'Kicking Plastic Out of Sport' webinars were evaluated, post-event. After taking part in the webinars, attendees consistently reported that they felt informed and concerned about the impacts of plastic pollution, and that they found attending the event useful. Where possible, they also indicated that they had new ideas of reducing their plastic consumption and that they will avoid single-use plastics. An angling-related activity was also evaluated. Once again, those who took part in the survey agreed that they felt somewhat informed about plastic pollution, that they knew how to avoid plastic ending up in the environment, and that they felt it was important to reduce litter in the environment.

The above evaluation examples were post-activity only. A preferred method of evaluation is to obtain pre- and post-activity responses from each participant. While more challenging to administer, this method makes it possible to determine whether the activity resulted in a measurable change in, for instance, knowledge, environmental attitudes (e.g., level of concern) or intended behaviours.

It is worth noting that, when exploring the effectiveness of activities aimed at changing behaviour, it is rarely possible to measure *actual* behaviour change: usually it is only possible to enquire about *intentions* to change behaviour. In view of this, care should be taken when interpreting results as research suggests that there may be a gap between how someone states they will behave and how they actually behave (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

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