

Take it Slow Project: Apulia B&B Environmental Awareness

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Abstract

The present explorative research, through a questionnaire, investigates the B&B operators' awareness to environmental preservation focusing on tools and actions performed. The final aim is improving knowledge related to the opportunity of implementing the right environmental certification to support the development of a specific area into Apulia region. Results achieved, indicate that Carbon footprint seems to be the suitable certification for the analyzed reality. The research question is in line with SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) in particular 11 and 12 SDGs. The present exploratory research was carried out in the field of hospitality through a questionnaire among managers belonging to six B&B participating into LCP. The B&B observed shows a good level of awareness to the environmental preservation, but they are not able alone to support the certification weight in terms of innovation, managerial re-organization, and investments. Originality and value of present paper is linked to the specific field investigated. A lot of works is related to hospitality industry few to the B&B operators. Possible practical implications are related to the role of network. Its role is twofold: firstly, overcome the weakness of single operator and secondly improving operators' environmental performance imply to increase the attractiveness of micro destination in Apulian region.

Keywords

B&B, sustainable tourism, eco-certification, Take it slow project, Carbon Footprint

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Introduction

Tourism is considered an industry difficult to regulate through uniform quality criteria or methods. To pass through compliance assessment for environmental certification and to become green, it is necessary that hotels, B&B, etc. adopt certain environmental standards from independent verifying body which recognizes the continuous implementation and improvement of high ecological quality (Font, 2002). More than 20 years ago have already existed over 100 eco-labels for tourism, hospitality, and eco-tourism, but they overlapped in meaning how to communicate green messages to tourists. Progress in assessing the role and importance of environmental certification in tourism sector came with the deeper study and more frequent application of ISO and EMAS standards (the latter mainly in Europe), with the wider expansion of the activity of the largest educational foundation for sustainable education in the field of tourism in Europe, Foundation for Environmental Education through their programs Green Key and Blue Flag. The topic of sustainability became central for tourism research and today requires adequate policies for its green development. Sustainable tourism is considered an element of wider sustainable development (Nguyen et al., 2019; Sharpley, 2000) and over the years, the scope of theoretical research has significantly increased with an emphasis also on territorial attractiveness or the performance of local communities etc. To achieve a sustainable tourism, it is important to develop transversal network embedding different SMEs belonging to a different economic sector in the area (such as culture, craft, agro-food, other touristic services) to differentiate services decoupling the economic growth from environmental pollution. For this reason, it is important to find solution able to measure and quantify the environmental pressure on the touristic activities.

In the last years, a body of literature has focused on the evaluation of the tourism carbon footprint (CF) as a tool to account for the environmental externality of tourism growth (Lee and Hsieh, 2016; Asmelash et al., 2019). The CF is a measure that expresses in CO₂ equivalent the total greenhouse gas emissions associated directly or indirectly with a product, an organization, or a service, useful for modelling environmental approach (Pertsova, 2007). The CF measurement is embedded in the ISO 14064-1 standard, and outlines the principles and requirements, at the organization level, for quantifying and reporting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and their removal. It includes requirements for the design, development, management, reporting and verification of an organization's GHG inventory. In literature the research studies focused on analyze the sustainability of the hospitality through the analysis of the CF. Lenzen et al., (2018) highlight that between 2009 and 2013, tourism's global carbon footprint has increased from 3.9 to 4.5 Gt CO₂e, four times more than previously estimated. Sun (2014) analyzes the carbon emissions for domestic tourism industries with the aim to evidence the economic benefits and environmental costs of further tourism development and the importance of taking into account "the energy use of national carriers for international transportation and the energy use embedded with imports with respect to tourism development". In this way it is possible to safeguard protected areas" by "minimizing the impact" over the environment (as ecotourism) and pursues ethical objectives by promoting the education and respect of the traveler. Furthermore, the measurement of environmental emission as CF, can provide important indications on future strategies by encouraging networked cooperation structures among local communities as B&B, hotels, traditional local craft and tourists, to develop environmental-friendly or low-carbon tourism (Rao and Saksena, 2021, Nguyen, Johnson and Young, 2022). The sustainability issues are also the basis of a specific type of tourism such as slow tourism. The theoretical understandings of slow tourism derived from sustainability at a territorial level as well as from tourist experience as individual well-being (Calzati and de Salvo, 2017). Also, the slow tourism can be considered a sub-part of sustainable tourism, since creates a new form involving experience with tourist structures (mainly B&Bs) and the tourists (mainly fans on pilgrimage routes) and thus emphasizes, responsibility and eco-friendliness" of all the stakeholders involved. The assessment of the quality of slow tourism is often associated with aspects such as slow food, local lifestyle, level of environmental protection of the location, level of costs.

This study represents an introductory part for the implementation of a specific outcome included in a European project Interreg named Take it slowly. The present explorative research, in line with other explorative research in the field of hospitality (Amicarelli et al., 2021; Eskerod et al., 2019) through a questionnaire, investigates the B&B operators' awareness to environmental preservation focusing on tools and actions performed. The final aim is improving knowledge related to the opportunity of implementing the carbon footprint environmental certification to support the development of a specific area into Apulia region. The research question is in line with SDGs (sustainable development goals) in particular, 11 and 12 SDGs.

The rest of the text is structured as follows. First section provides a general outlook of the project Take it Slow and its interrelation with the topic of slow tourism. Second section is consistently dedicated to the methodology of research. The third part includes discussion of main results of research. The last section summarizes the main findings and conclusions.

1. General framework of Take it slow project

Take it Slow "Smart and slow tourism supporting Adriatic heritage for tomorrow" is a project under Interreg-V-A Italy-Croatia programme. The project involves six Italian regions (Veneto, Molise, Emilia-Romagna, Abruzzo, Marche and Puglia) and three Croatian regions – Dalmatia region (with Dubrovnik, Split and Šibenik-Knin county), Ravni Kotari region (with Zadar county) and Istria region. Participants in the project from Apulia region are Public Apulian Theatre Consortium (Teatro Pubblico Pugliese, TPP) and Department of tourism, economics of culture and territorial development.

The general aim of the project is to develop the Adriatic region as a place of travel experience, enhancing sustainable tourism, slow tourism, innovation, and creativity through the identification of joint actions that would be highly beneficial for the protection of the environment in all participating regions and surrounding area. In Apulia region, the project activities are focused on the micro-destination named via Francigena located between Monopoli-Torre Canne and Selva di Fasano area, which is a part of the historical via Traiana route of the Council of Europe. Via Francigena routes covers over three thousand km starting from Canterbury to Santa Maria di Leuca (Lecce), which unites different peoples and cultures, touching 5 states, 16 regions and more than 600 municipalities.

The selected route has all the main characteristics for a successful tourism experience including food and lifestyle as well as green rural or maritime locations. The activities planned in the project have the goal to

enhance the area as green destination visitable all year through innovative eco oriented activities. To perform eco-oriented activities have been selected 37 participants (till March 2022) which signed a protocol for adhesion to a Local Community of Practice (LCP) with the purpose to create a network of enterprises for sharing best practices in tourism activities. In the LCP participate SMEs in the field of tourism activities, B&Bs operators, handcraft, enogastronomic operators, regional agencies, NGOs, and the University of Bari Aldo Moro. The role of the LCP is to develop a partnership platform able both to develop new ideas for innovating tourism products and services offered by tourist destinations and to apply various best practices for making natural and cultural heritage a leverage for sustainable and more balanced territorial development. The paper should be the result of a research in the area, corresponding to the specific topic of the conference.

2. Research methodology and B&B description

The present exploratory research was carried out in the field of hospitality through a questionnaire among managers belonging to six B&B participating into LCP. The questionnaire was sent via e-mail in October 2021 with reference to year 2020-2021 with a deadline of 20 days for the answers. Questionnaire sending has been accompanied by a short interview with each operator. These personal communications are very useful to understand some crucial implications. All the respondents have asked to remain anonymous. The questionnaire is composed by 14 questions plus a brief description of the main activity's characterising the single B&B. The questionnaire is split into four different environmental thematic areas: (a) energy; (b) waste; (c) water and (d) other, to better understand where the main improvements are implemented. In the category "other" the authors have been included all the other environmental practices observed. The B&B included in the present research are in the touristic area between Monopoli-Torre Canne and Selva di Fasano, 50 km-60 km respectively, far from Bari town. Their main features are recorded in table no. 1 and detailed below. B&B 1 is in the downtown of Fasano and has three rooms, parking and has some amenities as a course for cooking typical Apulian cuisine; B&B 2 is a vacation house in Selva di Fasano; B&B 3 has three rooms, and it is a Masseria in the Countryside of Fasano with a swimming pool; B&B 4 has nine rooms in the downtown of Torre Canne with a restaurant; B&B 5 is in Fasano town near to the selva of Fasano, has three rooms and a swimming pool; B&B 6 is between Fasano and Torre Canne, it has five rooms, bike rentals and plan and organize different excursions on the territory.

Table no. 1. Main features of B&B operators

	B&B 1	B&B 2	B&B 3	B&B 4	B&B 5	B&B 6
Location	Downtown of Fasano	Selva of Fasano	Countryside of Fasano	Downtown of Torre Canne	In Fasano town near to the Selva of Fasano	Between Fasano and Torre Canne
Number of rooms	3	9	3	9	3	5
Parking area	X	X		X	X	
Swimming pool			X		X	
Restaurant				X		
Car rental				X	X	
Bike rental	X		X			X
Leisure activities [§]	X		X			X
Electric car charging column			X	X		

Note: [§]) Including: nature excursions, regional tours and cook class

Source: *personal elaboration of the authors.*

3. Data analysis and discussion

Table no. 2 summarized main results achieved by the questionnaire useful for providing information on tools and actions performed by B&B operators.

Table no. 2. Tools and actions performed by B&B operators

Questions	B&B 1	B&B 2	B&B 3	B&B 4	B&B 5	B&B 6	Percentage results with YES
Energy							
Use of LED bulb	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Autonomous room temperature regulator	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	75%
Thermal break windows or PVC windows with at least double glazing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Use of class A fridge and refrigerator	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Presence of renewable sources (photovoltaic panel or solar thermal panel)	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	30%
Waste							
Separate collection of waste	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Water							
Presence of water jet breaker in the bathrooms	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Toilet with double button flush system	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%
Other							
Environmental certification	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	15%
Use of products with environmental certification	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	75%
Car-pooling service for employees	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	15%
Presence of a park or flowered balconies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100%

Source: personal elaboration of the authors

A first and general result shows that there is a high level of environmental awareness among B&Bs operators. As above stated, the questionnaire has been supported by a brief interview to improve its effectiveness and to collect as much useful experiences possible.

Analyzing the first environmental thematic areas proposed, *energy*, the B&Bs operators have done important economic investment to save energy. The 100% of the B&Bs have replaced the light bulbs with led bulbs, the windows with thermal break windows and the all the fridge and refrigerator in A class. Differently only the 75% have installed the autonomous room temperature regulator whereas only the 30% have the presence of renewable sources. According to the interview, has emerged that the owners of B&Bs are aware that this operation mode not only is helpful in reducing operating costs but can improve profits because can attract guest interested on green practices through the formation of positive image. The owners identify both guests' willingness to select eco B&Bs and/or hotels and their interest into green practices and the willing to accept the reduction of unnecessary hotel services (e.g., daily towel change, central laundry service) in favor of environmentally responsible business.

These results are also in line with the relevant literature. Han et al. (2019) highlights the "*pro-environmental intentions of practicing environmentally responsible actions during their hotel stay*" evidencing the sustainable behaviors practice when travelling. Furthermore, there is high interest in investing in renewable sources- mainly- photovoltaic panel, to become carbon neutral. The biggest obstacle to the implementation of renewable energies is due to the high cost and red tape. For these reasons, it is recognized the importance of creating a network to support major investments in the renewable energy, by creating a community for intercepting public or private funding.

The categories *water* and *waste* are considered very strategic not only for preserving the environment but also for costs saving. All the B&Bs have introduced water jet breaker and toilet with double button flush system. From the interview it emerges the need to adopt effective business practice to reduce water wastage or increasing recycling water system. This is due to the need to reduce the risk of water scarcity, or low water quality that can negatively affect the B&Bs management.

The same indication is for the waste category. In the opinion of the owners, a recovery system for waste should be adopted. All the B&Bs have a separate waste collection and do not use single plastic use in the

room or during the breakfast and refillable dispensers for soaps or shampoos and do not weight the amount of waste. All the owners agree with the idea to create a consortium for collecting waste sharing an adequate waste management system with other B&Bs and/or hotels and other industrial or trade activities in the area, recognizing profitability from recyclable and compostable waste (Pirani and Arafat, 2014). In literature are reported different successful examples of cooperation strategies in waste management. This is very important considering that the seasonality of tourism increases the issues of waste management. Bohdanowicz (2006) highlights the experience carried out in Sweden in which hotels shared an active waste sorting and recycling program included donation of hotel furniture and equipment.

The category *other* includes questions related to environmental certification, biodiversity safeguard and environmental practices in general. The car-pooling is adopted only by one B&B, whereas a flowered balcony and a park is present in the 100% of the structures. Carpooling has been identified as a possible alternative to own private car considering the reduced costs, as the fuel costs, are split among several individuals. In the opinions of employees, a minibus should be purchased from the owner of B&B to be shared among all employees, but the unsuccessful adoption of car-pooling is attributable to high costs of the minibus.

The 75% of the B&Bs use products with eco certification while only 1 B&B has adopted an environmental certification.

All the owner agreed that the environmental certification has a positive effect on hotels market value and in the last years has become an important asset for developing green marketing strategy. There is, however, an awareness of the significant costs to implement the eco-certification and the necessity to select the appropriate certification so as not to confuse the guests. This aspect is controversial and in literature is reported the confusion in the marketplace related to green certificate, with customers unable to distinguish among the different environmental claims (Bernard and Nicolau, 2022).

Conclusion

This explorative research shows that there is a high level of awareness related to the environmental by the side of B&B operators. All the participants to this study have started modifying their own energy, water, and waste management with the final aims to protect the environment, to save money (reducing energy and water bills), to increase turnover, and especially to be attractive for green tourists.

In this field, the possibility to perform environmental certifications as the carbon footprint could represent one of the best solutions. By all operators interviewed, the environmental certification, as carbon footprint, is recognized as an important lever of local development that can help both to attract customers, increasingly interested in green issues, and to preserve the natural beauty of the community. The main problem is represented by the costs to be incurred for eco-certification and the bureaucratic aspects related to it. For this reason, the creation of a local community can represent a competitive advantage as it can support a new model of governance integrated with other stakeholders in the area. In addition, the creation of a network can create a critical mass that can bring forward the requests to be submitted to the public sector which can better make economic investment by addressing them to areas of common interest for the community. For example, LCP could propose and support an “area eco-certification” rather than a single structure one. In this way it will be possible to by-pass the weakness recorded in the present study, expanding all the touristic local potentialities (e. g., B&Bs and enogastronomic operators; handcraft; regional tourism agencies). Even though the small numbers of players, these results are significant intending that the LCP (Local Community of Practice), signed among the over mentioned Apulian operators, could play a key role in the direction of environmental certification and to push by local authorities’ eco-engagement. Moreover, it is possible to create the basis to converge towards innovative and low environmental impact projects.

In conclusion the main limits are the weakness of single B&B structure, the cost of adopting this kind of tools and red tape afflicting Italian systems. Lastly, this explorative research has increased eco-knowledge in Apulian region micro destination. Based on these results, future study has to be addressed to LCP Carbon Footprint eco-certification representing one of the best suitable options towards sustainable tourism offer.

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