

# EXPLORING THE BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

The behavioural approach to sustainable tourism has received considerable attention and interest from the academic community within various fields of study. It has particular value for developing sustainable social practices. In this article, we investigate the contributions of the behavioural approach in the economic sciences, psychology, and adult education. Our objective is to reinforce the notion that individuals have the capacity to alter their behaviour to achieve active participation in unity with nature that firmly favours both their own well-being and environmental protection. We distinguish the term *tourism* as not only as a leisure activity, but also as *a turning or changing point* (while individuals adapt their performance in tune with nature to find the ways to achieve physical, mental, and spiritual equilibrium). Thereby, we make a further step to discussions on how exploration of the behavioural approach can support initiatives that promote environmental protection, and innovative tourism education programmes.

Keywords: Behavioural Approach, Behavioural Codes, Adult Education, Environmental Protection, Tourism Education Programmes, Tourism as a Turning or Changing Point, Well-Being, Sustainable Tourism.

JEL Classification: E70, E71

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The behavioural approach has an important role for developing sustainable social practices, including the practices in the tourism field. In fact, the behavioural approach to sustainable tourism has received considerable attention and interest from the scientific community within various fields of study.

This paper aims to analyse the contributions of the behavioural approach in the economic sciences, psychology, and adult education. Our main goal is to reinforce the notion that people can alter their behaviour to achieve active participation in unity with nature that firmly favours both their well-being and environmental protection.

In this context, the concept of tourism is not only related with a leisure activity, but also as a turning or changing point, while individuals adapt their performance in tune with nature to find the ways to achieve physical, mental, and spiritual equilibrium.

Thus, this article presents a further step to discussions on how the exploration of the behavioural approach can support initiatives that promote environmental protection, and

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innovative tourism education programmes. Firstly, it explores the outcomes from economic, psychological and adult education theories. Secondly, it presents the relation between well-being and sustainable tourism. Thirdly, some examples of developing sustainable practices are presented. Finally, the conclusion section presents the relevance of exploring the outcomes of the behavioural approach as methodological support for the development of sustainable tourism practices.

## **2. THE OUTCOMES FROM ECONOMIC, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ADULT EDUCATION THEORIES**

The concept of the behavioural approach has been used in different branches of sciences for examination of *stimuli and responses* – the mechanisms that drive human choice. Prominent economic and psychological theories focus on the research on behavioural predispositions when making decisions, which can be caused by internal and external stimuli. Until the 1940s (e.g. von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944), the assumption of complete rationality, well-known as the rational choice theory (Bentham, 1789), was among primary attempts to find the answers on how people make decisions. According to Simon (1955, 1982), rationality is bounded by cognitive restrictions, the data that an individual can access and analyse, and the time that available for decision-making. Jolls, Sunstein and Thaler (1998: 1471) reflected on the empirical evidence that ‘people exhibit bounded rationality, bounded self-interest, and bounded willpower’ (Jolls et al., 1998: 1471). In the present century, Kahneman (2003) explored the systematic biases that separate the beliefs people have and the choices they would make if they were completely rational. In fact, the key issue is that agents (individuals or groups), in most cases, take decisions based on their intuition and act in accordance with what happens at the moment instead of evaluating objectively past information. In their own studies, Simon (1982) and Kahneman (2003) outlined that our mental processes depend on the background that influences their development. It means that the restrictions to information, as the result of limited knowledge and capacities, render our choices far from the most advantageous ones.

Bounded rationality is well-illustrated through the idea of excessive choice. It happens in case individuals are faced with an excessively high number of alternatives. Iyengar and Lepper (2000) associate this process with decision exhaustion, choice deferment. and demotivation, while Schwartz (2004) connects it with unhappiness. Such a situation can be perceived by an individual as a state of excessive choice when he/she has a high number of alternatives, a short period of time for making decisions and, with that, a feeling of not knowing what to do or giving preference to what (Chernev et al., 2015).

Glasser (1999) emphasises that human choices are made to satisfy five needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. Based on this theory, the decision-making process is determined by the following conditions: (1) establishing of a goal and its value; (2) examination of the options available to reach them; (3) determination of the likelihood of each option to meet the goal; and (4) making the decision by choosing the option with the highest likelihood for meeting the goal (Mellers et al., 1999). However, decision-making is more emotional than logical (Bechara et al., 2000). Even though our decisions are guided by emotions, most people like to think we are still capable of making rational decisions. On the other hand, the concept of excessive choice is a cognitive process in which individuals are overcoming difficult times while making decisions when faced with several options (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000).

Some psychological theories include the ideas of naturalistic and spiritual intelligence (Gardner, 1999; Garcês, Pocinho, & Jesus, 2017; Garcês, Pocinho, Jesus, & Rieber, 2018) as

well as emotional intelligence (Damasio, 1999; Bechara, Damasio, & Damasio, 2000). That affect key life choices. In recent years, creativity has been also considered as one of the most powerful psychological concepts to problem solving and decision making.

Since 1982 the EGPROC, a European group of researchers, has held annual meetings to discuss studies on human decision-making processes. The group members published a collection of papers about the psychological processes involved in decision making (Svenson & Gonzalez, 2014; Svenson & Tyszka, 2014). The EGPROC group studies show that the probability of making good decisions depends on the following psychological factors: (1) the critical realist perspective, that relies on decisions involving risk and uncertainty (Raynard, 2014); (2) the influence of format-dependent probabilities and additivity neglect (Riege et al., 2014); (3) the biased judgements of asset accumulation and investment decisions [Svenson & Gonzalez, 2014]; (4) the confidence-frequency effect (Dida & Kakey, 2014); and (5) belief in others' trustworthiness and trusting behaviour (Macko et al., 2014).

In the present world, the urgent environmental matters (*Before the Flood*, 2016) are determined by the findings on the level of behavioural human codes that intensify the environmental damage. Psychology has repeatedly raised the issues of environmental discourse (as we can see with the recent creation of a new psychology field - environmental psychology). For instance, Hill and Johnston (2003) draw attention to the emotional manifestations of human alienation from the earth. From an ecological and eco-spiritual perspective, they encourage a critique of socially-constructed meanings on human-environment relations and promote actions that restore human and the earth well-being as a spiritual act. In fact, the exploration of the decision-making determinants at physical, mental, and spiritual levels make possible identification of key factors for the modelling of future scenarios. It is important to refer to 'the significance and urgency of our present constellation, in which the Earth system itself is being mobilised towards (and not only through) humanity', and to the importance 'to become attuned to find one's way within the Anthropocene' (Decuyper, Hoet et al., 2019: 3).

The above-mentioned outcomes on the behavioural approach provide the impetus to investigate some possibilities to recode human psychological variables for reaching sustainable high performance within a period of physical or mental activity (*time on*) as well as a period of leisure and recreation (*time off*). Within this framework of thought, we discuss the issue of original *time off* paradigms for contributing to the understanding of several aspects of sustainable tourism (Moscardo et al., 2013). It would be significant to underscore the importance of this subject from the environmental point of view (getting benefits from unity with nature during tourism activities, individuals are more sensitive to the matters of promoting environmental protection), and from the educational perspective (innovative tourism education programmes always serve as an attraction for lifelong learners).

### 3. WELL-BEING AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Working toward an understanding of the variety of tourism-related behaviours with the application of positive psychology (Pocinho et al., *forthcoming*), scholars support the view that 'tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon related to the movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence, pleasure being the usual motivation' (*International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics*, 2010: 1). Furthermore, the terms 'well-being' and 'wellness' facing new conceptualisations. Contemporary societies in search of better and healthier lifestyles are trying to apply a 'new way of being' to their daily routine and not only to a free time (*European Travel Commission*, 2016). In fact, people are looking for new paths for equilibrium between work and relaxation time. Steps in this direction can

be motivated by various intentions such as the idea of feeling good (Pyke et al., 2016) and the desire to find well-being if moving away from one's daily lives across tourism experiences and activities (Filep, 2016). Hence, well-being is a far greater predictor of sustainability-place attachment than are geographical and demographic variables (Vada et al., 2019).

In case of the EU, the total population is projected to increase in the future. Further, according to the *2018 Ageing Report* (2018), the number of citizens aged over 65-years is growing exponentially and, as a result, tourist movements are increasing worldwide (*World Tourism Organization*, 2016).

Talking about the working-age population (individuals aged between 15 and 64), the *2018 Ageing Report* reports that the number of

people aged between 15 and 64 will decrease significantly from 333 million in 2016 to 292 million in 2070... The old-age dependency ratio (people aged 65 and above relative to those aged 15 to 64) in the EU is projected to increase by 21.6 percentage points, from 29.6% in 2016 to 51.2% in 2070. This implies that the EU would go from having 3.3 working-age people for every person aged over 65 years to only two working-age persons. (*The 2018 Ageing Report*, 2018).

Within this framework, people will be in much less of a hurry to work; on the contrary, they will seek to improve their health and well-being. In these conditions, natural products and types of tourism services directly related to natural sources will increasingly be in demand. As may be expected, this should bring a lot of attention to thousands of miles of natural resources with the view to improve the environmental protection strategies on which people's well-being depends. In fact, it is a great opportunity for developing some creative experiences and making adaptations to the new wave of behaviour. Furthermore, the contributions on this subject are integral parts of the tourism industry for promoting sustainable tourism.

Seeking physical and psychological well-being, modern people focus on a balanced life that satisfies high-quality requirements. Positively, individuals have changed their psychological profiles – being more spontaneous and knowledgeable, they ask for products and services of excellence and desire authentic experiences that have long-lasting impacts. Gradually, they are becoming more aware of the environment and sustainability of destinations, reflect about experiences and life; and look for self-development to build a better world (Paulisic et al., 2016).

Thus, for professionals, it is fundamental to accompany the abovementioned changes and introduce better strategies for developing sustainable practices. In this context, it would be useful and timely to make sensible reflections on a country level on the contribution of tourism products and practices for disseminating sustainable attitudes and contributing to behaviour changes.

The Sustainable Development Goals state:

We recognize that social and economic development depends on the sustainable management of our planet's natural resources. We are therefore determined to conserve and sustainably use oceans and seas, freshwater resources, as well as forests, mountains and drylands and to protect biodiversity, ecosystems and wildlife. We are also determined to promote sustainable tourism, to tackle water scarcity and water pollution, to strengthen cooperation on desertification, dust storms, land degradation and drought and to promote resilience and disaster risk reduction (*Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015: 9).

In fact, the promotion of sustainable tourism is not only an investment in nature preservation; the reimbursement occurs at different levels and across various dimensions (including economic growth and dissemination of the strategies for modifying of behavioural codes). For instance, for lifelong learners, it would be essential to deep the knowledge on how to reach sustainable high performance in every day routine. The acquisition of this experience is more pleasant on the level of short- or long-term tourism programmes within a framework that, at the same time, makes as much as possible connections to sports, literature, artwork, cultural heritage, celebrations, gastronomy, music, etc. Sustainable practices can be taught through the beneficial exchange of experiences, sharing life-meaning positive attitudes and behaviours. Here, we would like to conceptualise a definition of *tourism as a turning or changing point* while individuals adapt their performance in tune with nature to find ways to achieve physical, mental and spiritual equilibrium. To attain such a result, individuals need to learn how to change their working and living habits. Some examples of current projects and initiatives that are described below provide a good platform for sharing of experiences.

#### 4. DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

A good illustration of the opportunity to learn how to reach sustainable high performance through a tourist activity that leads to a changing/turning point is the *Rent a Finn* programme (*Rent a Finn*, 2019). On the one hand, this project can be considered a tourism programme; from another perspective, it proposes multiple dimensions for developing sustainable initiatives contributing to improvement of many areas of people's lives: promoting well-being, lifestyle changes, and unity with nature. This programme firmly favours environmental protection by changing the human vision about the planet into sustainable behaviour. The main concept of this project is that a human performance wheel contains the following essential components that must be integrated: mental energy, general health, physical activity, nutrition, biomechanics, sleep, and recovery. Each part of the wheel should be in balance, otherwise the wheel stops spinning. According to the specialists, 'Improving the quality of your recovery and helping you find a sustainable balance between work and rest are key components of all our programmes' (*Hints Performance*, 2018). In fact, it is not an easy task to help individuals change their habits during busy days. However, being reconnected to nature helps to process and feel its importance as the primary source of a human life. Two participants of the programme argue:

Nowadays... everyone is pretty busy – with the normal daily routine, work, and everyone's got stuff to do. And then we don't give enough attention and importance to nature. And to me, this is [a] massive mistake... What I realized actually, is you guys give a lot of importance to nature. You know how to protect it. The more you are respectful of nature, the more nature is going to be respectful to yourself as well. And you can always make the most out of nature if you take care of it as well. So I would say our connection to nature has improved a lot. We kind of reconnected again. And I think we value it more now (*Rent a Finn*, 2019: visits from Summer 2019).

At present, one of the main challenges for individuals is to overcome the transitional border representing past habits that prevent all components of a human performance wheel from being in balance. For this reason, creating and investing in tourism programmes with the objective of serving as *a turning or changing point* for individuals in relation to themselves, environment, and other objects or factors, could significantly contribute to the achievement

of the urgent pressing needs with which people are struggling today. Based on the acquired experiences, travellers can create *lifelong education networks*, exchanging the results of their trips and contributing to further investigations, to assist other individuals in integrating approved models into daily routine.

There are a variety of other programmes for developing sustainable practices. The Tourist Well-Being Project and Madeira Wine Contributions are examples of recent projects developed for such purposes on the Portugal's Madeira Island (Garcês et al., 2017; Abreu et al., 2019).

The Tourist Well-Being Project is an empirical study designed to evaluate well-being from a psychological perspective and explore the attributes and features of a psychological profile of tourists in Madeira. Among the main project's aims are the following: (1) evaluate tourists' well-being on Madeira Island through the measurement of creativity, optimism, spirituality, and well-being variables from a positive psychology perspective; (2) evaluate the most attractive tourism product offers for Madeira visitors; (3) connect tourists' personal and psychological variables to the activities they undertake on the Island; (4) develop an app that will enable service customisation based on the discoveries of the tourist psychological profile (*The Tourist Well-Being Project, 2017–2020*). Since 2017, specialists have applied a tourism well-being scale, an instrument used to assess human optimal psychological experience, through the HOPE theoretical Model (Garcês et al., 2017). The project results suggest that the most enjoyed activities and experiences are related to nature: Madeira Levada walks; leisure walks; sport activities through Madeira landscapes, villages, gardens, and mountains; discovering the local gastronomy, authentic contacts with *the Sea* ('o Mar' is the Portuguese term for the Atlantic Ocean) and cultural interactions with the locals. The researchers underscore a significant upgrade of tourist flows on the Island due to high-quality conditions to obtain well-being experiences (Garcês, Pocinho & Jesus, 2020).

The outcomes of the Madeira Wine Contributions project show that the Madeira wine industry has had a significant environmental impact and is one of the main tourist attractions for the global community. According to the researchers,

... within the environmental impacts, we can highlight that tourism contributes to: solid waste increase; water and energy consumption increase; atmospheric emissions increase; noise increase; impacts on local fauna and flora; impacts on the geological heritage; people increase, both visitors and manpower' (Abreu et al., 2019: 347).

This study supports the role of the Madeira wine industry that helps in decreasing the rate of land abandonment and soil degradation and embraces the preservation of the rural humanised landscape. In fact, the above-mentioned project gives several valuable practical insights on minimising environmental impacts and improving the conservation of biodiversity through sustainable tourism development.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of our study is to emphasise the relevance of exploring the outcomes of the behavioural approach (from the standpoint of various fields of study) as methodological support for the development of sustainable tourism practices. These practices contribute to environmental sustainability and a human search for self-definition and well-being in the current geological age. This subject consists of challenging traditional paradigms, allowing researchers to derive new perspectives in considering initiatives that promote the

dynamic participation of lifelong learners in tourism programmes. In addition, we propose a definition of the term 'tourism' as a turning or changing point that leads individuals to rethink, in depth, their performance and adapt it to align with nature, thereby finding the means to achieve physical, mental, and spiritual equilibrium. There are a variety of tourism programmes designed with the purpose of motivating changes in behaviour (by reconnecting individuals to nature for their realignment on the ways to well-being as well as recognition of the importance of environmental conservation). These programmes reinforce the following idea:

when placed in a conducive environment with beautiful scenery, novel cultural context, and the potential for meaningful connections with others, 'peak' experiences can initiate transformative meaning-making in a tourist (Kirillova et al., 2017: 509).

For tourism programmes, it is important that, while promoting the acquisition of new knowledge on well-being, they provide high-quality standards for acknowledging the cultural peculiarities of sites and take into consideration diverse tourist education requirements. The research on tourist profiles make it possible to identify the potentials of customised sustainability experiences for increasing interest in sustainable tourism programmes. These kinds of initiatives should be managed carefully, ensuring that tourists compatible with these aims are offered what they are looking for a while, at the same time, they are able to identify strong fundamentals for protecting and preserving natural resources. We believe that each individual has the power to alter his/her own behaviour for establishing connections with nature that, all taken, are a firm step toward sustainable development at multiple levels of maturity.

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