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**THREE ESSAYS ON PACKAGE TOURISM  
AND SUSTAINABILITY**

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*Ad Anna e Ottavio,*

*i miei genitori*



*You can be anything you want to be,  
just turn yourself into anything you think that you could ever be  
(Queen)*



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## **ABSTRACTS**

This dissertation consists of three related essays on package tourism and sustainability. While the first two essays might be referred to as companion essays and use the same dataset, the third essay uses a different dataset.

### **Abstract First Essay**

#### **Sustainability of Package Tourism and Destination Competitiveness. The case of Dominican Republic**

Mass package tourism is one of the main causes behind the ecological problems of many coastal destinations. It was initially considered incompatible with the notion of sustainability, but it is now recognized as potentially being able to incorporate more sustainable policies and practices. The essay introduces a set of sustainability practices in package tourism, and tests their role in explaining the competitiveness of a “sun and sand” tourism destination. This essay presents the results of research undertaken in Dominican Republic, one of the world’s leading markets for mass sun and sand tourism. A survey questionnaire was designed including items related to the sustainability of the vacation, and submitted to package tourists. To reduce the large set of items to a smaller one, a principal component analysis (PCA) is performed. Then, the relationship of dependency between

the dependent variables measuring destination competitiveness and the components resulting from PCA is analysed by performing a regression analysis. The empirical result shows that sustainability is positively associated to the competitiveness of the tourism destination. It supports the hypothesis that sustainable tourism development is not only good for preserving the local ecosystem, but also for improving destination competitiveness.

Keywords: *sustainability, sun and sand mass tourism, package vacation, destination competitiveness, Dominican Republic*

### **Abstract Second Essay**

#### **Tourists’ Perspective on Package Holidays and Sustainability**

It is well established that tourists’ overall satisfaction is partially determined by the assessment of different attributes. Although there is wealth of literature on the growing interest of tourists for an intact environment and authentic culture, a direct test on the relationship between sustainability of package tourism and tourists’ satisfaction has never been performed; therefore, the essay is aimed at examining whether there is a relationship with: i) overall tourists’ satisfaction; ii) intention to rebook. A survey questionnaire was designed including items related to the sustainability of the vacation, and submitted to package tourists. To reduce the large set of variables regarding the sustainability assessment to a smaller one, a principal component analysis (PCA) is performed. Then, the relationship of dependency between the two dependent variables and the components resulting from the PCA is analysed by estimating two ordered logit models. Empirical results show that a sustainable offer could improve customers’ satisfaction and increase their fidelization. This essay is also aimed at understanding if package tourists are aware of sustainability issues and

demanding more sustainable travel experiences. Hence, a descriptive statistical analysis and an importance-performance analysis are performed.

Keywords: *sustainability, sun and sand mass tourism, package holiday, hospitality industry, customer satisfaction*

### **Abstract Third Essay**

#### **Corporate Social Responsibility in the Tour Operating Business: a Survey Worldwide**

Studies on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in tourism to date have largely focused on hotels rather than tour operators. An empirical study was conducted with a sample composed by 204 tour operators worldwide for a better understanding of the CSR initiatives in the tour operating business. This essay proposes and tests a framework to assess CSR understanding and implementing by tour operators. A questionnaire has been designed listing the most relevant dimensions of what is currently referred as CSR practices in tour operating business. Through a principal component analysis and a subsequent binary logistic regression analysis it was tested if there is a relationship between CSR practices and profits' growth. Empirical evidence supports the relevance of CSR practices as a determinant of profits' growth. Moreover, sustainability seems to embody vision and values of most of tour operators interviewed. No insurmountable obstacles on adopting CSR initiatives have been detected.

Keywords: *corporate social responsibility, tourism sustainability, package vacation, tour operator*



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## **INTRODUCTION**

This dissertation consists of three related essays on package tourism and sustainability. While the first two essays might be referred to as companion essays and use the same dataset, the third essay uses a different dataset. The first dataset consists of 307 package tourists interviewed in Dominican Republic, one of the world’s leading markets for sun and sand (S&S) tourism, and also one the most tourism-dependent region in the world (Padilla & McElroy, 2005). The second dataset is composed by 204 tour operators worldwide.

The two datasets are complementary, in order to investigate sustainability in the package tourism, both from supply side (including destinations and tourism businesses, such as hotels and tour operators) and demand side (package tourists).

Mass package tourism is one of the main causes behind the ecological problems of many destinations. Coastal areas are also the first environments to experience the detrimental impacts of tourism. Mass package tourism was initially considered incompatible with the notion of sustainability, but it is now recognized as potentially being able to incorporate more sustainable policies and practices. Various authors converge in the fact that all types of tourism can aim to be sustainable.

Budeanu (2005, p. 90) claims that «sustainable tourism’ cannot be achieved if mass tourism practices are not adjusted to integrate sustainability». The reason is that tour operators have become a dominating force in the holiday market. As stated by Cavlek (2002), they have had such an important influence on tourism development that we talk about the “tourism industry”. The central (and perhaps insurmountable) question is reconciling the concept of sustainability with rapid tourism growth aimed by many emerging countries.

The first essay introduces a set of sustainability practices in package tourism and tests their role in explaining the competitiveness of a S&S tourism destination. To reduce the large set of items to a smaller one, a principal component analysis (PCA) is performed. Then, the relationship of dependency between the dependent variables measuring destination competitiveness and the components resulting from PCA is analysed by performing a regression analysis.

Sustainability of tourism destinations has become a major area of tourism research. The concept of competitiveness has been recognized as connected with the notion of sustainability (Ritchie, Crouch, 2003; Hassan, 2000). However, the large debate on the role of sustainable development has partly overlooked the call for a deeper empirical test. There is still no clear empirical evidence of the role of sustainability in explaining the competitiveness of a S&S destination.

Competitiveness of mass S&S destinations needs attention not only because it accounts for a sizable share of the total tourist flows, but also because is the main form of tourism (often almost exclusive) in many islands, countries, and regions worldwide.

It is well established that tourist’s overall satisfaction is partially determined by the assessment of different attributes. Although there is wealth of literature on the growing interest of tourists for an intact environment and authentic culture, a direct test on the relationship between sustainability of package tourism and tourists’ satisfaction has never been performed. Package tourists’ interest in sustainability is still not

demonstrated. This is a central topic for tourism industry, as Miller (2001) reminds us that we cannot expect business to move towards sustainability unless it is economically beneficial or requested by the consumers.

Therefore, the second essay is aimed at examining whether there is a relationship of dependency between attributes of sustainability of a package vacation and: i) overall tourists' satisfaction; ii) intention to rebook. To reduce the large set of variables to a smaller set, we perform a principal component analysis (PCA), and we test the relationship among the components resulting from PCA and the dependent variables through a regression.

This essay is also aimed at understanding if package tourists are aware of sustainability issues and are demanding more sustainable travel experiences. Hence, a descriptive statistical analysis and an importance-performance analysis are performed.

The hospitality industry has undergone tumultuous changes in the last decade. Competitive pressures, changes of consumer preferences, new distributions channels and technological innovations have produced a change in the characteristics of tourism packages.

Tour operators (TO) have progressively recognized that tourists have become increasingly aware of sustainability issues, showing a disapproval towards unsustainable tourism development. Some TO have started to undertake corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in order to avoid the menace of being seen as irresponsible firms. CSR in tour operating business reflects a complex and multifaceted concept, although there is now widespread recognition that CSR relates to TO commitment in achieving sustainable development not only in the environmental dimension, but also in the social and economic dimension.

The third essay proposes and tests a framework to assess CSR understanding and implementing by TO. Studies on CSR in tourism to date have largely focused on hotels rather than TO. An assessment of the CSR initiatives on tour operators worldwide has never been done.

Hence, for a better understanding of the CSR initiatives in the tour operating business, an empirical study was conducted with a sample composed by 204 tour operators worldwide. TO were asked to recognize the importance of CSR practices, to identify the greatest obstacles in adopting them, and to describe their intensity of engagement in implementing CSR initiatives. Through a PCA and a subsequent binary logistic regression analysis it was tested if there is a relationship between CSR practices and profits' growth.

# **CHAPTER I. First Essay**

## **SUSTAINABILITY OF PACKAGE TOURISM AND DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS. THE CASE OF DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

### **1.1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Tourism is in many developing regions worldwide the most viable economic development option, and in some countries, the main source of foreign exchange earnings. In the last three decades, tourism has occupied an increasing position in regional development, often seen as the great hope for less developed regions. The fastest and easiest way was to put tourism development in the hands of large multinational tour operators (TO). The major mass “sun and sand” (S&S) tourism destinations are mostly depending on foreign companies in order to sell the existing capacity of their tourism facilities (Bastakis, Buhalis, Butler, 2004; Budeanu, 2005 Alegre, Cladera, Sard, 2013). The long term sustainability of the destinations is subordinated to TO first priority – to stay in business – as they will move to another destination as soon as their financial interests can

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<sup>1</sup> The work presented in this Chapter has been realized in collaboration with Magdalena Cladera who contributed to the statistical analysis, under the supervision of Tonino Pencarelli.

be better served (Carey, Gountas, Gilbert, 1997). Tourism is one of the main industry in the world with impacts to match. Because tourism occurs in environmentally fragile areas, its impact on the environment is relevant. Through large-scale tourism development, many coastal pristine locations worldwide have been damaged. Mass tourism is one of the main causes behind the ecological problems of many marine and coastal areas with a rich biodiversity (Davenport, Davenport, 2006).

Sustainability of tourism destinations has consequently become a major area of tourism research. The concept of competitiveness has been recognized as connected with the notion of sustainability (Ritchie, Crouch, 2000; Hassan, 2000). However, the large debate on the role of sustainable development has partly overlooked the call for a deeper empirical test. There is still no clear empirical evidence of the role of sustainability in explaining the competitiveness of a S&S destination. This study aims at filling this gap.

First, we operationalize the conceptual approach of many tourism studies by including in the analysis a number of items we have found as important to define sustainability of a package vacation. We submit the questionnaire to package tourists in the Dominican Republic (DR), one of the world's leading markets for sun and sand tourism, and also one the most tourism-dependent regions in the world (Padilla& McElroy, 2005).

Then, to reduce the large set of variables to a smaller set, we perform a principal component analysis (PCA). Finally, we test the relationship among the components resulting from PCA and the tourism destination competitiveness through a linear regression. We measure the competitiveness of the tourism destination using the following indicators: i) tourist satisfaction; ii) environmental quality; iii) socio-cultural heritage; iv) local economic development, following Cucculelli and Goffi (2016) approach.

We choose package tourists in DR for various reasons. A major drawback in literature has been the very limited attention devoted to organized tourists in the explanation of the competitiveness of a tourism

destination. When package tourists are interviewed (Wong, Kwong, 2004; Wang et al., 2007; Raikonen, Honkanen, 2013) they are asked to rate classic elements of their vacation (beach, nightlife, activities, food, transportation, accommodation facilities, etc.). No empirical studies focus on sustainability elements from a package tourists' perspective. Moreover, these elements are always analysed in connection with TO quality of services or performances, they are never been associated to destination competitiveness.

Competitiveness of mass S&S destinations needs attention not only because it accounts for a sizable share of the total tourist flows, but also because is the main form of tourism (often almost exclusive) in many other islands, small countries, and regions in the world.

DR is one of the world's primary destinations for S&S tourism; it is by far the Caribbean's leading tourism country and one of the Latin America's main tourism destinations. Furthermore, little and mostly outdated empirical work has focused on impacts of tourism into the Caribbean (Hills, Lundgren, 1977; Belisle, Hoy 1983; Holder, 1988; Weaver, 1991; De Albuquerque, McElroy, 1992; McElroy, De Albuquerque, 1998; Yaw, 2005), in spite of the fact that the Caribbean is the most tourism-dependent region in the world (Padilla& McElroy, 2005), and most of the tourism is controlled by international tour operators. This is a common pattern for many other tourism regions worldwide; therefore, our results could be of interest for a larger audience.

The paper is structured as follow. Section 2 sets the theoretical framework. Section 3 summarizes the Dominican Republic case study. Section 4 describes the research design and methodology. Section 5 provides a discussion of the main findings. Some conclusions are drawn in the last section of the paper.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

### **1.2.1 Sustainability of Destinations: Mass “Sun and Sand” Tourism**

Sustainability is a multifaceted concept encompassing various elements concerning characteristics, resources, facilities and services of a tourism destination.

The concept of sustainability was transferred to tourism from the notion of sustainable development following the publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development Report, known as the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987). Even if after more than a quarter-century the world is an enormously different place (Sneddon, Howarth, Norgaard, 2006), and the Report has been criticised for the central approach (Adams, 1990) and for the inattention to power relations among local-to-global actors (Lélé, 1991), it represented an important starting point for the formulation of sustainable policies. In Sharpley’s view (2000) sustainable tourism development does not appear to be entirely consistent with the developmental aspects of sustainable development, but has a larger product centre perspective.

Tourism researchers have been trying to define sustainable tourism development (STD) for many years. Despite it is widely accepted that STD is a long term goal (WTO, 1993), and a concept which is constantly evolving (Inskeep, 1991) and intrinsically dynamic (Liu 2003), there is no standard definition for “sustainable tourism destination” (Tepelus, Cordoba, 2005). Lee (2001, p. 314) observes that «since destinations are unique, so are sustainable development issues in these destinations».

A number of authors have made significant contributions to the effort of understanding tourism from a sustainability perspective. Mihalič (2000), Hassan (2000) and others study destination competitiveness from environmental perspective, but sustainability is much more than only a function of the natural environment (Global Environment Facility, 1998). Craik (1995) and Butler (1999) underline that sustainability cannot be

exclusively reduced to environmental matters. As stated by Swarbrooke (1999, p. 13), sustainable tourism is «tourism which is economically viable but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment and the social fabric of the host community». McKercher (1993) also recognizes the ecological and the social perspectives of sustainability in tourism.

However, there is an emerging consensus that STD aims at minimizing environmentally negative impacts, preserving cultural heritage, at the same time providing learning opportunities, including positive benefits for the local economy and contributing to the enhancement of local community structures (Weaver, 2005). Sustainability rests at least on three integrated elements: the ecological, socio-cultural, and economic dimension.

Practical evidence shows that STD not only can stop further deterioration, but also contribute towards the appreciation of the destination (Aguiló, Alegre, Sard, 2005).

Mass tourism was initially considered incompatible with the notion of sustainability (Krippendorf, 1987; Butler, 1991; Valentine, 1993), as they were seen as polar opposites by Pearce (1992). The idea of the polar opposite was followed by the position of the “movement” resulted in the demand to change mass tourism to more sustainable forms (Cohen, 1987; Butler, 1990), and finally to the idea of “convergence” between the two types (Inskeep, 1991). Inskeep (1991), Hunter, Green (1995), Clarke (1997), Swarbrooke (1999), Budeanu (2005), Tepelus (2005) converge in the fact that all types of tourism can aim to be sustainable. Budeanu (2005, p. 90) asserts that «sustainable tourism’ cannot be achieved if mass tourism practices are not adjusted to integrate sustainability».

Hence, economic benefits for locals and the minimisation of environmental and social repercussions could be complementary aims in every destination: the key factor is managing and controlling the tourism activity.

Besides, two other aspects of sustainability need to be considered. First, Liu (2003) and Kastenholz (2004) observe that sustainable tourism cannot

be achieved without a proper management of tourist demand. Notwithstanding, demand issues have often been neglected in the sustainable tourism debate. This is maybe due to the fact that the concept of sustainability was simply transposed from the broader concept of sustainable development, where the nature of demand is considered as a given condition. This is not the case of tourism that is both supply and demand driven.

Second, many authors agree that the competitive destination is the one which increases well-being for its residents in the long term (Crouch, Ritchie, 1999; Bahar, Kozak, 2007; Dwyer, Kim, 2003; Heath, 2002). In this sense, Bramwell et al. (1996) observe that “locals” need to be empowered in order to go towards a sustainable tourism development: if tourism is an income generator sector for local communities having a multiplier effect, the host population has to be empowered and needs to fully participate in the development process.

Coastal areas are very often the first environments to experience the detrimental impacts of tourism (Buraka, Dogana, Gazioglu, 2004; Davenport, Davenport, 2006). The increase in coastal tourism flows, especially in the form of mass tourism, is coupled with emerging concerns about potentially negative impacts on regional development from an environmental, economic and social point of view (Shaalán, 2005). Aguilò, Alegre, Sard (2005) point out the persistence of a S&S tourism model, but not the same as before: several features of S&S tourism have changed, as an adaptation within the framework of STD. Various mass coastal destinations are trying to move towards a more sustainable approach of tourism development (Fortuny et al. 2008; Rodríguez, 2008).

The central (and perhaps insurmountable) question is reconciling the concept of sustainability with rapid tourism growth aimed by many emerging countries. Tourism was seen as an important source of foreign exchange (Tapper, 2001). Not having the necessary skills, in order to attract tourism flows as quickly as possible, they have totally relied on tour operators (Cavlek, 2002). Consequently, TO have had a high degree of

influence on the type of tourism developed. The power of TO in developing countries has been documented many years ago (Dieke 1991; Sinclair, 1992). The emerging of new destinations offers TO more choice, and therefore makes them be less dependent on any one destination (Carey, Gountas, Gilbert, 1997).

Various authors have highlighted that TO do not always take a long-term view of destination development (Carey, Gountas, Gilbert, 1997; Curtin & Busby, 1999; Forsyth, 1995; Miller, 2001; Tapper, 2001; Klemm & Parkinson, 2001). As Klemm & Parkinson (2001) noted, TO are primarily “profit seeking companies”, and they often view sustainability as a secondary objective. That is one of the main reasons why putting the principles of sustainability into practice has proven to be anything but simple in tourism destinations, especially in small developing nations.

Many authors have underlined the relationship between sustainability and competitiveness and suggested that sustainability can improve destination competitiveness (among others, Ritchie, Crouch, 2003, Hassan, 2000). However, there is still no clear evidence of a role of sustainability factors in explaining the competitiveness of a S&S tourism destination. Consequently, we propose the following research question: RQ. Is sustainability of package S&S tourism associated with destination competitiveness?

### **1.2.2 Island Tourism and Coastal Tourism**

Many academic books and articles related to island tourism have been published in the last three decades. A rich literature over the years has also grown about tourism in the small island developing states (SIDS), focusing on environmental and economic problems. SIDS were brought to world attention by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) “Agenda 21”, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which called for organising a Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of SIDS. This Conference, held in Bridgetown two years later, led to the Barbados

Declaration and Programme of Action, a set of strategies for protecting the fragile environments of SIDS. On September 2014, the Third International SIDS Conference was held in Samoa, reaffirming and updating some of the principles of the previous conferences.

Much of island and SIDS tourism literature concentrates on environmental vulnerabilities, structural problems and economic constraints suffered by islands. In the SIDS tourism context, Croes (2006) argues that tourism is the best way to create growth and employment, generating foreign exchange and reducing poverty. It is claimed that tourism in small islands is often characterized by lack of local control and participation in tourism development (Rao, 2002), lack of experience and expertise (Kokkranikal et al., 2003) and limited resources (Cheng & Vu, 2015).

Many authors assert that tourism impacts are nowhere more pervasive and persistent as on islands and their communities, especially smaller ones (Conlin & Baum, 1995; Briguglio et al., 1996; Lockhart & DrakakisSmith, 1996; Apostolopoulos & Gayle, 2002; Gossling, 2003; Carlsen & Butler, 2011). Strategic planning methodologies for tourism development in the island context from the point of view of sustainability were presented (García-Falcón, Medina-Muñoz, 1999).

Common themes in this literature are the fragile environmental characteristics (Kerr, 2005), peripherality and vulnerability (Lim & Cooper, 2009). Hoti et al. (2005) emphasize the low resistance to external shocks, including natural disasters as cyclones, hurricanes and seismic activity, political disorders and terrorism, and the threat of sea-level rise. From the economic viewpoint, Briguglio (1995) underlines the isolation from major markets, the poor business diversification and the difficulties in substituting imports goods with local products, which leads to a high dependence on the exterior. The author claims that the small internal market, due to the small population, means low level of competitiveness and no possibilities of taking advantage of economies of scale. Further structural handicaps which have been identified are the high transportation and communication costs, the poor infrastructure and the low levels of education. Other common

features are the lack of local financial capital and the dependence on single commodities (Lockhart & DrakakisSmith, 1996), the structural difficulties and high levels of economic leakage (Buhalis, 1999).

On the other hand, as reported by Scheyvens & Momsen (2008), there is another part of the literature that emphasizes the strengths of islands, and in particular small islands. According to it, small island size can ease coordination of tourism industry, facilitate innovations to respond to market demands, and help to penetrate the market with a recognizable brand (Croes, 2006). Armstrong & Read (2006) identify strong cultural, social and natural capital present within many SIDS. Baldacchino (2005) emphasizes the strong international ties given by the historic high mobility of many islanders. Campling (2006) highlights the political strengths of many small islands due to the decolonization, and argues that it facilitates tourism planning.

Therefore, many doubts arise. Are islands unique as tourist destinations facing peculiar problems? Are issues from literature above valid to all islands? Is “island tourism” a distinctive phenomenon, or rather is just a certain model of tourism development that can be common to some islands but also to continental coastal destinations?

In our opinion, the representation of a tourism model common to small island developing states worldwide is too simplistic and has suffered from an overly narrow conceptualization. Which should be the measure of an island to be called “small”? Is the term “small” referred to population, area, or what else? Dozens of islands are considered altogether in a single “SIDS box”, as the Pacific island of Niue (1.1 thousand inhabitants, 260 km<sup>2</sup>, \$10 million GDP), Singapore (5.5 million inhabitants, 719 km<sup>2</sup>, \$308 billion GDP), Cape Verde (525 thousand inhabitants, 4,033 km<sup>2</sup>, \$3.1 billion GDP) and Dominican Republic (9.9 million inhabitants, 48,442 km<sup>2</sup>, \$66 billion GDP). What do they have in common? Maybe the only thing is that they are surrounded by water.

As claimed by Scheyvens & Momsen (2008) a stereotypical picture of island states has been built; there is not always robust evidence to support

assertions of vulnerability, the situation is highly differentiated. As argued by Sharpley (2012), the study of island tourism is unlikely to disclose solutions common to all islands. Carlsen and Butler (2011) observe that the reality is more complicated, there is little homogeneity than the above literature would suggest.

Consequently, this study rather to be generalizable to other islands or even SIDS worldwide, can fit the context of coastal destinations or regions, which followed the path of package tourism development and are coping with sustainability problems.

### **1.3 The Dominican Republic Case Study**

Tourism is a huge contributor to the economies of all Caribbean countries and the first contributor to many of them. Tourism in the Caribbean region, with 26.3 million visitors in 2014 (+5.2% compared to 2013) (CTO, 2015), contributes \$51,9 billion towards the area's gross domestic product in 2014, which represented 14,6% of its total GDP (WTTC, 2015). The Caribbean was defined as "the most tourism-dependent region in the world" (Pentelow, Scott, 2011), and WTTC (2015) certifies that it is the first region in the world for: tourism total contribution to GDP (14.6%) and to employment (13%), for tourism investment contribution to total capital investment (12.2%), and for visitor exports contribution to total exports (17.8%). Domestic travel spending generates just 29.6% of direct tourism GDP.

The WEF Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index suggests that most Caribbean economies rely extensively on their famous beaches, but many countries in the region still need to address competitiveness gaps (WEF, 2015). In the last two decades, there has been a huge growth in chain hotels foreign-owned and in luxury hotels aimed at attracting high-spending tourists. Much of the profits from tourism are earned by foreigner corporations, which own hotels and arrange tourists' activities.

Dominican Republic (DR) is the Caribbean's main tourism destination. DR is a part of the Caribbean island of "Hispaniola", shared with Haiti, and

with over 10 million people, is also the second-largest Caribbean nation after Cuba. We chose DR as applied case for various reasons.

DR is a place with outstanding natural resources and unique characteristics. Lonely Planet, the world’s leading travel publisher, has named Dominican Republic as one of its Top 10 Countries in the world for tourism: “with sun-drenched beaches, ecotourism, a rich culture of music and dance, influential art galleries and museums, and of course a warm and welcoming people, the country has all the elements of a perfect vacation destination”<sup>2</sup>.

DR is one of the world’s leading markets for sun and sand tourism. DR is the leader in the Caribbean also in terms of tourism revenue and hotel rooms (approximately 70,000) (Constanzo, 2014). DR ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the Americas by the number of international tourist arrivals, after “giants” such as USA, Mexico, Canada, Brazil and Argentina (UNWTO, 2015). Just to make clear the importance of this small country in terms of tourist numbers, it is enough to note that DR received 5.1 million international tourists in 2014, only 800 thousand less than Argentina (5.9 million) and Brazil (5.8 million), countries 57 and 174 times larger than DR, respectively. This may be the first alarm bell for the island’s delicate eco-system.

Beach tourism is the main tourism sector of DR, receiving the biggest number of visitors and generating most of the revenues. DR is a typical example of large-scale all-inclusive coastal tourism development. Most of the tourism in DR is organised by international tour operators. The majority of the resorts are located along the coast in only two of the 32 Dominican provinces: La Altagracia (Punta Cana) and Puerto Plata, the areas chosen for our applied case. Padilla, McElroy (2005) study findings show that in a comparison with 42 small islands worldwide, Punta Cana and Puerto Plata are among the most tourism-penetrated areas worldwide. In 2014, more than 5.1 million international tourists visited the country, while their number did not exceed 1.8 million in 1995<sup>3</sup>. DR accounts for 23% of all tourist arrivals

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.islandsinfo.com/dominicanrep.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL>.

in the Caribbean region, and is by far the first country in terms of tourism arrivals, followed by Cuba (2.9 million) (UNWTO, 2015).

DR visitors jumped by a remarkable +9.6% compared to 2013 (CTO, 2015). The sharp increase in the number of visitors is creating even more strain on the fragile local ecosystems. The operation of all-inclusive resorts has significant impacts on the environment in DR. Salinization of groundwater, damage of coral reefs and mangroves, enormous water consumption, pollution of the water, the air and of the soil are often the main environmental problems arising from this type of tourism.

For all these reasons, we think that a world’s leading destination for all-inclusive package tourism such as DR can be an interesting case study.

## **1.4. Empirical Analysis**

### **1.4.1 Research Design and Data Collection**

In order to generate the desired empirical data, a survey instrument was created. The data were collected with a questionnaire asking tourists how much they agree or disagree with various statements related to the sustainability of their package vacation on a 5-point Likert scale. Drawing the questionnaire, the three dimensions of the sustainability of a package vacation – environmental, sociocultural, economic – were considered and translated into the statements presented in Table 1.2.

The survey also asks respondents to rate overall satisfaction with their stay at the destination, the environmental quality, sociocultural heritage and economic development in a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire also collects information about socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age, education, country of residence, travel party, times travelling to DR, package travel experience). The sample’s descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 Sample's descriptive statistics.**

Variable	%	Variable	%
<b>Sex</b>		<b>Whom did you travelled with?</b>	
Male	47,73	Alone	2,94
Female	52,27	With friends	31,37
<b>Age</b>		With my partner	48,04
18 – 29	10,71	With my partner and children	10,46
30 – 44	48,7	Other	7,19
45 – 59	34,74	<b>How many organized trips have you been on in the last 10 years?</b>	
60 and over	5,84	1	3,58
<b>Education</b>		2-4	39,09
Primary school education	0,65	5-6	26,71
Secondary school education	12,38	8 or more	30,62
Non-university higher education	46,25	<b>How many times have you been to Dominican Republic?</b>	
University education	40,72	1	58,77
<b>Country of residence</b>		2	21,75
Italy	5,25	3	11,69
Spain	5,25	4 or more	7,79
France	8,52	<b>How many times have you been to this hotel?</b>	
Germany	14,1	1	48,49
UK	15,74	2-4	32,44
Ireland	1,97	5 or more	19,06
Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark	13,11		
Belgium, Netherelands	6,89		
Austria, Swizerland	5,25		
Others European Countries	3,93		
Russia	1,64		
USA	5,9		
Canada	3,61		
Australia, New Zeland	1,97		
Center/South American Countries	5,25		
Other Countries	1,64		

The questionnaire was designed in 5 languages: English, French, Spanish, Italian and Dutch. It was pretested on five travel agency managers and ten tourism researchers. A pilot test was conducted to ascertain the appropriateness of the question items on 30 organized tourists. On the basis of the pre-test, some statements were simplified and/or rewritten. Then, the

final draft of the model was screened by a panel of both academics and practitioners.

Tourists were contacted personally by the researcher who explained the purpose of the research. They were asked to give the researcher their email contact, in order to send them a web survey to respond when back home. This approach was chosen so that tourists could have had a more informed and a clearer judgement at the end of their holiday. Punta Cana and Puerto Plata were selected as applied cases as they are the two most tourism dependent regions in DR (Padilla& McElroy, 2005). The survey was submitted between December 2013 and March 2014. A total of 307 usable surveys were returned.

#### **1.4.2 Methodology**

The responses were summarised in four components by applying a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The obtained components were considered as explanatory variables, instead of the original items, in the set of models that were estimated later for analysing the interrelationships among sustainability and destination competitiveness. This procedure reduces superfluous information and would prevent multicollinearity problems in the models.

Two statistics were used to test if the factor analysis is appropriate for this study (Hair, et al., 1995). First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic is calculated as 0.903 which is statistically significant. Second, Barlett’s test of sphericity is conducted, yielding a significant Chi-Square value in order to test the significance of the correlation matrix ( $\chi = 2,622.698$ , Sig. 0.000). Findings of both tests suggest that the factor analysis was appropriate for this study. Finally, Cronbach’s Alpha was computed for each component (see table 1.2). All the coefficients indicate that these multiple measures are reliable for measuring each construct.

In order to respond the research question, the relationship among these components and different dimensions of destination competitiveness were analysed. Four linear regressions were estimated, where the components obtained from the previous PCA were used as explanatory variables and the dependent variables, which measure competitiveness, were the following (measured on a 5-point Likert scale):

- tourist satisfaction;
- environmental quality;
- socio-cultural heritage;
- local economic development.

High tourist numbers and market share had long been supposed to be the indicators of a competitive destination. TDC has been initially considered as having more arrivals, bed-nights, revenues, or market share than that of another destination. Competitiveness was viewed as the capacity of a destination to expand its market position and share through time (d’Hartesse, 2000). Hence, destination competitiveness has been originally measured by indicators such as arrivals, overnight stays, market share and revenues. These views have several shortcomings.

First, the importance of not overloading the carrying capacity of a destination preserving environmental integrity was not taken into consideration (Croes, 2010). Second, the relation between tourism and economic prosperity to local communities was not considered. The fact that tourism development is linked to socioeconomic local development has been greatly underestimated: the future of a destination depends on how well they are balanced. Therefore, the idea that tourism should respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities and provide viable, long-term socio-economic benefits has come forward.

Ritchie and Crouch (2000) highlight the relationship between competitiveness and economic prosperity, and the delivery of an experience that is more satisfying compared to other similar destinations. Many authors seem to agree that the competitive destination is the one which increases well-being for its residents in the long term (Crouch, Ritchie, 1999; Bahar,

Kozak, 2007; Dwyer, Kim, 2003; Heath, 2002). Buhalis (2000) identifies four main objectives for a competitive destination: enhance the long-term prosperity of local people; maximise visitors’ satisfaction; maximize profitability of local businesses and generate multiplier effects; optimize tourism impacts. This also acknowledges the view of Müller (1994) and Hunter (1995) who recognize that a competitive destination creates the correct balance on the tourist satisfaction, well being of the residents, intact nature, and healthy culture. Ritchie and Crouch, (2003) define tourism destination competitiveness as the ability to increase tourism expenditure, to increasingly attract visitors while providing them with satisfying experiences, while enhancing the well-being of destination residents and preserving the natural and social capital of the destination.

As in Cucculelli and Goffi (2016), we follow this approach in measuring destination competitiveness. This is why we measure destination competitiveness using the four indicators above.

In addition, the socio-demographic and trip characteristics that were collected by the questionnaire were also used as independent variables (sex, age, education, country of origin, size of the travel party, number of organized trips in the last ten years, number of previous visits to the Dominican Republic, number of previous trips with the tour operator). The variables that were not statistically significant were removed and the final models were re-estimated.

## **1.5. Results and Analysis**

Principal Component Analysis produced four components, which explain 64% of the total variance. The list of items included in the components is shown in table 1.2.

**Table 1.2. PCA of sustainability assessment**

Components	Loadings	Variance (%)	Communalities	Cronbach's alpha
<b><i>Environmental sustainability</i></b>		<b>41,67</b>		<b>0,887</b>
A recycling waste system was set up	0,817		0,719	
Water saving actions were implemented	0,807		0,790	
Energy saving actions were implemented	0,782		0,741	
Detailed recommendations were made about how to respect the environment	0,677		0,676	
Charitable projects were promoted	0,614		0,590	
Environmental friendly means of transport were used	0,572		0,574	
<b><i>Socio-economic sustainability</i></b>		<b>10,15</b>		<b>0,801</b>
We were encouraged to buy handmade products and souvenirs directly from local producers	0,760		0,621	
We were encouraged to eat typical foods in local restaurants	0,752		0,645	
We were encouraged to buy excursions directly from local travel agencies	0,725		0,545	
Detailed information were offered about the local culture	0,549		0,523	
Interactions with the local community were promoted	0,536		0,557	
<b><i>Eco-friendly tourism development</i></b>		<b>6,50</b>		<b>0,732</b>
The height of buildings in the hotel is restricted to the height of the vegetation profile	0,802		0,688	
The structures of the hotel site are built with low-impact materials	0,573		0,676	
Voluntary towel and bed linen reuse programmes were realized	0,591		0,483	
The size of the groups was limited when visiting natural reserves	0,564		0,621	
Public access was maintained in the beach	0,391		0,379	
<b><i>Local working conditions</i></b>		<b>5,68</b>		<b>0,884</b>
Employees seem to be adequately paid	0,853		0,846	
Employees seem to be satisfied with their working conditions	0,829		0,848	
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0,903		
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Chi-Square	2622,698		
	Signific.	0		

The first component accounts by itself for a high percentage of the variance (41.67%), something that is frequently encountered in PCA. This mixed grouping encompasses the notion of “environmental sustainability” including various eco-friendly practices adopted. The second component is associated with five variables inherent to “socioeconomic sustainability” (10.15%). The tie to local economy is the common theme of three attributes comprised by this component (link with local restaurants, producers and travel agencies); the two remaining elements are inherent to the sociocultural concept of sustainability. The third component refers to variables concerning the “eco-friendly tourism development” (6.50%); some items refer to structural characteristics of the resort site, other items to eco-friendly initiatives. The last component concerns the “local working conditions” (5.68%), both wage and non-wage dependent.

Table 1.3 summarizes the results related to the effects of the PCA components on each of the dependent variables obtained from the four linear regressions: environmental quality (Env Qual); socio-cultural heritage (Soc Cul); local economic development (Econ Dev); tourist satisfaction (Tour Sat).

**Table 1.3. Regression results for the dependents variables measuring destination competitiveness**

	Env Qual	Soc Cult	Econ Dev	Tour Sat
Environmental sustainability	0.425***	0.385***	0.156***	0.127**
Socio-economic sustainability	0.217***	0.570***	0.278***	0.150***
Eco-friendly tourism development	0.635***	0.297***	0.195***	0.160***
Local working conditions	0.122*	0.363***	0.595***	0.178***
(Constant)	5.694***	3.679***	4.388***	5.858***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.461	0.534	0.511	0.268
Number of observations	272	272	270	272

Note: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

The results show that all factors – “environmental sustainability; socio-economic sustainability; eco-friendly tourism development; local working

conditions” – are positively associated at a very significant level to dependent variables measuring destination competitiveness.

First of all the role of environmental issues (here represented by two components “environmental sustainability and eco-friendly tourism development”) emerges. Waste management and water and energy consumption are important elements of demonstrating commitment to sustainability. However, as it is clear from these groups of items, destination competitiveness is much more than only a function of a good waste management and water/energy saving programs. It is also dependent on the environmentally-friendly tourism planning and development. Caribbean region has been characterized by a form of mass tourism development harmful to the island’s fragile ecosystems (Padilla, McElroy, 2005). DR is a paradigmatic example: it is ranked 134th out of 141 countries in the world in terms of environmental sustainability by the World Economic Forum Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (WEF, 2015). Nature has been gradually replaced by tourism constructions. This is common to many destinations. As pristine sites become well known, they have been progressively occupied by anonymous sites made of concrete and steel perfectly replicable everywhere in the world. Empirical evidence shows that this not only ends up being painful for the local ecosystem, but can also have very negative impacts on the competitiveness of the destination.

Results also indicate that it is important to stimulate economic interactions with locals, as they can improve destination competitiveness. DR history was characterized, as elsewhere in the Caribbean region, by colonial maladministration and plantation slavery, a legacy that seems to continue to inhibit the economic growth, as claimed by Ferguson (1992). High leakage rates are often detected with the presence of a mass tourism development (Hampton, 1998; Weaver, Lawton, 2002). A great proportion of the benefits derived from tourism leaks to foreign countries (Telfer, Wall, 2000; Page, Connell, 2006; Sandbrook, 2010), as in DR and the Caribbean. Tourism represents the core industry of the DR economy: the contribution of tourism to the Gross Domestic Product amounts to 18%, generating about

20% of direct and indirect jobs in the country, and gross income exceed the 4 billion dollars (Constanzo, 2014). Nevertheless, the population in DR did not entirely benefit from the growth of this sector.

Empirical evidence shows that local working conditions have a significant and positive relationship with destination competitiveness. DR has experienced growing debt problems, unemployment and high inflation. According to the latest official poverty data<sup>4</sup>, more than a third of the country’s total population is living in poverty (almost 20 per cent in extreme poverty), with a shortage of basic food, sanitary and health problems. In rural areas, poor people constitute half of the population, so many decided to move to the coast in search of job opportunities in tourism. Meanwhile, national economic policies created the conditions to generate a supply of labour for tourism, offering incentives to foreign companies investing in the tourist industry. These results call for a deeper consideration of the links between employment and tourism destination competitiveness. Choy (1995) claims that the prevalence of restaurants, bars and hotels may induce to think that tourism industry is relatively low skilled. This has resulted in local people providing cheap labour in tourism services instead of being the main receivers of the growing tourism business. The great changes which have happened in tourism have made customers more demanding and looking for a better quality experience. Employment in tourism sector is too often considered to be irrelevant in affecting business and destination competitiveness. These exploratory results suggest that changes should be coming soon.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/country/dominican-republic>.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

The aim of the paper was to analyse if sustainability of package S&S tourism is associated with destination competitiveness. In order to do this, we perform a survey by including a list of sustainability indicators and we submit the questionnaire to organized tourists in Dominican Republic, one of the world’s leading S&S tourism destinations.

To reduce the large set of variables to a smaller set a principal component analysis (PCA) was performed. Factor components were first used as main independent regressors in a successive regression analysis. The empirical result shows that sustainability is positively associated to the competitiveness of the tourism destination. It supports the hypothesis that sustainable tourism development is not only good for preserving the ecosystem of a coastal S&S tourism destination, but also for improving its competitiveness. Hence, a competitive S&S destination can be developed if there an integration of sustainability issues into all relevant business practices.

A limitation for this study could be the number of respondents, regarding the type of analysis, it can be considered relatively small. Thus, future studies may attempt to obtain a larger sample. Despite a relatively small sample size, these findings should be viewed as a first step to understanding the relationship between sustainability and destination competitiveness. Another limitation is that respondents to the survey questionnaires are tourists from two areas in DR. To enhance the generalizability of findings from this study, replication of this study for different S&S locations in other areas worldwide is encouraged.

This research model is the first of its kind, but it can be suitable for analysing these relationships elsewhere, and could be generalized to other coastal mass destinations affected by socioeconomic and environmental vulnerability. This study is certainly relevant to other S&S mass destinations that face similar challenges in terms of tourism’s legitimate contribution to sustainable tourism development. On a practical level, this research provides

insights for government and industry operators to better understand the underlying factors that influence destination competitiveness.

These results are likely to help tourism policy makers and destination managers to adopt competitive strategies based not only on business related factors, but to consider sustainability matters a top priority in their plans. If international tourism businesses are not particularly interested in the sustainable long-term development of destinations, alternative methods should be considered by destinations. Legislation and regulatory action could help to establish effective actions by tourism businesses, enforcing voluntary initiatives.

## **CHAPTER II. Second Essay**

# **TOURISTS' PERSPECTIVE ON PACKAGE HOLIDAYS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

### **2.1 Introduction<sup>5</sup>**

The hospitality industry has undergone tumultuous changes in the last decade. Competitive pressures, changes of consumer preferences, new distributions channels and technological innovations have produced a change in the characteristics of tourism packages. The growing interest of tourists for quality is highlighted by numerous research studies. Krippendorf (1987) and Poon (1993) affirm the existence of a new tourist, more active, experienced, open-minded, and searching for the quality. Nevertheless, tourists' interest in sustainability is still not demonstrated, and it is subject of much debate (Forsyth, 1997; Middleton and Hawkins, 1998; Curtin and Busby, 1999; Budeanu, 2000, 2009; Miller, 2001, 2003; Van Wijk and Persoon, 2006). There is room for more in-depth research into sustainability and organized tourists' preferences.

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<sup>5</sup> The work presented in this Chapter has been realized in collaboration with Magdalena Cladera who contributed to the statistical analysis, under the supervision of Tonino Pencarelli.

This is a central topic for tourism industry, as Miller (2001) reminds us that we cannot expect business to move towards sustainability unless it is economically beneficial or requested by the consumers. It is well established in the tourism literature that tourist's overall satisfaction is partially determined by the assessment of different attributes (Alegre & Cladera, 2006; Alegre & Garau, 2011; Alegre & Cladera, 2009; Cho, 1998; Danaher & Arweiler, 1996; Fallon & Schofield, 2003; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Kozak, 2003; Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000; Osti, Disegna, & Brida, 2012; Pizam, Neumann, & Reichel, 1978; Caber, Albayrak, Matzer, 2012; Kozak, Rimmington, 1999; Bahar, Kozak, 2007; Haahty, Yavas, 1983; Haathy, 1986; Kozak, 2002; Rääkkönen, Honkanen, 2013; Wang et al., 2007). Nevertheless, a direct test of the relationship between sustainability of a package holiday and tourists' satisfaction has never been performed.

We aim at filling this gap by interviewing package tourists from two hotels in Dominican Republic (DR). Tourists were asked to rate in a 5-point Likert scale the importance of different components of a vacation. They were also asked to evaluate how much they agree with various statements related to the sustainability initiatives implemented by the hotel in a 5-point Likert scale. Following the Alegre, Garau (2010) approach, the questionnaire also includes some attributes where the respondents could express their discontent.

This study is aimed at understanding, first, if package tourists are aware of sustainability issues, and are demanding more sustainable travel experiences. Therefore, after a descriptive statistics analysis, we perform an importance-performance analysis (IPA).

A second objective is to examine whether there is a relationship of dependency between i) overall satisfaction, ii) intention to rebook, and different attributes of the sustainability of the vacation. To reduce the large set of variables to a smaller set, we perform a principal component analysis (PCA); these relationships are analysed by estimating two ordered logit models.

The paper is structured as follow. Section 2 sets the theoretical framework. Section 3 give details about the empirical analysis (research design and methodology). Section 4 provides a discussion of the main findings. Some final remarks and hints for further research are discussed in the last section of the paper.

## **2.2. Literature review**

Dolnicar, Crouch, Long (2010) point out that researchers still have only a limited understanding of what tourist behavior can be considered as sustainable, and little agreement about the profile of the environmentally friendly tourists. More generally, the research field on transitions to a sustainable production and consumption system is not yet very well structured, its boundaries are still “fluid” (Vergragt, Akenji, Dewick, 2014). It is useful to distinguish between two terms that are often used interchangeably: green consumerism and sustainable consumption (SC). Green consumerism is the practical early conception, which then has evolved into sustainable consumption and pushed it into the international policy programs (Hobson, 2006). Akenji (2014) clarifies the differences between green consumerism and sustainable consumption, looking at each concept’s historical development.

Various models have been developed to explain SC behavior (Zsoka et al., 2013; Wang, Liu, Qi, 2014). Biswas, Roy (2015) show that social value parameter is the dominant factor influencing SC behavior, and that SC preferences differ significantly among consumers, being higher for those with green purchase or consumption experience or notion. This is confirmed by Ritter et al. (2014), who also find that the relation price-quality does not play a central role in the decision of consuming such products. The lack of knowledge seems to be the greatest barrier to SC (Tseng and Hung, 2013), as just in this case the consumption decision is based on a pure economic aspect (Wang, Liu, Qi, 2014). Sustainability awareness is growing but is

class- and age-differentiated (Barbosa, Veloso, 2013). Vicente-Molina et al. (2013) illustrate that factors such as culture, environmental structures and services in different countries play a relevant role in SC behavior. Evidence indicates that attitudes are the most significant predictor of purchasing behavior, and that SC behavior is mainly determined by income, perceived consumer effectiveness and age (Zhao et al., 2014).

Various research studies have been realized to study SC in tourism. Miller (2003) shows that tourists are not demanding “green products”, but they will not return to unsustainable destinations. Middleton and Hawkins (1998) believe that there is an overwhelming evidence for product qualities link to environmental issues. Other research studies show that sustainability is an issue of growing interest among tourists, although this interest is not reflecting in purchasing decisions (Intel, 2003; Tearfund, 2001). Curtin and Busby (1999) have found a perceived irrelevance of sustainable tourism, in a demand focused on low prices. The tour operators interviewed by Van Wijk and Persoon (2006) point out the absence of a solid demand for a sustainable tourism product. Budeanu (2000), Forsyth (1997), and Miller (2001) go towards the same conclusion; this is also confirmed by a CBI market survey (CBI 2003).

The studies above date back to a decade ago, or even more. In 10-15 years, there have been many changes in tourist preferences, as shown by the recent literature in tourism and hospitality. Chen (2015) highlights how sustainable-effort-related factors have an impact on tourists’ perceptions, selection decisions, experience, and post-experience. Han et al. (2011) demonstrate that eco-friendly attitudes favourably affect hotel guests’ intentions to visit a “green” hotel, to spread positive word-of-mouth, and to pay more. Kang et al. (2012) examine hotel guests’ willingness to pay a premium for environmentally friendly and sustainable practices; they have found a positive and significant impact of the level of environmental concern on willingness to pay a premium for green practices. This is in line with another research, which shows that more nature-oriented tourists strongly perceive environmentally responsible practices as more valuable

(Andereck, 2009). Chan (2013) notes the importance of the implementation of green marketing strategies in order to attract more green-conscious travellers.

Changes in tourism tastes will tend to induce a transformation of the offer. Established that the consumers are the target objective through the choices they make, there is a direct consequence on what is produced by companies (Akenji, 2014).

Consequently, this study is aim at understanding if there is a positive relationship between sustainability of the hotel facilities and: i) tourists' satisfaction; ii) intention to rebook.

### **2.3. Research Design and Methodology**

In order to generate the desired empirical data, a survey instrument was created. Drawing the questionnaire, the various dimensions of sustainability (environmental, sociocultural, economic) were considered.

First, tourists were asked to define the concept of “sustainability” choosing three items among the following: i) “a tourism in contact with nature”; ii) “in contact with locals”; iii) “that enhances the well being of the residents”; iv) “involving visiting heritage/historic sites”; v) “involving visiting untouched natural areas”; vi) “that preserves local culture and community”; vii) “that provides access for people with disabilities”; viii) “that respects the environment and the local heritage”. The three items viii) “that respects the environment and the local heritage”, vi) “that preserves local culture and community” and iii) “that enhances the well being of the residents” represent the three pillars of sustainability: the environmental, sociocultural and economic dimension, respectively.

Afterwards, they were asked to rate in a 5-point Likert scale the importance of different components of a vacation, distinguishing between one block of items related to sustainability, and a second block concerning classic features of a vacation (see table 2.4).

A further section of the questionnaire comprises 27 statements related to sustainability initiatives implemented by the hotel, as shown in the table 2.5. Tourists were asked how much they agree or disagree with these statements on a 5-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire also includes 5 attributes where the respondents could express their discontent. We included in the questionnaire some potentially negative features of the experience, as they could become decisive elements in tourists' overall satisfaction (Tribe & Snaith, 1998; Petrick, Tonner, & Quinn, 2006; Truong & Foster, 2006; Crofts, Pan, & Raschid, 2008). As evidenced by Alegre, Garau (2010), tourists are usually asked about characteristics related to the reasons for choosing a destination, and that are consequently considered to be positive (Jenkins, 1999; Oh, 2001; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Oh (2001) and Ryan, Huyton (2002) underline that, due to the emotional involvement in the vacation, the higher a tourist's motivation concerning a certain feature, the more she/he would be likely to rate it positively. The tendency to rate a destination's attributes positively reduces the efficiency of the surveys (Alegre, Garau, 2010).

Furthermore, the survey asks respondents to rate overall satisfaction with their stay at the destination and the intention to rebook in a 5-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire also collect information about socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age, education, country of residence, travel party, times travelling to DR) and about the importance of some attributes of the vacation. A final figure of 307 tourists participated in the survey. Table 2.1 lists some of the characteristics of the interviewees.

**Table 2.1. Sample's descriptive statistics**

Variable	%	Variable	%
<b>Sex</b>		<b>Whom did you travelled with?</b>	
Male	47,73	Alone	2,94
Female	52,27	With friends	31,37
<b>Age</b>		With my partner	48,04
18 – 29	10,71	With my partner and children	10,46
30 – 44	48,7	Other	7,19
45 – 59	34,74	<b>How many organized trips have you been on in the last 10 years?</b>	
60 and over	5,84	1	3,58
<b>Education</b>		2-4	39,09
Primary school education	0,65	5-6	26,71
Secondary school education	12,38	8 or more	30,62
Non-university higher education	46,25	<b>How many times have you been to Dominican Republic?</b>	
University education	40,72	1	58,77
<b>Country of residence</b>		2	21,75
Italy	5,25	3	11,69
Spain	5,25	4 or more	7,79
France	8,52	<b>How many times have you been to this hotel?</b>	
Germany	14,1	1	48,49
UK	15,74	2-4	32,44
Ireland	1,97	5 or more	19,06
Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark	13,11		
Belgium, Netherelands	6,89		
Austria, Swizerland	5,25		
Others European Countries	3,93		
Russia	1,64		
USA	5,9		
Canada	3,61		
Australia, New Zeland	1,97		
Center/South American Countries	5,25		
Other Countries	1,64		

Two hotels located in Punta Cana (La Altagracia Province) and Puerto Plata, DR, were chosen. These regions were selected as they are perfect examples of a travel package experience, being two of the most tourism tourism-penetrated areas in the world (Padilla& McElroy, 2005). The survey was submitted between December 2013 and March 2014. Tourists were contacted personally by the researcher who explained the purpose of the

research. They were asked to give the researcher their email contact, in order to send them a web survey to respond when back home. This approach was chosen so that tourists could have had a more informed and clearer judgement at the end of their holiday.

The questionnaire was designed in 5 languages: English, French, Spanish, Italian and Dutch. It was pretested on five travel agency managers and ten tourism researchers. A pilot test was conducted to ascertain the appropriateness of the question items on 30 organized tourists. On the basis of the pre-test, some statements were simplified and/or rewritten. Then, the final draft of the model was screened by a panel of both academics and practitioners.

An importance-performance analysis was conducted in evaluating tourists' satisfaction about sustainable initiatives implemented by hotels. Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) is a tool for evaluating tourist satisfaction well documented in the marketing literature (Martilla, James, 1977), and extensively used in hospitality and tourism research (Enright, Newton, 2004; Lai, Hitchcock, 2015; Sever, 2015).

Subsequently, the responses relating the 27 questionnaire items were summarised in six components by applying a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The obtained components were considered as explanatory variables, instead of the original items, in the models (for the level of tourists' satisfaction and the intention to book again with the TO) that were estimated later. This procedure reduces superfluous information and would prevent multicollinearity problems in the models.

Two statistics were used to test if the factor analysis is appropriate for this study (Hair et. al, 1995). First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic is calculated as .890 which is statistically significant. Second, Barlett's test of sphericity is conducted, yielding a significant Chi-Square value in order to test the significance of the correlation matrix ( $\chi = 3778.907$ , Sig. .000). Findings of both tests suggested that the factor analysis was appropriate for this study. Finally, Cronbach's Alpha was computed for each component

(see table 2.3). All the coefficients indicate that these multiple measures are reliable for measuring each construct.

Later, the objective was analysing if and to what extend the components representing sustainability dimensions, obtained from the PCA, affect overall satisfaction of the vacation and the intention to rebook. Two models were estimated, one for each of these two dependent variables. Given that in the questionnaire both variables are collected by an ordinal scale, ordinal regressions or ordered logit models were estimated.

## **2.4. Results and discussion**

### **2.4.1 Descriptive Results: Tourists’ Interest in Sustainability**

Tourists were initially asked about the meaning of the term “sustainable tourism”<sup>6</sup>. Table 2.2 shows that just 19.8% of the respondents have a very clear idea of the concept of sustainability, as they are aware of the three main dimensions of sustainability. 37% of the respondents have an idea of what is sustainability, as they recognize two dimensions (most of them, the sociocultural and environmental, 30.5%). 29.2% identify sustainability with just one dimension (in particular, the environmental, 16.2%). 13% have no clear idea of what sustainability stands for. Environmental dimension is by far the first to be identified by tourists as related to the concept of sustainability (for two thirds of the sample).

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<sup>6</sup> With the choice of maximum three items among the following: i) in contact with nature; ii) in contact with locals; iii) that enhances the well being of the residents; iv) involving visiting heritage/historic sites; v) involving visiting untouched natural areas; vi) that preserves local culture and community; vii) that provides access for people with disabilities; viii) that respects the environment and the local heritage. The items “viii) that respects the environment and the local heritage”, “vi) that preserves local culture and community” and “iii) that enhances the well being of the residents” represent the environmental, sociocultural and economic dimension of sustainability, respectively.

**Table 2.2. Dimensions of sustainability recognized by tourists**

Economic, sociocultural and environmental dimension	19,8%
Sociocultural and environmental dimension	30,5%
Economic and sociocultural dimension	2,9%
Economic and environmental dimension	3,6%
Economic dimension	4,2%
Sociocultural dimension	8,8%
Environmental dimension	16,2%
Others	13,0%
No answer	1,0%

According to what they declare (table 2.3), sustainability is not a priority. The rating given to the sentence “I choose this hotel because is sustainable” is slightly above 2 in a scale from 1 to 5, as well as “I choose this destination because is sustainable” (2.23). Sustainability does not seem to represent a primary issue in their vacation (2.49). Just few tourists know the sustainable holiday plan implemented by the hotel (1.97).

**Table 2.3. Sustainability awareness**

	Mean	Variance	Skewness	Curtosis
I choose this hotel because is sustainable oriented	2,08	1,293	0,758	-0,321
I choose this destination because is sustainable	2,23	1,248	0,513	-0,526
In my vacation sustainability is a primary issue	2,49	1,257	0,222	-0,739
I know the sustainable holiday plan implemented by the hotel	1,97	1,105	0,763	-0,269

Nevertheless, when they were asked to rate the importance of different components of a vacation (see table 2.4), the results show somewhat surprising: the block of items related to sustainability aspects received a higher mean value (3.68) than the classical features of a holiday (3.16). Sustainability seems to be something important in a package vacation. The probable reason for this discrepancy in results – between what they declare and what they demonstrate – is the limited knowledge of the concept of sustainability.

A t test for the equality of means among the mean value of the items not related to sustainability and the mean value of the items related to

sustainability was performed. The p-value of the t test is 0.000, indicating that there are differences between both means, then there are differences among the mean value of the items related to sustainability and those not related to sustainability.

“Experiencing the local culture” (4.15) in “contact with nature” (4.02) and in an intact “natural environment” (4.07) is a top priority for tourists, even more than “relaxing at the beach” (3.69), and much more than their interest for “entertainment” (2.49), “shopping opportunities” (2.48), “sport activities” (2.74) and “nightlife” (2.78).

Among the sustainability features, “low-impact construction materials in the hotel area” (3.68), “hotel not overcrowded with tourists” (3.63), “eating typical foods in local restaurants” (3.82) and “interactions with locals” (3.76) were also high rated by tourists.

**Table 2.4 Importance of elements of a package vacation**

Not related to sustainability	3,16
Relaxing at the beach	3,69
Nightlife	2,78
Entertainment	2,49
Sport activities	2,74
Cultural activities	3,70
Shopping	2,48
Interactions with other tourists	3,02
Safety	4,42
Related to sustainability	3,68
Contact with nature	4,02
Integrity of the natural environment	4,07
Low-impact construction materials in the hotel area	3,68
Hotel not overcrowded with tourists	3,63
Eating typical foods in local restaurants	3,82
Buying handmade products from local producers	3,35
Experience the local culture	4,15
Involvement in charitable programs	2,64
Interactions with locals	3,76

#### **2.4.2 Descriptive Results: Sustainability Initiatives Assessment**

Table 2.5 shows the tourists' assessment of sustainability initiatives implemented by the hotel. Mean values are not so different, being all items very close to the neutral threshold 3 (neither agree nor disagree) in the range between 2.66 and 3.59 (with one exception, mean 2.08).

The first part is composed by environmental initiatives that could be implemented by hotels. A key step to optimising environmental sustainability is to ensure that hotel energy (mean 3.30) and water consumption (3.16) is no greater than the need (Chan, 2013). To conserve resources, hotels should also adopt a voluntary towel reuse programme (3.20) and a recycling waste system (3.09). A second block of items regards the environmental-friendly development (items n. 5 to 7), with variables concerning the heights of the buildings (3.21), the low-impact materials of buildings (3.15) and the preservation of native vegetation (3.35). Two items concern the tours organized at destination (environmental friendly means of transport, 3.03, and the limited size of the groups, 3.56).

Furthermore, the communications to tourists about environmental issues is important in order to raise their awareness about respecting the environment. This item received a lower mean value than the above (2.88), calling for a greater attention by hotels, also considering that this is the less expensive and easiest initiative to implement. Budeanu (2005) claims that travellers need to be educated in order to increase their awareness about the social and environmental potential impacts of their activities at the destination.

Sustainability cannot be confined to purely environmental matters, but the socio-economic element should also be considered (Murphy, 1985, McKercher, 1993, Bramwell et al., 1996). It is composed at least by three pillars: the ecological, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions (Butler 1999, Swarbrooke, 1999). That is the reason why ten items refer to socio-economic issues. Sustainability is also about people, meaning employees, local community, stakeholders, or members of the local business

environment (Mathieson and Wall, 1982; Murphy, 1985; Krippendorf, 1987). Hotels should demonstrate their respect for employees, ensuring appropriate working conditions (mean 3.49) and proper salaries (3.19). It is also important to leave economic opportunities for secondary businesses run by local people (Britton, 1982), encouraging tourists to eat in local restaurants (3.06), buy souvenir in local shops (3.06), and excursions in local travel agencies (2.66). A sustainable tourism model is the one that increases well-being for its residents in the long term (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003), therefore local economic development should be promoted by hotels (3.59).

**Table 2.5. Sustainability assessment scores**

Sustainability assessment scores	Mean	Median	Standard deviation
Energy saving actions were implemented	3,30	3	1,30
Water saving actions were implemented	3,16	3	1,30
Voluntary towel and bed linen reuse programmes were realized	3,20	3	1,34
A recycling waste system was set up	3,09	3	1,50
The height of buildings in hotel is restricted to the height of the vegetation profile	3,21	3	1,32
The structures in the hotel are built with low-impact materials	3,15	3	1,33
Preservation of native vegetation	3,35	3	1,31
The size of the groups was limited when visiting natural reserves	3,56	4	1,23
Environmental friendly means of transport were used	3,03	3	1,37
Detailed recommendations were made about how to respect the environment	2,88	3	1,39
Detailed information were offered about the local culture	3,46	4	1,15
Respect for local culture	3,26	3	1,15
Public access was maintained in the beach	3,10	3	1,45
Interactions with the local community were promoted	3,04	3	1,23
Employees seem to be satisfied with their working conditions	3,49	4	1,10
Employees seem to be adequately paid	3,19	3	1,14
Promotion of local economic development	3,59	4	1,07
We were encouraged to eat typical foods in local restaurants	3,06	3	1,22
We were encouraged to buy handmade products and souvenirs directly from local producers	3,05	3	1,22
We were encouraged to buy excursions directly from local travel agencies	2,66	3	1,28
Charitable projects were promoted	2,08	2	1,20
Protection of sensitive coastal areas	3,06	3	1,26
Too many concrete constructions in the hotel	2,75	3	1,22
Too many tourists in the hotel	2,65	3	1,13
Hotel is secluded from the local community	2,89	3	1,25
We could not experience the local culture	2,36	2	1,22
We could not make purchases directly from local businesses	2,24	2	1,16

Tourism has also an important role of enhancing cultural exchanges, supporting cultural preservation (3.26). Interactions with the local community should be promoted avoiding an “enclavization” of tourists within the hotel area. Another way in which hotels can demonstrate consideration for the local community is to offer support to local charities facilitating tourists’ donations, which recorded the lowest mean value among the whole set of items (2.08).

The list of attributes rated “from a positive perspective” was separated from the list of features rated “from a negative perspective” (see the last section of the table 2.5). It is worth noting that some of the attributes in the first list have counterparts in the second list (see Table 2.6). Following the methodology applied in Alegre & Garau (2010), for analysing the concordance among the opinions related to a “positive perspective” and the ones related to a “negative perspective”, the percentage of tourists with ratings for the positive items of 4 or higher (they agree or strongly agree with the positive statement, indicating satisfaction) and the percentage of tourists with ratings for the negative items of four or higher (they agree or strongly agree with the negative statement, indicating dissatisfaction) were compared.

The last column of the table shows the percentage of tourists that rated the negative item indicating dissatisfaction, when they rated the positive item indicating satisfaction. A lack of concordance is detected when observing these percentages. A 29.2% of tourists who rated positively item b.14) “interactions with the local community were promoted” rated negatively item c.4) “hotel is secluded from local community”. The same interpretation can be given for the other items. For each positive item, there is a relatively high percentage of tourists that have rated them positively but at the same time show dissatisfaction when they were asked for the corresponding negative item.

**Table 2.6. Percentages of positive and negative ratings**

Positive items	% of scores $\geq 4$	Negative items	% of scores $\geq 4$	% of dissatisfaction $\geq 4$ given that satisfaction $\geq 4$
b5	43,8	c1	24,7	21,4
b6	40,1			22,5
b14	40,0	c3	32,0	29,2
b11	52,7	c4	18,5	15,9
b18	38,4	c5	14,7	14,7
b19	38,7			13,8
b20	26,3			19,0

b.5) “the height of buildings is restricted to the height of the vegetation profile” and b.6) “the structures in the hotel are built with low-impact materials”; with c.1) “too many concrete constructions in the hotel”;

b. 14) “interactions with the local community were promoted” with c.3) “hotel is secluded from local community”;

b.11) “detailed information were offered about the local culture”, with c.4) “we could not experience the local culture”;

b. 18) “we were encouraged to eat typical foods in local restaurants” b. 19) “we were encouraged to buy handmade products and souvenirs directly from local producers” and b. 20) “we were encouraged to buy excursions directly from local travel agencies”, with c.5) “we could not make purchase directly from local businesses”.

In order to assess the consistency of the answers related to the positive and negative perspectives, two statistics of association were calculated, gamma and C of contingency (see table 2.7). The gamma statistic is applied to qualitative and ordinal variables and its values range from -1 (maximum negative association) to 1 (maximum positive association). For supporting the consistency of the answers, the statistic gamma should indicate a high degree of negative association among the ratings of positive and negative perspectives. However, the values of the statistic gamma are negative for all the pairs of items. Therefore, results show a lack of concordance among the answers related to a positive perspective and those related to a negative one. This results agree with those obtained by (Alegre & Garau, 2010) indicating that tourists rate the resort attributes differently, depending on the use of a satisfaction or dissatisfaction based scale.

**Table 2.7. Statistics of association between attributes rated positively and negatively**

Positive items	Negative items	Gamma	C of Contingency
b5	c1	-0,105	0,268
b6		-0,198	0,388
b14	c3	-0,067	0,317
b11	c4	-0,187	0,351
b18	c5	-0,116	0,266
b19		-0,201	0,290
b20		-0,118	0,322

### 2.4.3 Importance Performance Analysis Results

An importance-performance analysis (IPA) was performed in evaluating tourists’ satisfaction about sustainable initiatives implemented by hotels. IPA is a simply applied technique for measuring attribute importance and performance that can help the development of effective marketing program. A standard approach adopted by IPA is to combine measures of importance and performance into a two dimensional grid so as to ease data interpretation and produce suggestions for action. The overall mean scores of importance and performance are then used to create four quadrants within the plot (Oh, 2001). Fig. 2.1 shows the position of the sustainability attributes in the four quadrants.

The two dimensional IPA model is divided into four quadrants with performance on the x-axis and importance on the y-axis. As a result of this, four quadrants namely “Keep up the Good Work”, “Possible Overkill”, “Low Priority”, “Concentrate Here” are created (Martilla & James, 1977). The four quadrants can be used to generate suggestions for hotel managers, as follows:

- Quadrant I (High Importance/High Performance) is labelled “Keep up the good work”. All attributes that fall into this quadrant are the strength and pillar of the hotels, and they should strive to maintain.

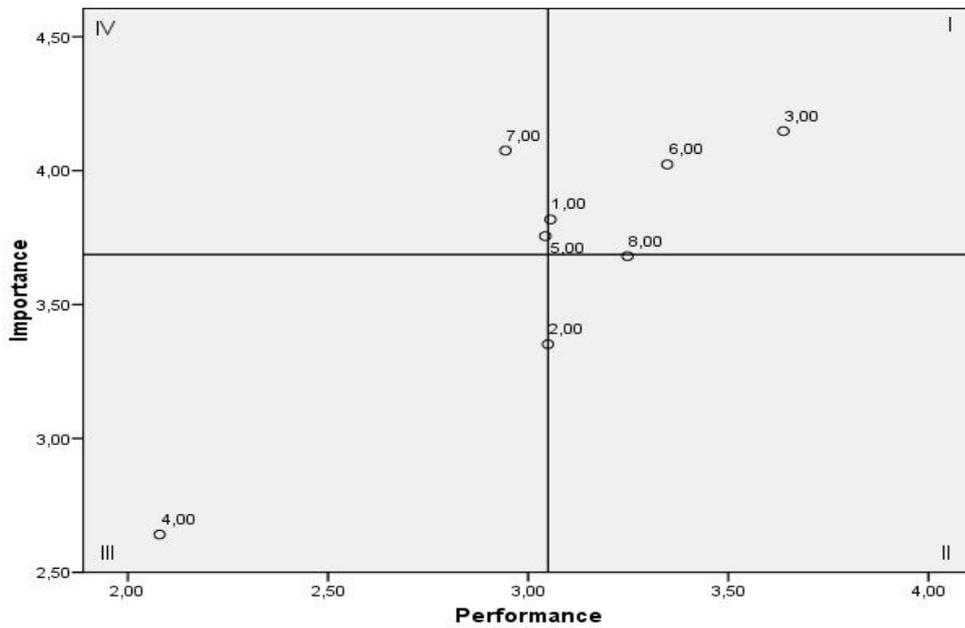
- Quadrant II (Low Importance/High Performance) is labelled as “Possible Overkill”. It denotes attributes that are overly emphasized by the hotels; therefore, they should reflect on these attributes, they should allocate more resources to deal with attributes that reside in quadrant I.
- Quadrant III (Low Importance/Low Performance) is labelled “Low Priority”. Thus, any of the attributes that fall into this quadrant are not important and pose no threat to the hotels.
- Quadrant IV (High Importance/Low Performance) is labelled “Concentrate Here”. Attributes that fall into this quadrant represent critical areas that need to be improved with top priority.

Quadrant I shows that the hotel rates well in terms of “3. promotion of local culture” and “6. nature preservation”, factors on which they should keep focusing. This is also true for the item “8. use low-impact materials for construction”, at the border between quadrant I and II, rated higher in term of importance for tourists than in term of performance. Item “7. engagement in environmental integrity” is located in the quadrant IV representing a critical area that need to be improved with top priority.

Items “1. promotion of local gastronomy” and “5. promotion of interactions with locals” are localized right in the border between quadrants I and IV, suggesting that they are important features for tourists, therefore the hotel should make sure to focus on them.

On the other end, according to tourists’ responses, hotels should not expend too much effort on supporting charitable programs, as item “4. promotion of charitable programs” was rated very low in terms of importance and performance. Also item “2. promotion of local products”, which is localized in the edge between the quadrants II and III, seems not to require much efforts.

**Fig. 2.1 Importance Performance Analysis**



Key:

1	Promotion of local gastronomy:	a11	Eating typical foods in local restaurants	b18	We were encouraged to eat typical foods in local restaurants
2	Promotion of local products:	a12	Buying handmade products from local producers	b19	We were encouraged to buy handmade products and souvenirs directly from local producers
3	Promotion of local culture:	a13	Experience the local culture	c4	We could experience the local culture <sup>7</sup>
4	Promotions of charitable programs:	a14	Involvement in charitable programs	b21	Charitable projects were promoted
5	Promotion of interactions with locals:	a15	Interactions with locals	b14	Interactions with the local community were promoted
6	Nature preservation:	a7	Contact with nature	b7	Preservation of native vegetation
7	Engagement in environmental integrity:	a8	Integrity of the natural environment	b22	Protection of sensitive coastal areas
8	Use low-impact materials for construction:	a9	Low-impact construction materials in the hotel area	c1	Few concrete buildings in the hotel area

<sup>7</sup> Items c1 and c4, originally formulated in a negative sense, was converted into positive and the mean value of the responses reversed accordingly.

#### 2.4.4 Principal Component Analysis Results

Principal Component Analysis produced 6 components, which explain 63.99% of the total variance.

**Table 2.8. PCA of sustainability assessment**

Components	Load	Var (%)	Comm	Cronb alpha
<b><i>Environmental sustainability</i></b>		<b>32,50</b>		<b>0,886</b>
Water saving actions were implemented	0,864		0,81	
Energy saving actions were implemented	0,827		0,75	
A recycling waste system was set up	0,782		0,71	
The structures in the hotel are built with low-impact materials	0,650		0,71	
Voluntary towel and bed linen reuse programmes were realized	0,592		0,63	
Environmental friendly means of transport were used	0,591		0,60	
Detailed recommendations were made about how to respect the environment	0,581		0,66	
<b><i>Social and economic interactions with locals</i></b>		<b>9,78</b>		<b>0,818</b>
We were encouraged to buy handmade products and souvenirs directly from local producers	0,753		0,64	
We were encouraged to buy excursions directly from local travel agencies	0,716		0,55	
We were encouraged to eat typical foods in local restaurants	0,711		0,60	
Detailed information were offered about the local culture	0,579		0,55	
Interactions with the local community were promoted	0,545		0,58	
Charitable projects were promoted	0,501		0,61	
<b><i>Socio-economic sustainability</i></b>		<b>7,16</b>		<b>0,81</b>
Employees seem to be satisfied with their working conditions	0,808		0,78	
Employees seem to be adequately paid	0,821		0,77	
Promotion of local economic development	0,751		0,66	
Respect for local culture	0,476		0,60	
Public access was maintained in the beach	0,422		0,36	
<b><i>Environmentally-friendly tourism development</i></b>		<b>5,43</b>		<b>0,713</b>
Protection of sensitive coastal areas	0,772		0,69	
The height of buildings in the hotel is restricted to the height of the vegetation profile	0,588		0,56	
Preservation of native vegetation	0,566		0,61	
The size of the groups was limited when visiting natural reserves	0,528		0,62	
<b><i>Unsustainable tourism development</i></b>		<b>4,94</b>		<b>0,612</b>
Too many concrete constructions in the hotel	0,809		0,68	
Too many tourists in the hotel	0,782		0,64	
Hotel is secluded from the local community	0,480		0,40	
<b><i>Tourism “enclavization”</i></b>		<b>4,18</b>		<b>0,778</b>
We could not make purchases directly from local businesses	0,785		0,74	
We could not experience the local culture	0,730		0,76	
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0,890		
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Chi-Square	3778,907		
	Significance	0,000		

The last component ‘tourism “enclavization”’ is dropped from consideration, as factors defined by only two observed variables could be considered conceptually weaker (Mulaik, 2010). The list of items included in the components are shown in the table 2.8. The results produced by the PCA are briefly discussed below.

*Component 1: Environmental sustainability (32.5%)*

The first component accounts by itself for a high percentage of the variance, something that frequently is encountered in PCA. This mixed grouping encompasses the notion of “environmental sustainability”. An intact environment is indispensable for the success of tourism industry. The enjoyment of a depends on taking place in an environment that is perceived as being natural and unspoiled (Holden, Kealy, 1986). In many mass destinations, tourism has resulted in a series of negative environmental impacts and in the degradation of the natural heritage (Shalan, 2005).

Budeanu (2005, p. 90) asserts that «sustainable tourism’ cannot be achieved if mass tourism practices are not adjusted to integrate sustainability». Waste management and water and energy consumption are important elements of demonstrating commitment to sustainability. However, as it is clear from this group of items, environmental sustainability is much more than only a function of a good waste management and water/energy saving programs. It also regards transportation system and hotel constructions.

Hotels and destinations often show little interest in sustainable development following the western model of the “condominium blocks on the beach” (Curtin, Busby, 1999). This is particularly evident in DR as elsewhere in the Caribbean region, where tourism development has been overly rapid and unplanned (Padilla, McElroy, 2005). The consequence is that these destinations are not so different from the places where tourists live: tourists try to escape urban environment, and end up spending their vacation in a urban environment again. Sustainability also regards tourist respect for local environment. As stated by Cavlek (2002), tourists demand

an intact environment, but when they are on vacation, few of them are willing to accept the limitations necessary to preserved nature. Hotels should carefully inform them about the environmental consequences of their actions.

*Component 2: Social and economic interactions with locals (9.78)*

The second component is composed by six items that refer to social and economic interactions with locals. Tourism, even more than any other economic activity, is based on human interactions that should be monitored. It may affects the way of living and local moral values (Swarbrooke, 1999). It has a significant role in increasing cultural exchanges and supporting cultural preservation. The all-inclusive hotels are designed so that the tourist is not compelled to leave the spacious hotel complex. Conversely, it is important to promote interactions with the local community, and to offer detailed information about local culture. Cultural exchanges require a long process and should be carefully planned. When locals perceive the tourists’ lifestyles as more desirable than their own, they feel frustrated and unhappy (Budeanu, 2005). This is also stimulated by the fact that they have to work to provide quality leisure for the tourists. Van Wijk, Persoon (2006) note that tourists are often happy and relaxed, while locals are too busy working to ensure the relaxation: instead of exchanging cultural experiences, in many cases locals become ‘attractions’ for tourists, changing their own traditions to exploit their commercial potential. Some resort complexes tend to transform local culture into a commodity to be exploited for profit (Krippendorf, 1987).

It is also important to stimulate economic interactions with locals. A great proportion of the benefits derived from tourism leaks to foreign countries (Telfer, Wall, 2000; Page, Connell, 2006; Sandbrook, 2010). High leakage rates are often detected with the presence of a mass tourism development (Hampton, 1998; Weaver, Lawton, 2002). Hotels in developing countries have been presented as having marginal ties to the local economy (Telfer, Wall, 2000). A common criticism on mass tourism is

that it often leaves insignificant profits with the host community (Britton, 1982). This is particularly evident in the Caribbean.

*Component 3: Socio-economic sustainability (7.16)*

This component is associated with five variables inherent to socio-economic sustainability. As has been noted above, very often a large proportion of tourism earnings goes to foreign investors and does not remain in the destination (Dwyer, Forsyth, 1994). Krippendorf (1987) points out that the sociocultural effects are so significant that they should be studied before anything else. Murphy (1985) describes tourism as a sociocultural event for both the guest and host. He reasons that if tourism is supposed to be “the hospitality industry”, it must consider the social and cultural impacts it is having on the host community at large.

Economic policies in developing countries created the conditions to generate a supply of labour for tourism, offering incentives to foreign companies investing in the tourist industry. This has resulted in local people providing cheap labour in tourism services, instead of being the main receivers of the growing tourism business. Choy (1995) claims that the prevalence of restaurants, bars and hotels may induce to think that tourism industry is relatively low skilled. The great changes which have happened in tourism have made customers more demanding and looking for a better quality experience. Hospitality and tourism businesses are in need of more skilled workers in order to create an environment for customer satisfaction. These results call for a deeper consideration of the links between employment and quality of services.

*Component 4: Environmentally-friendly tourism development (5.43)*

This component refers to 4 variables concerning the environmentally-friendly tourism development. Mass tourism is related to the large-scale replication of standardized holiday packages combining accommodation and transport to accommodate large numbers of tourists from different social groups (Bramwell, 2004). It is basically a quantitative concept, about large

volumes and large scale of replication production. As unspoiled locations become popular among tourists, they have gradually be filled by anonymous sites made of concrete and steel, perfectly replicable anywhere in the world (Budeanu, 2005). Nature is gradually replaced by tourism constructions.

Aguiló, Alegre, Sard (2005) write about the persistence of the sun and sand model, describing the reasons that induce tourists to choose a particular destination: the key question is to transform this model into a more sustainable one. Mass tourism was initially considered incompatible with the notion of sustainability (Krippendorf, 1987; Butler, 1991; Pearce, 1992). Different visions have subsequently emerged in tourism literature. Mass tourism is now recognized as potentially being able to incorporate more sustainable policies and practices (Budeanu, 2005; Tepelus, 2005). Various mass tourism destinations are moving toward a more environmentally-friendly approach of tourism development model (Fortuny et al. 2008; Rodríguez, Parra-López, Yanes-Estévez, 2008).

#### *Component 5: Unsustainable tourism development (4.94)*

The fifth component contains 3 items and has been named “unsustainable tourism development”. Lack of planning regulations resulted in the “cementification” of some of the most beautiful coastlines in the world, with lack of environmental regard. In DR tourism development has caused deforestation for condominium and hotel construction and road works, as well as beach loss, lagoon pollution and reef damage (McElroy, de Albuquerque, 1998). This is common to many other mass tourism destinations (Fortuny et al. 2008; Rodríguez, Parra-López, Yanes-Estévez, 2008).

Mass tourism industry needs large amounts of accommodations and infrastructures to receive tourists. This encourage the construction of large hotels, roads and other infrastructures (Klemm, Parkinson, 2001). They are often financed by developers less interest in the long-term development of the destination (Klemm, 2006). This means spoiling the beauty and the natural characteristics of the destinations, and consequently repel future

tourists (Forsyth, 1995). The mass urbanization of many touristic areas caused by the construction of hotels, roads, and “cementification” of the land, results in a decrease in the interest of tourists in the long term seeking a more environmentally intact destinations (Cavlek, 2002).

#### 2.4.5 Ordered Logit Model Results

Table 2.9 reports estimated results of the relationship between the dependent variable “overall satisfaction of the vacation” and some explanatory variables, including the five components of the sustainability of the vacation resulting from the PCA. The results show that if we consider tourists’ satisfaction, we observe a positive relationship with the following components: “environmental sustainability; social and economic interactions with locals; socio-economic sustainability; environmentally-friendly tourism development”.

**Table 2.9. Results of the estimated ordered logit model for the level of tourists’ satisfaction**

	Coefficient	Significance
<i>Components of sustainability assesment</i>		
Environmental sustainability	0,213	0,067
Social and economic interactions with locals	0,285	0,014
Socio-economic sustainability	0,471	0,000
Environmentally-friendly tourism development	0,252	0,030
Unsustainable tourism development	-0,352	0,003
<i>Travel party</i>		
Alone	.	.
With friends	0,847	0,268
With the partner	1,611	0,033
With partner and children	1,578	0,056
Other	1,957	0,024
<b>Pseudo R-cuadrado</b>		
Cox y Snell	0,164	
Nagelkerke	0,185	
McFadden	0,083	

We have a factor - “unsustainable tourism development” - that plays a negative role, in the sense that its association with the dependent variable is negative. This means that a higher urbanization of the tourist area is associated with lower customers’ satisfaction. This result strongly supports the relevance of sustainability as a crucial determinant of tourists’ satisfaction.

Table 2.10 reports estimated results of the relationship between the dependent variable “intention to rebook” and the set of explanatory variables. The results show that the factors “environmental sustainability” and “socio-economic sustainability” and “social and economic interactions with locals” have a positive role in the dependent variable. Consequently, the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between sustainability and intention to rebook is also confirmed.

The component “environmental sustainability” has a positive and significant role in both dependent variables. After all, natural resources can be considered the most important tourism attraction (Ritchie, Crouch, 2003). The quality of the environment is strictly connected to the attractiveness of the destination. Individually, hotels do not have a substantial negative impacts on the environment; nevertheless, together with many others, they can have very significant environmental impacts, being harmful for local ecosystems. Tourism and environment are in a very complex relationship (Butler, 2000), and hotels activity can have severe consequences in term of degradation of the environment. Mihalič (2000) points out that a well-managed environment is not only good for sustainable development but is also the best advertiser.

The component “socio-economic sustainability” is by far the variable with the highest impact on the model, regardless of the dependent variable used. This result supports the assumption that sustainability is not only about environmental preservation, but that socio-economic variables have also great relevance in explaining tourism satisfaction and intention to rebook. This is reinforced by the fact that another variable that refers to the

socioeconomic factor - “social and economic interactions with locals” - has a positive role in both the dependent variables.

A probable explanation is that a more sustainable socio-economic model permits hotels to be more integrated with the territory, and consequently to offer customers more authentic experiences. Tourists are interested in consuming products that are characteristic of the area they are visiting. They increasingly seek quality, they are more adventurous and sensitive to the environment, and in search of a greater authenticity. Maximising local economic linkages allows hotels to offer their customers something more enriching than a traditional mass vacation, and thus more satisfying. These results also seem to go against the tendency of tourists’ enclavization within self-sufficient hotels.

**Table 2.10. Results of the estimated ordered logit model for the intention to rebook**

	Coefficient	Significance
<i>Components of sustainability assesment</i>		
Environmental sustainability	0,217	0,061
Social and economic interactions with locals	0,286	0,011
Socio-economic sustainability	0,384	0,001
Environmentally-friendly tourism development	0,124	0,275
Unsustainable tourism development	-0,132	0,245
<i>Level of education</i>		
Under high education	.	.
High and university	-0,893	0,009
<i>Travel party</i>		
Alone	.	.
With friends	0,680	0,346
With the partner	1,092	0,124
With partner and children	1,720	0,029
Other	1,196	0,149
<i>Times travelling with the TO</i>		
First time	.	.
Two to four	0,300	0,247
More than four	0,681	0,026
<b>Pseudo R-cuadrado</b>		
Cox y Snell	0,169	
Nagelkerke	0,178	
McFadden	0,063	

## **2.5. Conclusion**

The paper has a threefold objective: i) to understand if package tourists are aware of sustainability issues; ii) to analyse if they are demanding more sustainable travel experiences; iii) to determine whether there is a relationship of dependency between i) overall satisfaction, ii) intention to rebook, and different attributes of the sustainability of the vacation. In order to do this, we interviewed organized tourists from two hotels in the Dominican Republic.

After a descriptive statistics analysis, we first perform an importance-performance analysis (IPA) in evaluating tourists' satisfaction about sustainable initiatives implemented by the hotels.

Empirical evidence show that most of tourists do not have a clear idea of the concept of sustainability. That is the reason why, even if they declare that sustainability is not a top priority in their vacation, they demonstrate a high interest in sustainability, even more than in classic features of the holiday (e. g. beach, entertainment, sport, shopping).

Afterwards, to reduce the large set of variables regarding the assessment of different sustainability aspects to a smaller set, we perform a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). For our aim, we study the dependency between two dependent variables “tourists' satisfaction” and “intention to rebook”, and the explanatory variables given by the components resulting from the PCA, by applying an ordered logit model.

The results show a positive relationship between factors related to sustainability and both tourist satisfaction, and intention to rebook. The evidence supports the hypotheses that a more sustainable offer could improve customers' satisfaction and increase tourists' fidelization.

Therefore, hotels should be more engaged in environmental preservation and local socioeconomic development. Consumers are continually put at the center of every business strategy; they would provide the primary trigger for the industry to adopt sustainable initiatives. The findings indicate that hotels should choose sustainable product and service features that do no harm

social and natural environment. The reason is that these findings support the hypothesis that a more sustainable offer not only contributes to preserving the ecologic balance and minimizing negative sociocultural impacts, but also has an impact on tourists' satisfaction.

To enhance the generalizability of findings from this study, replication of this study for different locations in other areas of the world is encouraged. A limitation of our research is that, regarding the type of analysis, the number of respondents can be considered relatively small. Thus, future research may attempt to obtain a larger sample to more accurately represent hotel customers. Despite a relatively small sample size, these findings should be viewed as a first step to understand the relationship between sustainability and tourists' satisfaction.

Further studies could be conducted on smaller-sized resort complexes, as these realities, due to economic, structural and organizational constraints, may experience even more challenges in the implementation of a sustainable offer. Researchers could extend this approach on a larger scale to identify differences in research findings. Future research may consider investigating how demographic and travel preferences related factors may impact on the analysis. A longitudinal approach could be adopted to observe changes over time in tourists' behaviors.

# **CHAPTER III. Third Essay**

## **CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE TOUR OPERATING BUSINESS: A SURVEY WORLDWIDE**

### **3.1 Introduction<sup>8</sup>**

Tour operators (TO) have the central role of connector in the distribution chain (Bastakis, Buhalis, Butler, 2004). They constitute the link between customers and providers of services, and therefore have the power to influence both sides of the demand (Cooper et al., 1998). Studies on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in tourism to date have largely focused on hotels (Rodriguez, Cruz, 2007; Henderson, 2007; Kasim, 2009; Huimin, Ryan, 2011; Garay, Font, 2012; Font et al. 2012; Frey, R George, 2010; Tsai et al., 2012; de Grosbois, 2012; Tsai, Tsang, Cheng, 2012; Kucukusta, Mak, Chan, 2013; Benavides-Velasco, Quintana-García, Marchante-Lara, 2014; Zientara, Kujawski, Bohdanowicz-Godfrey, 2015; Kang et al., 2015)

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<sup>8</sup> The work presented in this Chapter has been realized in collaboration with Lorenzo Masiero who contributed to the statistical analysis, under the supervision of Tonino Pencarelli.

rather than tour operators (Miller, 2001; Dodds, Kuehnel, 2010), and mostly are about environmental issues.

Nevertheless, an assessment of the CSR initiatives on tour operators worldwide has never been done. We aim at filling this gap by submitting a survey to TO from different countries and continents. Our sample is composed by 204 tour operators.

We use previous evidence from literature as the primary input data for a questionnaire itemizing the most relevant dimensions of what is currently referred as CSR practices in the tour operating industry, including obstacles and disincentives in adopting CSR practices. The sample of tour operators can be used as background for a better understanding of the CSR initiatives implemented by TO worldwide.

The paper have various objectives. First, to recognize the importance of CSR practices for TO; second, to identify the perceived barriers to the implementation of CSR activities into business; moreover, to evaluate the degree of intensity of TO engagement in implementing CSR initiatives. A further aim of the paper is to examine the impacts of the CSR initiatives on TO profitability.

In order to do this, after a descriptive statistics analysis, we first perform a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to reduce the large number of variables into a smaller set, and then we use the obtained components as exploratory variables in a subsequent binary logistic regression analysis. The dependent variable, which measure TO performance, was the growth of profits in the last two years.

The paper is structured as follow. Section 2 summarizes the recent theoretical and empirical studies about CSR in the tour operating business. Section 3 illustrates the research design and the methodology. Section 4 shows the results from the descriptive analysis and from the PCA and regression estimation. This section provides a discussion of the main findings. Some conclusions are drawn in the last section of the paper.

### **3.2 Literature review**

Tour operators offer a pre-arranged combination of components, normally comprising transport, accommodation, and other tourism services (food, excursions, entertainment), to people often lacking of linguistic or organizing skills, or even time to organize (Evans, Stabler, 1995). They control the market place directing an enormous amount of tourists all year around (Schwartz, Tapper, Font, 2008). They have become a dominating force in the holiday market. As stated by Cavlek (2002), they have had such an important influence on tourism development that we talk about the “tourism industry”. The success of many destinations have relied whether foreign tour operators have included them in their plans.

The mass market seemed to be destined to an endless growth, but since the Nineties the mechanism got stuck. Tourism has gone through various phases. The “introductory phase” in the Fifties was characterized by a very personal relationship between territory and tourists, relatively few in number and extremely wealthy. Then, the “growth fase” from the Sixties to the mid-Eighties, was characterized by rapid growth, air travel development, and a mass-market distribution (Evans, Stabler, 1995). In the Nineties the “mature phase” has started with industry concentration, high level of competition and volatility of the market.

In response to “frugal tourists”, TO started to offer last minute-low budget packages (Reimer, 1990). The pressure on prices was also due to the worldwide fall in travelling, resulting in overcapacity (CBI, 2003), which reduced enormously profit margins of tour operators (Van der Duim, Van Marwijk, 2009). In the last two decades, there has been a decline in profitability, a high competition on prices, excess capacity, last minute discounting and many TO bankruptcies (Klemm, Parkinson, 2001).

The tough market conditions of the tourism business were not helpful in achieving more sustainability (Van Wijk and Persoon, 2006). TO are profit-seeking companies primarily concerned with their own survival and possible growth: their choice to adopt certain practices is mainly subordinated to

their first priority, to stay in business (Carey, Gountas, Gilbert, 1997). As recognized by Klemm, Parkinson (2001), TO are firms for whom the long term sustainability of a particular destination is secondary to their business objective. Ashworth and Goodall (1990) believe that the lack of responsibility is also a function of the lack of ownership, and therefore control, over the tourism services provided. TO will move to another destination as soon as their financial interests can be better served (Carey, Gountas, Gilbert, 1997).

Only recently, a number of large tour operators have taken a more proactive attitude and have started to develop environmental policies and plans including green purchasing strategies, and environmental training for their staff. In addition, they take frequent initiatives for education, sponsorship of environmental protection activities, although they are considered ‘soft’ compared to the true potential of tour operators. Some large TO have also started to develop environmental management systems for the hotels and airlines under their direct ownership (Budeanu, 2009).

TO have increasingly recognized not only that tourists have become more aware of the quality of services, but also an increasing tourists’ disapproval towards unsustainable tourism development (Cavlek, 2002; Sigala, 2008). Most of the large European TO had a high level of awareness about tourism’s negative potentials, and recognized that they have the responsibility for reducing the negative impacts of tourism (Budeanu, 2005). Nevertheless, thinking of having low requirements from customers and little regulatory pressure, they have had few incentives to invest efforts in improving their sustainable performance. Some of them chose to undertake corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in order to avoid the menace of being seen as irresponsible firms.

Corporate social responsibility in the tour operating business reflects a complex and multifaceted concept. CSR relates to TO commitment in achieving sustainable development not only in the environmental dimension but also in the social and economic dimension (Kalisch, 2002; Miller, 2001). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (1999)

claims that CSR is driven by “human rights, employee rights, environmental protection, community involvement, supplier relations, stakeholder rights and monitoring”.

CSR is too often considered general and vague, rather than translate into accurate practices. Only after the United Nations Environment Programme “TOI, Tour Operators Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development” (TOI 2003, 2004, 2005), five determined areas in which to incorporate sustainability into tour operating business were identified. Afterwards, Travelife EU LIFE-funded programme introduced specific sustainability criteria into the supply chain of European tour operators for those who voluntarily decided to join the platform.

For the purpose of this paper, CSR actions were compiled from a number of different studies. Various authors explore with different methodologies TO sustainable supply chain management (Sigala, 2008; Budeanu, 2005; Schwartz, Tapper, Font, 2008; Baddeley, Font, 2011) and environmental management systems (Herremans, Reid, Wilson, 2005; Van der Duim, Van Marwijk, 2009) adopted by TO. A wealthy of research works has been dedicated to single aspects of the relationship between tour operators and sustainability: TO sustainable practices (Tepelus, 2005; Forsyth, 1995) and attitudes towards sustainability (Curtin and Busby, 1999); TO potentials (Budeanu, 2009), influence (Carey, Gountas, Gilbert, 1997) and contributions (Cavlek, 2002) to sustainability; the profile of TO promoting a sustainable products (Holden, Kealy, 1986), and TO sustainable reporting (Van Wijk and Persoon, 2006). Other research addresses the ethical orientation of TO (Tapper, 2001; Weeden, 2002), exploring the concept and the essential attributes for ethical operators.

Further studies examine the corporate responsibility in UK tour operators (Miller, 2001) and the level of CSR activities in Canadian TO (Dodds, Kuehnel, 2010). Although awareness of CSR is evident among Canadian mass tour operators, they are not yet adhering to the principles of CSR in a structured and systematic form, and there is little participation and no monitoring of CSR initiatives (Dodds, Kuehnel, 2010). Miller (2001)

recognizes that the long-term benefits in the adoption of CSR initiatives that UK TO failed to recognize: first and foremost is the avoidance of a future censure by tourists.

Basically, research to date has acknowledged that, while there is a wide collection of cases of good practices, there are substantial opportunities for more CSR initiatives in tour operating business. In particular, tourism literature suggests a variety of issues limiting the implementation of sustainable measures by TO, and consequently the introduction of CSR practices.

The lack of knowledge can be seen as a relevant barrier. Forsyth (1995) notes that there is a lack of understanding of sustainable tourism principles. In their applied research, Van Wijk and Persoon (2006) find that when it comes to specify the initiatives, TO remain “vague at best”. The adoption of CSR initiatives is also challenged by human resource, organizational and financial limitations (Schwartz, Tapper, Font, 2008): poor status of tourism jobs, low pay, high turnover are high impediments toward a more sustainable course of action (Weeden, 2001). The lack of responsibility is also function of the lack of ownership, and so control, over the tourism services offered (Ashworth, Goodall, 1990). All these issues are addressed in the questionnaire.

### **3.3 Research Design and Methodology**

In order to generate the desired empirical data, a survey instrument was created. The data were collected with a web survey submitted to tour operators worldwide. A pilot test was conducted to ascertain the appropriateness, clarity and cohesiveness of the question items with personnel from five different tour operators and five tourism researchers. On the basis of the pre-test, some statements were simplified and/or rewritten. Then, the final draft of the model was screened by a panel of both academics and practitioners.

A web survey was submitted between December 2014 and April 2015. About one month after the first invitation to participate, a second email was sent; afterwards, a final invitation was sent to all the contacts that did not complete the survey in order to increase the participation rate. To assess that they could provide the relevant information needed on the company's CSR practices, the survey was directed to the top management of each TO (CEOs, or vice presidents as a second choice); it is recognized that the personal sense of obligation and formal commitments of the top management is the key point in adopting sustainability policies and CSR measures (Miller, 2001; Schwartz, Tapper, Font, 2008; Budeanu, 2009). TO emails were found from the websites of the main national and international associations of tour operators worldwide. 204 usable responses were received.

The web survey has a threefold objective: recognize the importance of CSR practices for TO; identify the perceived barriers to the implementation of CSR activities into business; evaluate the intensity of TO engagement in implementing CSR initiatives.

Tour operators were asked what they consider to be the greatest obstacles and disincentives in adopting practices of sustainable tourism with a 1-5 points scale "Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree". In a second part of the questionnaire, tour operators were asked how much they agree with statements related to the concept of sustainability in the tour operating business. In the third section, tour operators were asked to describe their degree of intensity of engagement in implementing CSR initiatives on a 5-point Likert scale (5 Totally engaged in it, 4 Considerably engaged, 3 Reasonably, 2 Marginally, 1 Not at all). The various statements were included as they emerge from the above-cited literature.

For each items, the first four moments of the distribution were determined and discussed: mean value, variance, skewness, kurtosis. Subsequently, the responses of the 28 items relating the firm's engagement in implementing CSR initiatives were summarised in six components by applying a Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The obtained components

were considered as explanatory variables, instead of the original items, in a model that was estimated later. This procedure reduces superfluous information and would prevent multicollinearity problems in the models.

The relationship among these components and tour operators' financial performance was analysed. Tour operators were asked if there has been a growth of profits in the last two years (ranging from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree). In the logit model, let  $Y$  be a binary response variable:  $Y = 1$  if they agree or strongly agree,  $Y = 0$  otherwise). A binary logistic regression was estimated, where the components obtained from the previous PCA were used as explanatory variables and the dependent variable, which measure performance, was the growth of profits in the last two years. To permit a causal interpretation of the estimated coefficients, the model has the vectors of regressors ( $F$ ) measured as average values for the period 2010-2012, whereas the dependent variable “profits growth” refers to a later period (2013-2014).

A total of 204 usable surveys were returned. Table 3.1 shows the sample descriptive statistics.

**Table 3.1. The sample. Descriptive statistics**

<b>In which area is your company's headquarter located?</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Vertical integration of the company</b>	
Europe	27	0 - 1 activities	31,9
America	2,5	2 activities	16,7
Africa	38,2	3 activities	16,2
Oceania	0,5	4 or more activities	35,3
Asia	31,4	No answer	0
No answer	0,5	<b>Do you also own travel agencies?</b>	
<b>Which is your company profile?</b>		Yes	35,8
We are an independent company	88,7	No	64,2
We are a member of a group	7,8	No answer	0
We are the holding company of a group	3,4	<b>Do you also own accommodation facilities?</b>	
No answer	0	Yes	49
<b>What is the approximate number of customers per year?</b>		No	51
0 – 5000	82,4	No answer	0
5001-25000	11,3	<b>Which is your primary target?</b>	
25001-50000	2,9	Sun and sand tourism	4,4
more than 50000	2,9	Cultural tourism	26,5
No answer	0,5	Wildlife tourism	19,6
<b>What is the approximate annual turnover of your company?</b>		Eco/nature tourism	12,7
0- 1 million	67,6	Adventure tourism	16,7
2 – 5 million	16,2	No specific target	13,2
6 – 25 million	8,3	Other	5,9
more than 26 million	4,4	No answer	1
No answer	3,4	<b>What is the approximate percentage of customers interested in sustainability?</b>	
<b>What percentage of your firm's business derives from long haul (more than 5 hours flying time)?</b>		0-10	20,1
0-25	40,7	nov-30	26,5
26-50	9,3	31-50	29,9
51-75	13,7	more than 50%	22,5
76-100	33,3	No answer	1
No answer	2,9		

### **3.4 Results and Analysis**

#### **3.4.1 Sustainability Orientation**

No serious disincentives or impassable obstacles in adopting practices of sustainable tourism seem to emerge from TO interviewed (see table 3.2). The mean values range from 1.80 to 3.05 for all obstacles/disincentives which TO have been asked to evaluate, being 3 the neutral threshold (3 = do not agree or disagree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree).

An obstacle limiting the implementation of sustainable measures by TO, and consequently the introduction of CSR practices, could be related to tourism demand. This item received the second highest mean value (2.91) in the whole set of items, even if the variability in responses to this question is one of the highest in the group, demonstrating that respondents share different views about their perception of this element compared to other obstacles. In tourism literature, there also is not a clear orientation. Forsyth (1997) and Budeanu (2000) note that a clear and relevant market demand for more sustainable products is quite deficient. Curtin, Busby (1999) and Miller (2001) point out a perceived irrelevance of sustainable tourism in a market demand mostly concerned for low prices. On the other side, research studies show that sustainability is an issue of growing issue among mass tourists (Intel, 2003; Tearfund, 2001), which is also confirmed by recent empirical evidence (Kang et al. 2012). Another obstacle could be the “difficulty in the tourist education” (mean 2.76). Budeanu (2005) claims that travellers need to be educated in order to increase their awareness about the social and environmental potential impacts of their activities at the destination.

Many TO believe that governments should be proactive (Weeden, 2001, Van Wijk and Persoon, 2006), that they are too powerless to generate changes (Van der Duim, Van Marwijk, 2009). They also claim that the absence of a sustainability related regulation is a disincentive in investing in it (Budeanu, 2009). Empirical evidence shows that, as claimed by Tapper

(2001), some TO believe that others are responsible for implementing sustainability practices, mainly local governments (mean 3.05). However, they share very different views about it, as this item had the highest variance in the group (1.677). This is also demonstrated by the fact that TO tend to agree that they play a key role in the sustainability of the destinations (3.53) (see the next section of the questionnaire) and to disagree that “they are too small and powerless to produce changes” (2.51).

A further obstacle could be related to organizational problems (mean 2.62). A tour operator is sustainable if its suppliers are, and difficulties for TO come from the relationship with a multitude of small suppliers under different national legislations. Some TO do not behave as homogeneous entities, consequently one department may set up sustainable practices, others may take actions that weaken them (“it is too difficult to train staff”, mean 2.52).

Moreover, there is the perceived cost of investing in sustainability (mean 2.58). Investments in sustainability is often perceived as a cost rather than an investment (Weeden, 2001) and companies are reluctant to reduce negative impacts of their activities unless positive economic outcomes can be anticipated (Tepelus, 2005). This is confirmed by the fact that when, in the next section of the questionnaire, TO were asked if “sustainability is an important strategy of cost reduction”, the mean value is 2.85, the smallest rating in the whole set of variables. Miller (2001) claims that they will adopt a policy until is cheaper or more valuable than an alternative policy, so further CSR practices can be encouraged by the cost saving that enhanced sustainability can bring.

TO disagree that sustainable tourism is not a relevant issue (mean 1.80) and it has no additional value (2.07), and also that they are have no time to think about it (1.89) because they are too busy to think about it (2.04). After two decades something seems to have changed from the understanding and awareness of sustainable tourism shown by TO interviewed by Forsyth (1995) (when asked about the adoption of sustainability measures, some TO responded that: “we are already busy, we need to fill seats on charter

flights”). Sustainability is not anymore seen just as “a new managerial fashion” (2.29), or “a purely academic issue” (2,47).

**Table 3.2. Obstacles and disincentives in adopting practices of sustainable tourism**

	Mean	Var	Skew	Curt
There is a lack of demand for sustainable tourism	2,91	1,371	-0,031	-0,748
It is too difficult to educate tourists	2,76	1,205	0,028	-0,653
It is too difficult to train staff	2,52	0,999	0,410	-0,241
It has no additional value	2,07	1,142	0,732	-0,228
We have no time to think about it	1,89	1,091	1,071	0,368
It is too costly	2,58	1,315	0,229	-0,796
We have organizational problems to implement it	2,62	1,286	0,397	-0,652
We believe that local governments are responsible	3,05	1,677	-0,005	-1,032
Sustainable tourism is not relevant for our business	1,80	1,019	1,226	0,869
Sustainability is more an academic issue	2,47	1,521	0,474	-0,824
Sustainable tourism is only a niche product	2,45	1,381	0,324	-0,924
We are too busy to think about sustainability	2,04	1,102	0,928	0,399
We are too small and powerless to have any influence	2,51	1,601	0,387	-0,970
Sustainability is just a new managerial fashion	2,29	1,349	0,579	-0,634

Various researchers note that TO first concern is to remain in business (Forsyth, 1995; Carey, Gountas, Gilbert, 1997), as tough market conditions are not helpful in achieving sustainability (Van Wijk and Persoon, 2006). Klemm, Parkinson (2001), Schwartz, Tapper, Font, (2008), Curtin, Busby (1999) highlight that TO are profit seeking companies in a market characterized by aggressive competition on price, therefore long term sustainability is a secondary issue for them. This is not confirmed by empirical evidence (see table 3.3). These results show that sustainability seems to embody visions and values of TO interviewed, as this item received the highest mean value in the whole set of variables (3.76) and the second lowest variance (1.178).

Tour operators agree that sustainability is important to receive good satisfaction ratings (mean 3.73) and to avoid negative publicity (3.72), as they received among the highest ratings in the whole set of variables. This business is strongly characterized by good reputation and positive image,

and sustainability issues have come to public attention through research studies and through the media’s reporting of specific cases. Hence, it could reasonably be expected that TO see sustainability first of all as an important marketing strategy (Schwartz, Tapper, Font, 2008). Sustainability is seen “important for market differentiation” (mean 3.60) and also “an important marketing tool” (3.50). Empirical evidence show that TO think that sustainable tourism initiatives can add value to their products, allowing them to compete not only on price. During the last two decades, tourism demand has become more sustainability-aware and some companies have begun to respond by offering more environmentally friendly holidays (Holden, Kealy, 1996). The problem arises when sustainability is viewed just as a marketing tool instead of a planning mechanism (Middleton, Hawkins, 1998). It does not seem the case of the majority of the TO interviewed, for which sustainability has become part of their management process (3.47).

**Table 3.3. Understanding of the importance of sustainability**

	Mean	Var	Skew	Curt
Sustainability has become part of our management process	3,47	1,255	-0,329	-0,706
Sustainability is important to differentiate ourselves from the market	3,60	1,364	-0,626	-0,361
Sustainability is an important strategy of cost reduction	2,85	1,239	0,121	-0,656
Sustainability is important to receive good satisfaction ratings from our customers	3,73	1,146	-0,528	-0,314
Sustainability is important for a good reputation and avoidance of negative publicity	3,72	1,227	-0,614	-0,269
Sustainability is an important marketing tool	3,50	1,453	-0,545	-0,568
We play a key role in the sustainability of the destinations	3,53	1,363	-0,487	-0,629
Sustainability embodies our vision and values	3,76	1,178	-0,582	-0,416
Sustainability is considered important by travel agencies we work with	3,34	1,309	-0,254	-0,582

### 3.4.2 Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives

Table 3.4 shows the intensity of TO engagement in implementing CSR initiatives. Many TO interviewed train staff on good environmental practices (3.82) and preferentially use environmentally friendly

accommodations (3.52). Notwithstanding, the share of tour operators which have “introduced sustainable tourism guidelines for the companies they work with” (2.84) or “contract suppliers according to sustainability contracting standards” (2.94) is not so high. Many of them do not participate in eco-labelling schemes (2.66).

Two items concern the concept of limit. “We limit the number of tourists” recorded the second lowest score (2.56) in the whole set of variables, and also “we keep tour groups to a minimum” received a low mean value and the highest variance (2.098), indicating that TO shared very different views about these attributes.

Sustainability cannot be confined to purely environmental matters, but the socio-economic element should also be considered (Murphy, 1985, McKercher, 1993, Bramwell et al., 1996), as sustainability is also about people, meaning employees, local community, stakeholders, or members of the local business environment (Mathieson and Wall, 1982; Murphy, 1985; Krippendorf, 1987). As can be expected, “we use local labour” recorded the highest score in the group of variables (mean 4.31) and the lowest variance (0.796); the mean value is lower (3.87) when TO were asked if they “set standards for local labour” showing that the standards are, quite often, only those required by local legislation. One of the main reason for investing in developing countries is that national labour legislations are usually very loose, meaning that labour costs can be kept low through low wages, longer working conditions and less labour protection. TO should demonstrate their respect for those that worked with them, ensuring appropriate working conditions and proper salaries.

Many TO “use local goods” (3.88) and “locally owned accommodations” (3.70). This is mainly due to the small size of many tour operators in the sample. TO seem to be more engaged in “supporting local cooperation practices” (3.40) than in “promoting tourists’ donations” (2.92). Many of them “consult local stakeholders and local associations” (3.62) and “cooperate with environmental/social active NGOs” (3.40). They are more “involved in increasing awareness on sustainable tourism in their

customers” (3.69) than in “host governments” (3.16). Communications to tourists about environmental issues is fundamental in order to raise their awareness about respecting the environment. Most of them “provide a code of conduct to their customers” (3.51). Tourism has also an important role of enhancing cultural exchanges, supporting cultural preservation (Esman, 1984). Many TO interviewed “offer detailed information about local cultures” (3.90).

A sustainable tourism model is the one that increases well-being for its residents in the long term (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). It is also important to leave economic opportunities for secondary businesses run by local people (Britton, 1982). Many TO interviewed encourage their customers “to buy handmade products and souvenirs directly from local producers” (4.00) and “to eat typical foods in local restaurants” (3.96).

Some TO “communicate sustainability issues in their website and brochures” (3.06); nevertheless, most of them do not “produce periodic reports on sustainability activities” (this item received the lowest score in the group, 2.26). “We monitor environmental (3.16) and socioeconomic (3.09) impacts of our activity” received higher scores, meaning that when it comes to write about the concrete actions implemented, they are not still prepared. This ends up undermining the effectiveness of the monitoring. This is consistent with Van Wijk and Persoon (2006) results, which show that sustainability reporting of TO sector is still very limited; they show that TO remain vague in specifying their sustainability commitment, and most of them do not mention any formalized monitoring system.

**Table 3.4. Tour operator’s engagement in CSR initiatives**

	Mean	Var	Skew	Curt
We use locally owned accommodations	3,70	1,312	-0,774	-0,071
We use local goods	3,88	1,039	-0,977	0,758
We use local labour	4,31	0,796	-1,428	2,018
We set standards for local labour	3,87	1,363	-1,002	0,252
We limit the number of tourists	2,56	1,797	0,438	-0,890
We keep tour groups to a minimum	2,96	2,098	0,020	-1,307
We train staff on good environmental practices	3,82	1,268	-0,681	-0,388
We provide a code of conduct to our customers	3,51	1,801	-0,499	-0,907
We are involved in increasing awareness on sustainable tourism in our customers	3,69	1,394	-0,614	-0,506
We are involved in increasing awareness on sustainable tourism in host governments	3,16	1,895	-0,209	-1,152
We promote tourists’ donations	2,92	1,788	-0,034	-1,166
We develop conservation projects at destinations	3,11	1,852	-0,149	-1,162
We support local cooperation/donations practices	3,40	1,641	-0,347	-0,961
We consult local stakeholders and local associations	3,62	1,518	-0,775	-0,267
We cooperate with environmental/social active NGOs	3,40	1,882	-0,417	-1,025
We have introduced sustainable tourism guidelines for the companies we work with	2,84	1,935	0,164	-1,205
We contract suppliers according to sustainability contracting standards	2,94	1,846	0,025	-1,170
We produce periodic reports on sustainability activities	2,26	1,899	0,777	-0,683
We use sustainable means of transport	3,02	1,644	-0,032	-0,932
We preferentially use environmentally friendly accommodations	3,56	1,297	-0,452	-0,510
We monitor socioeconomic impacts of our activity	3,09	1,876	-0,172	-1,104
We monitor environmental impacts of our activity	3,16	1,835	-0,195	-1,072
We participate in eco-labelling schemes	2,66	1,897	0,266	-1,142
We communicate sustainability issues in our website and brochures	3,06	1,991	-0,116	-1,301
We offer detailed information about local cultures	3,90	1,124	-0,908	0,293
We encourage our customers to eat typical foods in local restaurants	3,96	1,173	-1,055	0,612
We encourage our customers to buy handmade products and souvenirs directly from local producers	4,00	1,165	-0,998	0,363
We encourage our customers to buy excursions directly from local travel agencies	3,54	1,820	-0,530	-0,891

Table 3.5 shows the intensity of TO engagement in implementing CSR initiatives in hotels (owned or partners). A key step towards optimising environmental sustainability is to ensure that hotel energy (3.55) and water consumption (3.52) is no greater than the need (Chan, 2013). To conserve resources, hotels also adopt recycling waste system (3.41). However, the mean value decreases and the variance increases when TO were asked if

they “set sustainability standard criteria for their hotels” (mean 3.11, variance 1.868), and if they “apply environmental auditing practices” (2.79). (this item received the lowest rating in the whole set of variables).

A second block of items regards the environmental-friendly development, with variables concerning the “heights of the buildings” (2.93), the “low-impact materials used for the structures” (2.96), the “areas of untouched vegetation” (3.20) and the location of the hotels “outside ecologically sensitive coastal areas” (3.28). The mean values recorded by this second block of items is less than the first block, suggesting a greater attention in implementing sustainability initiatives in the daily management, than there has been in the development and planning. In many destinations, nature has been rapidly substituted by tourism constructions. As untouched locations have become famous destinations, they have been gradually occupied by high impact tourism building perfectly replicable everywhere in the world (Budeanu, 2005).

**Table 3.5. Implementation of CSR initiatives in hotels**

	Mean	Var	Skewn	Curt
We set sustainability standard criteria for hotels	3,11	1,868	-0,128	-1,106
We separate waste	3,41	1,763	-0,551	-0,756
We reduce the use of water	3,52	1,521	-0,545	-0,549
We reduce the use of energy	3,55	1,449	-0,564	-0,519
We apply environmental auditing practices	2,79	1,696	0,106	-1,116
Hotels are built with low-impact materials	2,96	1,658	-0,053	-0,975
The height of hotels is restricted to the height of the local vegetation profiles	2,93	1,779	-0,028	-1,104
In the hotel area there are substantial areas of untouched vegetation	3,20	1,630	-0,277	-0,814
Hotels are located outside ecologically sensitive coastal areas	3,28	1,762	-0,330	-0,933

### 3.4.3 Principal Component Analysis and Regression Results

Principal Component Analysis produced six components, which explain 68.7% of the total variance. The list of items included in the components is shown in table 3.6.

**Table 3.6. Principal Component Analysis Results**

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>C1 SUSTAINABILITY ORIENTATION</b>						
We produce periodic reports on sustainability activities	.815					
We contract suppliers according to sustainability contracting standards	.695					
We have introduced sustainable tourism guidelines for the companies we work with	.691					
We participate in eco-labelling schemes	.617					
We use sustainable means of transport	.585					
We communicate sustainability issues in our website and brochures	.558					
<b>C2 SUSTAINABILITY MONITORING</b>						
We monitor socioeconomic impacts of our activity		.611				
We are involved in increasing awareness on sustainable tourism in our customers		.585				
We monitor environmental impacts of our activity		.584				
We provide a code of conduct to our customers		.527				
We train staff on good environmental practices		.518				
<b>C3 SOCIAL INITIATIVES</b>						
We support local cooperation/donations practices			.726			
We promote tourists' donations			.702			
We develop conservation projects at destinations			.688			
We cooperate with environmental/social active NGOs			.633			
We consult local stakeholders and local associations			.607			
<b>C4 LOCAL PROMOTION</b>						
We encourage our customers to eat typical foods in local restaurants				.864		
We encourage our customers to buy handmade products and souvenirs directly from local producers				.788		
We offer detailed information about local cultures				.635		
<b>C5 ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY</b>						
We use local goods					.814	
We use locally owned accommodations					.748	
We use local labour					.713	
We set standards for local labour					.576	
<b>C6 SMALL SCALE ORGANIZATION</b>						
We keep tour groups to a minimum						.874
We limit the number of tourists						.839
% of variance	14.5	12.1	12.0	10.3	10.2	9.6
Cronbach alpha	0.9	0.87	0.83	0.75	0.76	0.79

Rotation Method: Equimax rotation a. Component loadings > 0.5 are retained. 3 items are deleted.

The first component encompasses the notion of “sustainability orientation” (variance 14.5%) including various sustainable practices adopted by the tour operators. The second component is associated with five variables inherent to “sustainability monitoring” (12.1%). The third component refers to two variables concerning the “social initiatives” (12%). The fourth component concerns the “local promotion” (10.3%). The fifth component is associated with four variables encompassing the notion of “economic sustainability” (10.2%). The last one refers to two items connected to the small scale organization (9.6%).

Table 3.7 summarizes the results related to the effects of the six PCA components on the dependent variable “profits growth” obtained from the binary logistic regression. Focussing on the effects of these components, the results show that three components – “sustainability orientation”, “economic sustainability”, “small scale organization” – come up as very significant in explaining “profits growth”.

Cavlek (2002) claims that it can only be the consumer who put pressure for sustainable tourism. Indeed, it is true that holiday producers are not charitable institutions but commercial activities (Krippendorf, 1987). They will adopt a course of action until it is cheaper or more convenient compared to alternative policy (Miller, 2001). The story seems to be going in this direction: this result strongly supports the relevance of sustainability orientation and practices as a determinant of TO profits growth. Zhao et al. (2014) illustrate that responsible behavior is mainly determined by income, perceived consumer effectiveness and age. Based on this empirical evidence, responsible tourists are likely to be associated with a higher spending capacity, hence the positive relationship between sustainability orientation and TO profits growth.

Tourism is a sector able of fostering broad-based economic activities and local development. In order to do this, it is fundamental the connection between tourism and local economic growth. The component “economic sustainability” is very significant in explaining TO profits growth.

Maximising economic linkages very much depends on whether tourism creates employment opportunities and generates linkages in particular service-providing sectors and agriculture. A probable explanation is that it allows tour operators to be more rooted in the territory, and therefore to offer the tourist something more authentic that goes beyond standardized experiences.

Tourists are interested in consuming dishes and products that are characteristic of the area they are visiting (Sharpley, 1994). They are increasingly seeking quality rather than value, they are more adventurous and sensitive to the environment, and in search of a greater authenticity. Maximising local economic linkages allows TO to offer their customers something more uplifting than a traditional mass vacation, and thus more satisfying, for which they are willing to pay a premium price that reflects on TO profitability. These results also seem to go against the tendency of enclavization of tourists within self-sufficient tourism complexes run by foreigners.

The component “small-scale organization” has a positive and significant relationship with profits growth. Empirical evidence suggests that the more tour operators are turning to smaller groups, the higher is the profits growth in the last two years. This is probably related to the concept of specialization. Broadly speaking, many mass-market operators have not considered sustainability in their business processes, in the same way as specialist operators. However, the market demand is changing rapidly. Tourists are willing to pay more to have a more personalized experience. The choice to turn to smaller groups of tourists, offering them more personalized services seems to help profitability.

**Table 3.7. Binary Logit Results**

```

Log likelihood function      -117.05118
Restricted log likelihood    -129.84889
Chi squared [ 9 d.f.]      25.59542
Significance level          .00238
McFadden Pseudo R-squared  .0985585
Estimation based on N =    204, K = 10
Information Criteria: Normalization=1/N
                        Normalized  Unnormalized
AIC                       1.24560   254.10236
Fin.Smpl.AIC              1.25119   255.24225
Bayes IC                  1.40825   287.28356
Hannan Quinn              1.31140   267.52475
Model estimated: Mar 24, 2016, 12:08:42
Hosmer-Lemeshow chi-squared = 20.39762
P-value= .00893 with deg.fr. = 8
-----+-----
Variable| Coefficient   Standard Error  b/St.Er.  P[|Z|>z]  Mean of X
-----+-----
|Characteristics in numerator of Prob[Y = 1]
Constant| -1.46376***   .54157         -2.703    .0069
C1FEQ1| .43531**     .17534         2.483    .0130    .114D-16
C1FEQ2| .07580       .17098         .443     .6575    .490D-07
C1FEQ3| -.08158      .16343        -.499    .6177    .490D-07
C1FEQ4| .22197       .17006         1.305    .1918    -.392D-06
C1FEQ5| .44514***    .17088         2.605    .0092    -.637D-06
C1FEQ6| .48207***    .16804         2.869    .0041    .147D-06
IND| .37486       .51585         .727     .4674    .88725
TURN| .76006**     .36216         2.099    .0358    .28922
LONG| .25141       .34748         .724     .4694    .47059
-----+-----
Note: nnnnn.D-xx or D+xx => multiply by 10 to -xx or +xx.
Note: ***, **, * = Significance at 1%, 5%, 10% level.

```

### 3.5 Managerial Implications

From the findings, a number of theoretical and managerial implications can be drawn. A more sustainable tourism industry is mostly dependent on tour operators that are main actors in the business. As stated by Budeanu (2005), large-scale operators have connections with millions of tourists and many suppliers, representing a leading force for sustainability in tourism, and for the protection of nature and societies. Consumers are continually put at the center of every business strategy by TO; they would provide the primary trigger for the industry to adopt sustainable initiatives. The findings indicate that TO should choose sustainable product and service features that do no harm social and natural environment. The reason is that these findings support the hypothesis that a more sustainable TO offer not only contributes

to preserving the ecologic balance and minimizing negative sociocultural impacts, but also has an impact on profitability.

Commitments of the top management to sustainable tourism is the starting point in adopting sustainable initiatives in all tourism activities. These results push in this direction, confirming that sustainable tourism is neither an abstract matter of academic debate issue, nor a niche product. It has been proved that it can be extremely beneficial for TO, having an important additional value. Some tour operators believe that they are too busy to think about sustainability: empirical evidence has shown that a sustainability orientation can probably help them to sell holidays and to stay on the market.

The tour operator of the future will include the preservation of the social and natural capital in its products: it will be a company that through the excellence of sustainability practices increases its competitiveness.

TO managers should hurry to investigate internal sustainable practices, as evidence suggests that their commitment to sustainable development is one of the key to their long-term success. TO should cultivate the sustainable corporate culture in which the company and its employees should support a truly sustainable commitment to succeed. TO managers should devote their attention in developing sustainable products and services, selecting proper partners in the supply chain, creating advertising campaigns to attract travellers who are likely to appreciate the benefits of a sustainable offer. A sustainable orientation can elevate TO image and reputation in order to attract green-conscious tourists, and consequently TO financial performances. The results of this study can serve as a reference for the TO industry. The authors hope that the findings can be used to enhance sustainable initiatives in the TO industry.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The aim of the paper is to analyse the relationship between tour operators and corporate social responsibility. Specifically, the objectives of the article are to identify the degree of intensity of TO engagement in implementing CSR initiatives, to recognize the importance of CSR practices and the perceived barriers to their implementation. A questionnaire has been designed listing the most relevant dimensions of what is currently referred as CSR practices. A survey has been submitted to TO worldwide, 204 answers have been obtained. A further objective is to empirically test if there is a relationship between CSR practices adopted and profitability of the business, through a principal component analysis and a subsequent binary logit regression analysis. The study has the potential to offer a more comprehensive assessment of the main CSR initiatives adopted by TO worldwide.

Empirical evidence shows that no unsurmountable obstacles have been detected by tour operators. Sustainability seems to embody visions and values of most of the TO interviewed, it has become part of their management process. Sustainability is also seen as an important marketing tool allowing them to compete not only on price.

The degree of intensity of firm’s engagement in implementing CSR initiatives is quite high, even if the processes are not formalized (most of them do not produce periodic reports on sustainability activities). TO also seem to be relatively involved in implementing environmental initiatives in the hotels’ daily management.

Furthermore, empirical evidence supports the relevance of CSR practices as a crucial determinant of profits growth. Results show a positive relationship of the dependent variable “profits growth” with TO sustainability orientation.

The more tour operators are turning to smaller groups and trying to maximise local economic linkages, the higher is the profits growth. The survey seems to confirm that tourists are increasingly seeking authentic

experiences immersed in the true atmosphere of the destinations they are visiting; as shown by recent literature they are looking for more personalized and less “mass” oriented vacations, and are willing to pay more for it.

This study proposes and tests a framework to assess corporate social responsibility understanding and implementing by tour operators. These results encourage tour operators to carefully examine their offers, including CSR practices in their business policy, as empirical results show that these are connected with their financial performance.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

This dissertation consists of three related essays on package tourism and sustainability. While the first two essays might be referred to as companion essays and use the same dataset, the third essay uses a different dataset.

The first dataset consists of 307 package tourists interviewed in Dominican Republic (DR), one of the world’s leading markets for sun and sand tourism, and also one the most tourism-dependent region in the world (Padilla& McElroy, 2005).

We operationalize the conceptual approach of many tourism studies by including in the analysis a number of items we have found as important to define sustainability of a package vacation.

To reduce the large set of variables to a smaller set, we perform a principal component analysis (PCA) and we test the relationships among the components resulting from PCA and the dependent variables through regressions. In the first essay, we perform a direct test of the relationship between sustainability of a package holiday and destination competitiveness; in the second essay, we test the relationship between sustainability and: i) tourists’ satisfaction; ii) intention to rebook.

Sustainability of tourism destinations has become a major area of tourism research. The concept of competitiveness has been recognized as connected with the notion of sustainability (Ritchie, Crouch, 2003; Hassan, 2000).

However, the large debate on the role of sustainable development has partly overlooked the call for a deeper empirical test, as there is still no clear empirical evidence of the role of sustainability in explaining the competitiveness of a sun and sand destination. Competitiveness of package S&S destinations needs attention not only because it accounts for a sizable share of the total tourist flows, but also because it is the main form of tourism (often almost exclusive) in many islands, countries, and regions worldwide.

Package tourists’ interest in sustainability is also still not demonstrated: a direct test of the relationship between sustainability of a package holiday and tourists’ satisfaction has never been performed. This is a central topic for tourism industry, as Miller (1997) reminds us that we cannot expect business to move towards sustainability unless it is economically beneficial or requested by the consumers.

The results of the first essay show that all factors resulting from the PCA – “environmental sustainability; socio-economic sustainability; eco-friendly tourism development; local working conditions” – are positively associated at a very significant level to dependent variables measuring destination competitiveness. Hence, sustainability of package S&S tourism has a positive role in determining the competitiveness of a tourism destination.

First of all the role of environmental issues (here represented by two components “environmental sustainability and eco-friendly tourism development”) emerges. As it is clear from these groups of items, destination competitiveness is much more than only a function of a good waste management and water/energy saving programs. It is also dependent on the environmentally-friendly tourism planning and development. Dominican Republic, as other S&S mass tourism destinations worldwide, has been characterized by a form of mass tourism development harmful to the local fragile ecosystems.

Results also indicate that it is important to stimulate economic interactions with locals, as they can improve destination competitiveness. Empirical evidence shows that local working conditions have a significant and positive relationship with destination competitiveness. These results call

for a deeper consideration of the links between employment and tourism destination competitiveness. The prevalence of restaurants, bars and hotels may induce to think that tourism industry is relatively low skilled. This has resulted in local people providing cheap labour in tourism services, instead of being the main receivers of the growing tourism business. The great changes which have happened in tourism have made customers more demanding and looking for a better quality experience. Employment in tourism sector is too often considered to be irrelevant in affecting business and destination competitiveness. These results suggest that changes should be coming soon.

The results of the second essay show that that the component “environmental sustainability” has a positive and significant role in both dependent variables (tourist satisfaction and intention to rebook). After all, natural resources can be considered the most important tourism attraction (Ritchie, Crouch, 2003). The quality of the environment is strictly connected to the attractiveness of the destination. Individually, hotels do not have a substantial negative impacts on the environment; nevertheless, together with many others, they can have very significant environmental impacts, being harmful for local ecosystems. Tourism and environment are in a very complex relationship (Butler, 2000), and hotels activity can have severe consequences in term of degradation of the environment. Mihalič (2000) points out that a well-managed environment is not only good for sustainable development but is also the best advertiser.

The component “socio-economic sustainability” is by far the variable with the highest impact on the model, regardless of the dependent variable used. This result supports the assumption that sustainability is not only about environmental preservation, but that socio-economic variables have also great relevance in explaining tourism satisfaction and intention to rebook.

A probable explanation is that a more sustainable socio-economic model permits hotels to be more integrated with the territory, and consequently to offer customers more authentic experiences. Tourists are interested in

consuming products that are characteristic of the area they are visiting. They are increasingly seeking quality; they are more adventurous and sensitive to the environment, and in search of a greater authenticity. Maximising local economic linkages allows hotels to offer their customers something more enriching than a traditional mass vacation, and thus more satisfying.

Cavlek (2002) claims that it can only be the consumer who put pressure for sustainable tourism. Empirical evidence shows that sustainability is an important factor affecting tourists’ satisfaction. Considering that holiday producers are commercial activities that will adopt a policy if is more convenient compared to alternatives (Miller, 2001), these results push towards more sustainable forms of tourism development in S&S destinations.

The third essay proposes and tests a framework to assess corporate social responsibility (CSR) understanding and implementing by tour operators. An assessment of the CSR initiatives on tour operators worldwide has never been done. Our sample is composed by 204 tour operators. A web survey was submitted to tour operators from various countries in different continents, asking them to recognize the importance of CSR practices, to identify the greatest obstacles in implementing them, and to describe their intensity of engagement in implementing CSR initiatives. Afterwards, we first perform a PCA to reduce the large number of variables into a smaller set, and then we use the obtained components as exploratory variables in a subsequent binary logistic regression analysis.

Empirical evidence shows that no unsurmountable obstacles have been detected by tour operators in implementing sustainable initiatives. Sustainability seems to embody vision and values of most of the tour operators interviewed, it has become part of their management process. Sustainability is also seen as an important marketing tool, allowing them to compete not only on price.

The component “economic sustainability” is very significant in explaining tour operators’ profits growth. Maximising economic linkages very much depends on whether tourism creates employment opportunities

and generates linkages in particular service-providing sectors and agriculture.

The component “small-scale organization” has a positive and significant relationship with profits growth. Empirical evidence suggests that the more tour operators are turning to smaller groups, the higher is the profits growth. This is probably related to the concept of specialization. Broadly speaking, many mass-market operators have not considered sustainability in their business processes, in the same way as specialist operators. However, the market demand is changing rapidly. Tourists are willing to pay more to have a more personalized experience. The choice to turn to smaller groups of tourists, offering them more personalized services seems to help profitability.

The results of this study encourage tour operators to carefully examine their offers including CSR practices in their business policy, as empirical results show that these are connected with their financial performance.

This research model is the first of its kind, but it can be suitable for analysing these relationships elsewhere, and could be generalized to other coastal mass destinations affected by socioeconomic and environmental vulnerability.

This study is certainly relevant to other S&S mass destinations that face challenges in terms of tourism’s legitimate contribution to sustainable tourism development. On a practical level, this research provides insights for government and industry operators (hotels and tour operators) to better understand the underlying factors that influence destination competitiveness.

These results are likely to help business and destination managers to adopt competitive strategies based not only on business related factors, but to consider sustainability matters a top priority in their plans.

From the findings, a number of theoretical and managerial implications can be drawn. A more sustainable tourism industry is mostly dependent on tour operators that are main actors in the business. As stated by Budeanu (2005), large-scale operators have connections with millions of tourists and

many suppliers, representing a leading force for sustainability in tourism, and for the protection of nature and societies. Consumers are continually put at the center of every business strategy; they would provide the primary trigger for the industry to adopt sustainable initiatives.

The findings indicate that tourism businesses and destinations should choose product and service features that do no harm social and natural environment. The reason is that these findings support the hypothesis that a more sustainable offer not only contributes to preserving the ecologic balance and minimizing negative sociocultural impacts, but also has a direct impact on destination competitiveness, tourists' satisfaction, and business profitability.

Commitments of the top management – both in the private and public sector – to sustainable tourism is the starting point in adopting sustainable initiatives in all tourism activities. These results push in this direction, confirming that sustainable tourism is neither an abstract matter of academic debate issue, nor a niche product. It has been proved that it can be extremely beneficial for destinations, hotels and tour operators, having an important additional value.

Tourism managers should hurry to investigate internal sustainable practices, as evidence suggests that their commitment to sustainable development is one of the key to their long-term success. Tourism businesses should cultivate the sustainable corporate culture in which the company and its employees should support a truly sustainable commitment to succeed.

Tourism destinations should devote their attention in developing sustainable products and services, creating advertising campaigns to attract travellers who are likely to appreciate the benefits of a sustainable offer. A sustainable orientation can reinforce both destination image, and enhance tour operators and hotels' reputation, and therefore attract green-conscious tourists, increasing destination competitiveness and businesses' financial performances.

The results of this study can serve as a point of reference for package tourism, especially in sun and sand destinations. The hope is that these findings will be used to enhance sustainable initiatives in the tourism industry.



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# APPENDIX A.1. Survey 1

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PACKAGE TOURISTS

### General information

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- x1 Sex**  
1 Male  
2 Female
- x2 Age**  
1 18 – 29  
2 30 – 44  
3 45 – 59  
4 60 and over
- x3 Education**  
1 No completed education  
2 Primary school education  
3 Secondary school education  
4 Non-university higher education  
5 University education
- x4 Country of residence**
- x5 Whom did you travel with?**  
1 I travelled alone  
2 I travelled with friends  
3 I travelled with my partner  
4 I travelled with my partner and children  
5 Other
-

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**x6 How many organized trips have you been on in the last 10 years?**  
(including this trip)

- 1 1
- 2 2 - 4
- 3 5 - 7
- 4 8 or more

**x7 How many times have you been to Dominican Republic?**  
(including this trip)

- 1 1
- 2 2
- 3 3
- 4 4 or more

**x8 How many times have you been to this hotel?**  
(including this trip)

- 1 1
  - 2 2 - 4
  - 3 5 or more
- 

**What is the importance of the following elements in your vacation**  
(1: Not important at all - 2: Somewhat important - 3: Moderately important 4: Important - 5: Very important)

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- a1 Relaxing at the beach
  - a2 Nightlife
  - a3 Entertainment
  - a4 Sport activities
  - a5 Cultural activities
  - a6 Shopping
  - a7 Contact with nature
  - a8 Integrity of the natural environment
  - a9 Low impact construction materials in the hotel area
  - a10 Hotel not overcrowded with tourists
  - a11 Eating typical foods in local restaurants
  - a12 Buying handmade products from local producers
  - a13 Experience the local culture
  - a14 Involvement in charitable programs
  - a15 Interactions with locals
  - a16 Interactions with other tourists
  - a17 Safety
-

**How much do you agree with the following statements**

(1. Strongly Disagree - 2. Disagree - 3. Neither agree or disagree - 4. Agree - 5. Strongly agree)

- 
- b1 Energy saving actions were implemented
  - b2 Water saving actions were implemented
  - b3 Voluntary towel and bed linen reuse programmes were realized
  - b4 A recycling waste system was set up
  - b5 The height of buildings in hotel is restricted to the height of the vegetation profile
  - b6 The structures in the hotel are built with low-impact materials
  - b7 Preservation of native vegetation
  - b8 The size of the groups was limited when visiting natural reserves
  - b9 Environmental friendly means of transport were used
  - b10 Detailed recommendations were made about how to respect the environment
  - b11 Detailed information were offered about the local culture
  - b12 Respect for local culture
  - b13 Public access was maintained in the beach
  - b14 Interactions with the local community were promoted
  - b15 Employees seem to be satisfied with their working conditions
  - b16 Employees seem to be adequately paid
  - b17 Promotion of local economic development
  - b18 We were encouraged to eat typical foods in local restaurants
  - b19 We were encouraged to buy handmade products and souvenirs directly from local producers
  - b20 We were encouraged to buy excursions directly from local travel agencies
  - b21 Charitable projects were promoted
  - b22 Protection of sensitive coastal areas
  - c1 Too many concrete constructions in the hotel
  - c2 Too many tourists in the hotel
  - c3 The hotel is secluded from the local community
  - c4 We could not experience the local culture
  - c5 We could not make purchases directly from local businesses
- 

**How much you agree with the following statements**

(1. Strongly Disagree -5. Strongly agree)

- 
- d1 I choose this hotel because is sustainable oriented
  - d2 I choose this destination because is sustainable
  - d3 In my vacation sustainability is a primary issue
  - d4 I know the sustainable holiday plan implemented by the hotel
-

**Rate in a 5 point scale:**

---

- e1 Overall satisfaction of the vacation
  - e2 Intention to return to the destination
  - e3 Intention to rebook
  - e4 Environmental quality
  - e5 Sociocultural heritage
  - e6 Economic development
- 

**f What do you mean for sustainable tourism?**

**It is a tourism...** (maximum 3 choices)

---

- 1 in contact with nature
  - 2 in contact with locals
  - 3 that enhances the well being of the residents
  - 4 involving visiting heritage/historic sites
  - 5 involving visiting untouched natural areas
  - 6 that preserves the local culture and the community
  - 7 that provides access for people with disabilities
  - 8 that respects the environment and the local heritage
  - 9 No clear idea
-

## **APPENDIX A.2. Survey 2**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TOUR OPERATORS**

#### **General information**

---

- a1 In which continent is your company’s headquarter located?**
- 1 Europe
  - 2 America
  - 3 Africa
  - 4 Oceania
  - 5 Asia
- a2 In which country is your company’s headquarter located?**
- a3 Which is your company profile?**
- 1 We are an independent company
  - 2 We are a member of a group
  - 3 We are the holding company of a group
- a4 Are you a member of any association of tour operators? Could you please specify the name?**
- a5 What is the approximate number of customers per year?**
- 1 0 – 5,000
  - 2 5,001-25,000
  - 3 25,001-50,000
  - 4 more than 50,000
- a5 What is the approximate number of customers per year?**
- 1 0 – 5,000
  - 2 5,001-25,000
  - 3 25,001-50,000
  - 4 more than 50,000
-

- 
- a6 What is the approximate annual turnover of your company?**
- 1 0- 1 million
  - 2 2 – 5 million
  - 3 6 – 25 million
  - 4 more than 26 million
- a7 What percentage of your firm's business derives from long haul?**  
(more than 5 hours flying time)
- 1 0-25
  - 2 26-50
  - 3 51-75
  - 4 76-100
- a8.1 Vertical integration of the company**
- 1 1 activity
  - 2 2 activities
  - 3 3 activities
  - 4 4 or more activities
- a8.2 Do you also own travel agencies?**
- 1 Yes
  - 0 No
- a8.3 Do you also own accommodation facilities?**
- 1 Yes
  - 0 No
- a9 Which is your primary target?**
- 1 Sun and sand tourism
  - 2 Cultural tourism
  - 3 Wildlife tourism
  - 4 Eco/nature tourism
  - 5 Adventure tourism
  - 6 No specific target
  - 7 Other
- b2 What is the approximate percentage of customers interested in sustainability?**
- 1 0-10%
  - 2 11-30%
  - 3 31-50%
  - 4 more than 50%
-

**b1 What do you mean for sustainable tourism?**

**It is a tourism...** (maximum 3 choices)

---

- 1 in contact with nature
  - 2 in contact with locals
  - 3 that enhances the well being of the residents
  - 4 involving visiting heritage/historic sites
  - 5 involving visiting untouched natural areas
  - 6 that preserves the local culture and the community
  - 7 that provides access for people with disabilities
  - 8 that respects the environment and the local heritage
  - 9 No clear idea
- 

**b3 What do you think are the greatest obstacles in adopting practices of sustainable tourism?** (1 completely disagree – 5 completely agree)

---

- 1 There is a lack of demand for sustainable tourism
  - 2 It is too difficult to educate tourists
  - 3 It is too difficult to train staff
  - 4 It has no additional value
  - 5 We have no time to think about it
  - 6 It is too costly
  - 7 We have organizational problems to implement it
- 

**b4 How much do you agree with the following statements**  
(1 completely disagree – 5 completely agree)

---

- 1 We believe that local governmentes are responsible
  - 2 Sustainable tourism is not relevant for our business
  - 3 Sustainability is more an academic issue
  - 4 Sustainable tourism is only a niche product
  - 5 We are too busy to think about sustainability
  - 6 We are too small and powerless to have any influence
  - 7 Sustainability is just a new managerial fashion
- 
- 8 Sustainability has become part of our management process
  - 9 Sustainability is important to differentiate ourselves from the market
  - 10 Sustainability is an important strategy of cost reduction
  - 11 Sustainability is important to receive good satisfaction ratings from our customers
  - 12 Sustainability is important for a good reputation and avoidance of negative publicity
  - 13 Sustainability is an important marketing tool
  - 14 We play a key role in the sustainability of the destinations
  - 15 Sustainability embodies our vision and values
  - 16 Sustainability is considered important by travel agencies we work with
-

**c1 Please tick one box below to describe the intensity of engagement in implementing the following initiatives (5 Totally engaged, 4 Considerably engaged, 3 Reasonably, 2 Marginally, 1 Not at all)**

---

- 1 We use locally owned accommodations
  - 2 We use local goods
  - 3 We use local labour
  - 4 We set standards for local labour
  - 5 We limit the number of tourists
  - 6 We keep tour groups to a minimum
  - 7 We train staff on good environmental practices
  - 8 We provide a code of conduct to our customers
  - 9 We are involved in increasing awareness on sustainable tourism in our customers
  - 10 We are involved in increasing awareness on sustainable tourism in host governments
  - 11 We promote tourists' donations
  - 12 We develop conservation projects at destinations
  - 13 We support local cooperation/donations practices
  - 14 We consult local stakeholders and local associations
  - 15 We cooperate with environmental/social active NGOs
  - 16 We have introduced sustainable tourism guidelines for the companies we work with
  - 17 We contract suppliers according to sustainability contracting standards
  - 18 We produce periodic reports on sustainability activities
  - 19 We use sustainable means of transport
  - 20 We preferentially use environmentally friendly accommodations
  - 21 We monitor socioeconomic impacts of our activity
  - 22 We monitor environmental impacts of our activity
  - 23 We participate in eco-labelling schemes
  - 24 We communicate sustainability issues in our website and brochures
  - 25 We offer detailed information about local cultures
  - 26 We encourage our customers to eat typical foods in local restaurants
  - 27 We encourage our customers to buy handmade products and souvenirs directly from local producers
  - 28 We encourage our customers to buy excursions directly from local travel agencies
-

**c2 Please tick one box below to describe the intensity of engagement in implementing the following initiatives in hotels (owned or partners) (5 Totally engaged, 1 Not at all)**

---

- 1 We set sustainability standard criteria for hotels
  - 2 We separate waste
  - 3 We reduce the use of water
  - 4 We reduce the use of energy
  - 5 We apply environmental auditing practices
  - 6 Hotels are built with low-impact materials
  - 7 The height of hotels is restricted to the height of the local vegetation profiles
  - 8 In the hotel area there are substantial areas of untouched vegetation
  - 9 Hotels are located outside ecologically sensitive coastal areas
- 

**d1 How much do you agree with the following statements In the last 2 years... (1 completely disagree – 5 completely agree)**

---

- 1 We have had an increased marginality
  - 2 We have faced a very tough competition on prices
  - 3 We have seen a growth of profits
  - 4 We have seen a growth of sales revenue
  - 5 We have seen a growth of sales volume
  - 6 We have seen a growth of the firm
-