PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIORS IN THE HOUSEHOLD AND HOLIDAY SETTING. AN EXPLORATORY STUDY AMONG BRASOV CITIZENS

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Abstract

The present paper aims to investigate Brasov citizens’ pro-environmental behavior both in their household and holiday setting. In this sense, we conducted a qualitative research using the in-depth interview method on a 13 respondent sample which included self-declared environmentally friendly residents from the city of Brasov, Romania. Among them, six respondents are members of ecological NGOs and can be considered environmental activists. The interview guide was structured in two sections. First, we considered respondents’ pro-environmental behaviors, the description of their activities, aimed at protecting the environment, as well as the tools and resources developed by public authorities in order to facilitate and stimulate citizens’ involvement in environmental protection. The second section was focused on the description of respondents’ last holiday, the choice of tourism destination, transportation, accommodation unit and activities in the destination; respondents’ pro-environmental behaviors; and the tools and instruments developed by local public authorities or hoteliers in order to facilitate tourists’ environmentally friendly behavior. The results of the present study outline the fact that respondents’ involvement in environmentally friendly activities is identical, or almost identical, in both household and holiday setting. For the environmental activists, such a behavior is difficult to change, even in a holiday setting, where environmental protection is one the individuals’ ‘priority’. The outcomes of our research can be used by both tourist services providers in order to adapt their offer to consumers’ pro-environmental behavior and local authorities who can identify the actions which have to be undertaken in order to facilitate such behavior.

Keywords: pro-environmental behavior, in-depth interview, environment, tourism

JEL Classification: C83, Q32, Q53

Introduction

The last few decades have witnessed unprecedented global growth in the level of concern regarding environmental issues and protecting the environment has been a major issue in our society (Easterling et al., 1996) [6]. Recognizing the seriousness of ecological problems, people have become increasingly environmentally conscious (Han et al., 2009) [8]. This ecological awareness has led an increasing number of individuals to engage in environmentally friendly behaviors in their everyday lives (Kalafatis et al., 1999; Laroche et al., 2001) [12]-[15].

Although tourism researchers have begun to look beyond the tourism context at environmental behaviors more broadly (Miller, 2003; Dickinson and Dickinson, 2006; Hunter and Shaw, 2007) [19]-[3]-[10], there are still relatively few studies that have specifically explored the theoretical and empirical links between home-based and tourism-based environmental behaviors (Barr et al., 2010) [1]. This link is critical to establish because it is only when individuals are able to transfer their behaviors between contexts, as part of an embedded set of lifestyle practices, that it will be possible to argue that ‘sustainable lifestyles’ can and do exist (Barr et al., 2010) [1].
Based on these assumptions, the present paper investigates Brasov citizens’ pro-environmental behavior both in their household and holiday setting. The paper starts with a background, aiming to clarify the conceptual framework for pro-environmental behaviors in both household and holiday settings and continues with the presentation of the methodology employed for data collection and analysis. The third section is dedicated to the analysis of the research results and the final section includes a series of conclusions and the main limits of the study.

**Background**

Pro-environmental behavior is regarded as individuals taking to preventative action to protect their surrounding environment by empathizing with nature and addressing environmental issues (Scheule, 2000; Stern, 2000) [21]-[23]. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) [14] consider that ‘pro-environmental behavior’ is a behavior that consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of one’s actions on the natural and built world (e.g. minimize resource and energy consumption, use of non-toxic substances, and reduce waste production).

Over the past four decades, environmental psychologists and sociologists have attempted to describe, characterize, and understand the ‘pro-environmental individual’. This is the person who demonstrates a pattern of pro-environmental action across many different domains (e.g., energy use, water consumption, transportation, waste reduction) (Markowitz et al., 2012) [17]. Stern (2000) distinguishes three major behavioral types: the private-sector household behaviors (e.g., buying organic produce, sorting household waste for recycling); environmental citizenship behaviors (signing a petition and belonging to an environmental group); and willingness to make personal financial sacrifices for environmental goals, which assess policy support [23]. Several researchers [13]-[2] have investigated the emotional and attitudinal aspects associated with various kinds of pro-environmental behavior, such as giving financial support to protected parks or reducing household gas consumption (Kals et al. 1999; Carrus et al., 2005). Some of them suggest that emotional affinity and positive attitudes to people’s natural environment increase pro-environmental behavior (Dolnicar and Grun, 2009) [5].

Although there has been significant activity surrounding the establishment of policy frameworks for encouraging and embedding environmental practices into everyday life, these behaviors have tended to be those which are based in and around the home (Barr et al., 2010) [1]. Muller and Sonnenmoser (1998) found that pro-environmental behavior was most pervasive in private lifestyle and household activities [20]. Homburg and Stolberg (2006) [9] divided pro-environmental behavior into four categories including environmental activism (e.g., active involvement in environmental organizations), non-activist behavior in the public sphere (e.g., petitioning on environmental issues), private sphere environmentalism (e.g., saving energy and purchasing recycled goods) and behavior in organizations (Stern, 2000) [23].

Leontido (1994) suggested that how people behave during travel can be quite different from those of their home environment [16]. The behavioral difference is especially salient for leisure travelers because the person sees “oneself as a different kind of person when on holiday, less constrained by normal role demands and interpersonal obligations” (Eiser and Ford, 1995) [7]. Subsequent to the decision to take a holiday, come the choices related to different elements of the tourism product, starting with the location (destination), transport and accommodation that will secure the holiday experience (Sedigeti and Theocharou, 2002) [22]. Miao and Wei (2013) confirm that people display less pro-environmental behavior when they travel and suggest that consumers’ pro-environmental behavior at home does not accurately predict how they would behave environmentally when they travel [18]. Dolnicar and Leisch (2008) [4] postulated that the comparative analysis of pro-environmental behavior in the home and vacation contexts revealed that people generally demonstrate higher levels of pro-environmental behavior at home and provided two explanations of these systematic patterns: (1) that people feel more obliged to behave in an environmentally friendly manner at home and (2) that the infrastructure at the destination does not make it easy to continue the routine of typical pro-environmental behaviors at home.

Dolnicar and Grun (2009) [5] found that people tend to feel morally obliged to carry out pro-environmental behavior at home. The majority of their respondents (92%) indicated that they felt more morally obliged at home, whereas only 8% indicated the same feeling during their vacation. These authors outlined the main tendency of higher levels of pro-environmental behavior at home. An analysis of the main stated reasons indicates that people feel more responsible for the environment where they live and are willing to make a bigger effort to maintain a good living environment in their immediate surroundings. They do not feel obliged to behave in the same way on vacation. Two main reasons are that they feel vacation time is supposed to be worry-free, selfish time which should be free of responsibilities, and that the infrastructure is not available in the vacation context/environment to enable them to maintain their usual levels of environmentally friendly behavior (Dolnicar and Grun, 2009) [5].

**Methodology**

Aiming to investigate Brasov citizens’ pro-environmental behavior both in their household and holiday setting, we conducted a qualitative research between November 2014 and January 2015, using the in-depth interview method. We considered a 13 respondents sample, which includes self-declared environmentally friendly residents from the city of Brasov, Romania. Among them, 6 respondents are members of ecological NGOs (which we coded S7,
S8, S10, S11, S12 and S13) and can be considered environmental activists. The other 7 subjects are self-declared environmentally friendly individuals, coded in the following manner: S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6 and S9.

The interview guide was structured in two sections. First, we considered respondents’ pro-environmental behaviors, the description of their activities, aimed at protecting the environment, as well as the tools and resources developed by public authorities in order to facilitate and stimulate citizens’ involvement in environmental protection. The second section was focused on the following issues: the description of respondents’ last holiday, the choice of tourism destination, transportation, accommodation unit and activities in the destination; respondents’ pro-environmental behaviors; and the tools and instruments developed by local public authorities or hoteliers in order to facilitate tourists’ environmentally friendly behavior. Respondents were also asked to compare their pro-environmental behaviors in the household and holiday setting. Content analysis was used for data processing by grouping respondents’ answers according the themes included in the interview guide.

Results

In the first phase of the interview, respondents were asked to express their opinions concerning their activities which contribute to environmental protection. Data analysis revealed, in the first phase, respondents’ daily based activities with the purpose of protecting or deteriorating the environment: energy and water conservation, waste management, transportation, food and non food product consumption and environmental volunteering. Respondents’ environmentally friendly activities, both at home and in a holiday setting, are described in the second phase of the content analysis, as well as the reasons that do not allow them to behave in a pro-environmental in a holiday setting, similar to their home behavior.

Respondents’ pro-environmental behaviors in the household

a) Energy and water conservation are the main activities that the interviewed subjects outlined as the most important measures for environmental protection. In this sense, the main conservation measures mentioned by some of the respondents involve: switching the lights off when leaving a room, owning a PC/laptop instead of a TV for leisure purposes, plugging off home equipment when it is not used, limiting the use of the microwave oven, purchasing appliances with economy functions for water and energy consumption (fridges, washing machines), as well as using saving bulbs. On the other hand, in the case of microwave ovens, one of the respondents mentioned the use of this appliance at least once a day, in order to warm up food, especially due to his lack of time and the convenience of this equipment.

Most interviewed subjects outlined waste management as a key measure for environmental protection. Most of them mentioned it as a home and work based activity and outlined its importance in the following way.

S9: “I think it is the most important environmental measure, I would feel remorse for not doing it”.

On the other hand, certain respondents who practice this activity mentioned that although local waste collection is done in a selective way (using the special containers located in different neighborhoods of Brasov), the sanitation companies usually tend to mix their content when collecting the already selected waste. Considering this practice, respondents do not see the point of selecting waste.

S11: “I understood that selected waste is collected in the same place (...), so I do not see the point in doing it anymore.”

Another problem related to home based waste management activities is the lack of special containers in each of Brasov’s neighborhoods.

S10: “I hope that the selected waste is going to the right place (...) at home, I selectively collect the waste (...) I have the advantage to have appropriate containers just across my street but they are not present in each neighborhood ... and yes, it is an effort for somebody who lives farther away to take their waste in these special containers... I just hope the sanitation company does its job appropriately”.

The importance of selective waste collection is outlined by one of the respondents, related to the great impact of certain products (plastic, metal, appliances) on the environment.

S13: “(...) we are used to having different types of equipment at home (...) but we don’t realize exactly what their impact is, how they are made, where they end up after use, so each time I have the opportunity to collect them in a selective way, I do it.”

A special attention among the selective waste collection activities is given to the use of plastic bags. Most of the respondents mentioned they refuse to buy plastic bags from retailers because they bring their own bags made of fabric or plastic (which they use several times). The use of plastic bags is also encouraged by retailers, as they consider that the “service is incomplete” if they do not offer a bag with the sold product.

S12: “A measure that I usually take is to bring my own fabric-made bag instead of asking for one when I buy something (...) I don’t even accept paper bags (...) I even tell the sales persons: „Please do not give me one“, but they insist that their service is incomplete without offering clients a bag, so I have to fight them in this sense.”

A respondent mentioned an interesting remark regarding the common practice of retailer to offer plastic bags to their clients:

S4: “I have tones of plastic bags at home, but I still forget to take some with me when I’m shopping (...) so, when I have too many, I through them away.”
b) Concerning **local transportation**, the interviews’ analysis revealed the existence of different behaviors among individuals. First, there is the category of individuals who use environmentally friendly transportation in the city (buses, bikes) or prefer to walk. Their motives are different but **the environmental reason** is not the most important. Among these motives, the economic one is obvious, as people save money by using public transportation. In addition, the local transport infrastructure in the city of Brasov has improved in the last years, according to respondents’ opinions, thus, choosing the bus for local shifting is justified.

S5: “I try to walk or use the bike as much as possible, I don’t use a personal car, nor the local buses, the fewer cars are in traffic, the better and public transportation can also be a cheaper alternative.”

S10: “I have a car that I share with a friend, we try to use it together, I rarely use it, only when I need to carry something or take someone to a certain place (...) I also have a bike that I ride in the city (...) but I prefer to walk (...) or take the bus.”

On the other hand, certain respondents own a car and use it exclusively for local transportation, due to the comfort it offers, but also the lack of time for the use of public transportation. Thus, environmental problems are generated by the increasing use of cars/inhabitant, but also because they are not used at full capacity, when travelling to tourism destinations.

S8: “I used public transportation and I walked a lot before buying a car, nowadays, I don’t have the same behavior due to the lack of disposable time.”

The **production and consumption of food and non-food products** is also considered an important cause of environmental pollution, according to the interviewed subjects.

S9: “I wonder who buys so many goods, which are produced in large quantities, so people can’t consume all of them (...), thus, we are facing large quantities of unused products which are then turned into waste.”

In order to minimize the negative impact of production on the environment, the interviewed subjects consider that a significant change in individual behavior is needed, materialized in **consumption rationalization** - only buying needed products and in quantities which allow full use. This way, the consumption of resources needed in the production process is minimized, as well as the quantity of resulting waste. Excessive consumption and frequent purchases might be determined by individuals’ **low level of awareness** concerning the origin of different products, production conditions, the quantity of resources needed in the production processes as well as the impact that their production, consumption and resulting waste generate on the environment.

S10: “I don’t throw away food (...), I try to buy less, have my fridge semi-filled rather than full. I buy second hand clothes rather than new ones (...) throwing away things seems to be one the biggest problems of our civilization (...) if you can afford to buy something, it doesn’t mean that you can afford to pay the real price (...) do you know how many liters of water are consumed for the production of a cotton t-shirt? Tens of thousands liters of water are necessary and it is shocking to know that we are only paying 10 lei for this product, without actually being able to put the consumed water (...) so lots of resources are consumed.”

S13: “(...) the fact that I don’t eat unhealthy food and I try to take into consideration ecological principles in my choice of products, not just my culinary preferences (...) I try to convince other persons that this is the best way because I look at all kinds of farms (...), at how animals are being bred (...) if we add these things to the impact animals have on the environment (especially cattle), gas emissions etc., then things are pretty obvious, as far as I am concerned.”

Respondents (especially those who are members of ecological NGOs) consider that oil consumption and waste is also polluting the environment. Thus, it is important to take into account the used oils, resulting from the cooking process to specific collecting containers instead of throwing it away in the kitchen sink. Considering the lack of appropriate used oils collection centers/containers, certain respondents declared that they either do not use oils in the cooking process or they use very little oil, in order to minimize the impact of resulting waste on the environment.

S12: “I keep throwing away used oils in the kitchen sink; I have not managed so far to sore it in a bottle (...). It seems a bit complicated as this is a special product, which necessitates special attention and care (...) I am aware that I am not doing the right thing.”

S7: “When we are cooking, we put the used oil in a special jar (...) we have a friend who uses it for his van.”

Another measure aimed at reducing the environmental impact of their daily activities which was mentioned by the interviewed subjects, concerns the **consumption of local products and/or eco-certified products** (the so-called “green brands”). By consuming locally produced goods, respondents can contribute to environmental conservation as they do not encourage transportation from long distances to their residence city, which may cause additional pollution.

S10: “I try to buy short term consumption goods produced in Brasov or its surroundings (...) in the case of cosmetics I choose Romanian products or products manufactured by environmentally responsible companies.”

S8: “I try to buy local food products aiming to discourage the transportation of similar products from far away.”

Although the **consumption of cleaning products** was mentioned as a factor which has a negative impact on the environment by most of the respondents, giving up on this type of products is difficult as **eco-friendly alternatives are quite expensive** for the interviewed subjects.
S11: “I do not use bio cleaning products because they are considerably more expensive, I use normal cleaning products and do not pay a special attention to this issue.”

Respondents also mentioned that personal products which are produced by environmentally friendly companies may have a positive impact on the environment. One of the interviewed subjects mentioned that she likes to use natural products, which she buys from specialized stores. However, some of these natural products do not always deliver the expected result, so they have an inferior quality compared to the ordinary products which can be found on the market.”

S2: “I use a spray type of deodorant, which has a negative impact on the environment. I could replace it with a natural one but it wouldn’t be appropriate for me. For example, the spray type of deodorant does not leave stains on my clothes and it is a very efficient in neutralizing odors, while the natural one does not have all these qualities although it may be beneficial for the body.”

The use of chemical fertilizers in the food industry is determined by the need to offer competitive products on the market, which satisfy consumers’ demand for quality. For example, according to one of the respondents, the superior quality of fruits and vegetables is also perceived through their appealing shape and colors, thus indirectly generating the necessity of chemical fertilizers in the production phase.

S2: “I love gardening, helping my parents (…); however they use chemical fertilizers although I don’t agree because the fruits and vegetables tend to lose their taste and are no longer healthy (…) My parents sell these products and mention that most people look at them and say: “Well, they are not big enough!”’ so they registered losses (…) thus they decided to inject the products, to make them look prettier, although I do not feel it is fair. I do not agree with my parents in this case.”

**d) The active involvement in ecological activities, the collection of appliances or the adoption of an environmentally responsible behavior** is other ways in which the respondents consider they are getting involved in environmental protection. The interviewed subjects declared they are involved as volunteers (in certain cases, organized by the ecological NGO they are members of) in sanitation actions of a natural area (for example ‘Let’s do it Romania’) or they participate in used appliances collection campaigns organized by specialized firms. The active involvement in environmental protection was described by certain respondents as a personal example, which may inspire other people to follow the same behavior.

S12: “I get actively involved (…) when I am walking on a mountain trail and I see somebody throw away garbage I immediately react (…) I try not to walk away when I am facing this type of behavior.”

According to certain respondents, participating in environmental sanitation activities is not sufficient. An active involvement should imply an individual effort of each person to keep the environment clean, in the daily activities. This effort should be sustained by an increased awareness of each individual concerning the impact of his/her actions on the environment, generating an improvement of the “personal behavior” which becomes more environmentally responsible.

S13: “I can begin with the awareness, and then everybody has to create their own script. Not everybody needs to be vegetarian but they can recycle, if there was an institutional framework for this in our country. I think that each individual should find a personal script which may not include environmental activism, just a more responsible behavior (…) I think that the real impact would be realized by generating individual changes.”

Although respondents consider that the individual effort of each citizen has the highest impact on the environment, as the active implication in specific activities which contribute to nature conservation is more difficult to achieve, considering the permissive legislation and the lack of coercive measures. The freedom of each individual to get involved in environmentally friendly activities has determined certain respondents to declare they have to be “motivated not to buy frequently plastic bags” or that “it is hard to do something unless you feel the need for a change”.

Concerning the environmentally friendly activities that the respondents usually do in a holiday setting, data analysis revealed the existence of relatively similar behaviors. Considering the specificities of tourism consumption, the interviews included a description of the tourism package components (transportation, accommodation, food services and recreational services) as well as a series of features regarding respondents’ involvement in environmentally friendly activities.

**Respondents’ pro-environmental behaviors in a holiday setting**

a) First, tourism consumption involves, tourists’ travel to the destination, which implies the use of one or several means of transportation. In this sense, individuals’ contribution to environmental protection is reduced or nonexistent and its level is determined by the choice of transportation. From this perspective, one of the respondents declared a preference to use a car at full capacity and not the airplane for travels to certain tourism destinations, when this is permitted by the itinerary.

b) Second, the general and tourism infrastructure from the tourism destination may also exert a significant influence on tourists’ intentions to adopt an environmentally friendly behavior. In this sense, respondents declared that the existing infrastructure in international tourism destinations is adequately administered, which gives them the opportunity to display such a behavior. On the other hand, certain subjects observed that there is a lack of a
similar infrastructure in Romania or it is insufficiently developed, in order to allow the display of an environmentally friendly behavior.

S9:”I can selectively throw away the waste, home and when I am in a tourism destination (…) I never throw it away on the street (…) if I have the possibility to throw it away in a selective manner I will do it.”

c) In order to display an environmentally friendly behavior in holiday setting, all the ecologist respondents, members of environmental NGOs, declared they prefer to buy food and non food products from the visited area, in order to discourage their transportation from long distances.

S11:”(…) I have the same behavior; there is no difference, maybe when I am on a holiday I am ever more careful (…) When I am at home I don’t always buy locally produced products, but when I am on a holiday I tend to buy local products.”

d) Certain respondents mentioned that the resources consumption (energy, water etc.) is identical in both their household and holiday setting.

S12:”When I am on a holiday, I try to have the same responsible behavior, to be careful with the lights and water, I do not care that I am not in my own home.”

However, other respondents consider that resources consumption is different in each situation, depending on the individual travel purpose. In the case of other activities, the negative impact on the environment is lower in the holiday setting than at home, while in other types of activities, it can be higher.

S13:”At home I am more connected to my computer and different appliances, while, when I am in a holiday setting, I try to relax more (…) at home, I tend to bathe more, while when I am on a holiday I do everything faster, in order to have more spare time for interesting activities.”

In this context, we can identify equilibrium (compensation) between the resource consumption at home and in a holiday setting. Although certain components of the tourism packages may have a negative impact on the environment, such as tourists’ transportation to tourism destinations, other components have a neutral influence (e.g. cleaning, water and energy consumption) or even beneficial (e.g. buying local products, encouraging local producers), thus generating an equilibrium. Even though the interviewed subjects (especially those who are members of environmental NGOs) declared they have an environmentally friendly behavior in a holiday setting, some of the respondents consider that the time spent in tourism destinations should be exclusively dedicated to specific tourism activities.

S13:”(…) when you are on a holiday, you cannot do much.”

S5:”I walk, bike and turn off the lights both at home and on a holiday. I think that what I do not do when I am in a tourism destination is to recycle (…) I don’t know whether I think more about waste, due to the lack of time, as you want to make the best of your time there.”

Conclusion

Pro-environmental behavior studies in both home and holiday settings revealed the existence of significant differences between the two types of behavior (Barr et al., 2010; Dolnicar and Leisch, 2008; Juvan and Dolnicar, 2014) [1]-[4],[11]. The authors of the mentioned studies observed that in a holiday setting, individuals tend to be less environmentally friendly due to the lack of time for environmental protection activities, their wish to enjoy the time spent in the tourism destination, to do different recreational activities etc. However, the results of the qualitative research presented in this paper do not confirm previous studies, although the sample cannot be considered representative for the studied population, due to its exploratory approach. The involvement of individuals in environmentally friendly activities (especially in the case of environmental NGOs’ members) is identical, or almost identical, in any of the two settings. Statements such as: „it has become a reflex”, „I consume the same”, „I have the same behavior”, „I am a maniac when it comes to these things”, „I feel awful to leave the heat on when I am not in the hotel room, even when I am not paying for it”, „I do not change easily”, „I would feel remorse”, „I find these type of activities normal”, „automatism”, „they are part of my daily routine”, clearly indicate that such a behavior is difficult to change, even in a holiday setting, where environmental protection is one the individuals’ priority. In this context, further studies are needed, among bigger samples of environmentally friendly consumers, with the aim of outlining correlations between pro-environmental behaviors home and away. Also, additional correlations can be made between the different components of tourism packages (transportation, accommodation, and other services) and potential tourists’ intention to protect the environment during their holiday experience. Another study could focus on the correlation and comparison between the activities of environmentally friendly individuals in their home and holiday setting, aiming to outline significant differences between them. Future studies should also analyze the impact of different types of tourism packages on the environment, considering the services that tourists prefer, as well as a correlation between the choice of the tourism package and clients’ intention to behave in a pro-environmental manner during their holiday.
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