

The Link Between Responsible Tourism Products and Quality

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<p>The main theme of this thesis is responsible tourism which is an emerging paradigm that needs to be faced. There are more and more responsible tourism companies and products in today's travel market. It is believed to improve the travel experience and guarantee the quality of the vacation. The commissioner of this thesis, Oekoplusreisen, is a tour operator that works according to responsible guidelines. The owner of this company was interested to know whether tour operators and travel agencies also see the link with quality and responsible tourism products.</p> <p>The aims of this thesis were threefold. First it was hoped to build a theoretical background which proves that a responsible tourism product is of better quality. The next aim was to receive results through a quantitative research method. Finally it was hoped to get an answer to a research question that has not been answered before to best satisfy my commissioner's hopes and construct an innovative idea. The idea was to retrieve illustrative results to the commissioner about this previously unknown subject. The framework is based on sources about sustainable tourism and quality.</p> <p>A quantitative research method was chosen for this research where a wholly new questionnaire was conducted in Webropol 2.0 and sent to 3000 travel agencies and tour operators in German speaking countries. One month time was given for the companies to answer. The answers were analyzed and tabulated with Excel.</p> <p>The research results show that the link between responsible tourism products and quality is most commonly understood in some way. The results prove an understanding to the fact that responsible tourism products are of improved quality</p>	
Keywords Sustainable Tourism, Corporate Responsibility, Tourism, Quality	

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1 Introduction

The main theme of this thesis is responsible tourism which is an emerging paradigm that needs to be faced (Weaver 2006, 1). Responsible tourism works towards developing quality tourism products without affecting the natural or cultural environment negatively (Sharma 2007, 78). Responsible tourism products should be committed to the ideals of ecotourism or sustainable tourism (Fennel 2008, 170). This means traveling to nature preserved areas, visiting educational attractions and avoiding air travel (Spenceley 2008, 14; The International Ecotourism Society 2013; Weaver 2006, 79–82). The reason for responsible tourism is because it is believed to improve the quality of the tourism experience and to guarantee the quality of the tourism product (TOI 2011). Do today's travel agencies and tour operators see it the same way?

The commissioner of this thesis is a sustainable travel agent and tour operator Oekoplusreisen in Germany. The owner of this company wants to know if and how tour operators and travel agencies understand a responsible tourism product to bring improved quality. The reason he wants to know this is because this topic had not been researched before and he was interested to see if attitudes within travel companies have grown with the idea that responsible tourism products are in fact of better quality. Through the owner's own professional background and work he himself believes that responsible tourism products do bring improved quality. For these reasons the topic is important to research to see if the travel agencies and tour operators of today also agree to this.

The aims for this thesis are threefold. First it is hoped to build a theoretical background which proves that a responsible tourism product is of better quality. The next aim was to receive results through a quantitative research method. Finally it is hoped to get an answer to a research question that has not been answered before to best satisfy my commissioner's hopes and construct an innovative idea.

- The first goal will be reached by starting with the necessary terminology where product quality, sustainable tourism, eco -and alternative tourism will be de-

fined. The goals and principles of responsible tourism are made clear to the reader. Next reader is informed about responsibility within travel agencies and tour operators to build a more holistic view about the main theme. The theoretical part will be finished with identifying tourism products and ways of responsible travel. Examples of who sell responsible tourism products will be given and to glue all the parts of the theory together it will be concluded with identifying quality in responsible tourism products after which the reader should have the understanding that responsible tourism products bring improved quality.

- The next goal where it is hoped to receive results through a quantitative research method is because it is desired to see if travel agents and tour operators agree to the findings that will be made in the theoretical part: responsible tourism products bring improved quality. This will be achieved by conducting a questionnaire with at least five questions based on the theory. These questions will be done with the likert scale with which the opinion of a company for a certain statement can be searched for (Hirsjärvi 2007, 195). Through the questionnaire it was hoped to receive illustrative views of the attitudes of the travel agencies and tour operators towards the idea that a responsible tourism product brings improved quality.
- The final aim is to get an answer to a research question that has not been answered before to best satisfy the commissioner's hopes and construct an innovative idea. To achieve this it is necessary to undergo thorough background research to gain plausible information and facts that show a responsible tourism product as a quality product. Combining this with the questionnaire, that shall be conducted, to be answered by travel agents and tour operators it is hoped receive results that show where the professionals stand with the idea that responsible tourism products bring improved quality.

Due to lack of time and resources the thesis has to be limited in some ways. It is concentrated on responsibility, responsible products and quality of responsible products. Therefore terms such as tour operator and travel agency will not be opened but they

are taken as obvious terms. The reader should only understand what is meant by a quality product and therefore reasons why quality is considered important will not be discussed. The questionnaire will be sent mostly to German speaking countries. This is mainly because the commissioning company is German and also due to lack of time resources to conduct the survey in many languages.

The owner of the commissioning company has throughout his life learnt to appreciate sustainable travel and tourism practices. His company has the German Corporate Social Responsibility for travel agencies, CSR –certificate. In addition it is an affiliate and member of Forum Anders Reisen which works towards a more sustainable tourism and develops sustainable tourism practice criteria in Germany. Products of Oekoplusreisen include a two-week family trip to Nicaragua including volcano trekking and jungle exploring, a chocolate themed trip to Nicaragua where travellers learn about one of Nicaragua's important export products, a 14 day group trip through USA in a school bus and a 7 day bicycle tour through the forests of Germany. His products are all designed and planned in cooperation with sustainable companies. The owner believes any trip outside of Europe should last at least two weeks to minimize CO2 emissions. Everything throughout the supply chain is carried out with sustainability in mind.

For his passion and ideals towards sustainable tourism, the owner has been interested in knowing where today's travel agencies and tour operators stand with the changing paradigm towards sustainability. Through his work with Forum Anders Reisen he knows that sustainable travel companies have been increasing but he wants to know do existing travel agencies and tour operators understand a responsible travel product to bring improved quality. This is important to know because as a tour operator he wants to know how companies who sell his products (the travel agencies) believe his products to be of special quality because they are sustainable and also because he wants to know if tour operators believe their sustainable options to be of better quality.

I agreed to and chose this topic because of my high interest towards sustainable tourism which evolved through my internship in the commissioning company. The innovative idea and timely subject made this topic an appropriate challenge and relevant to a bachelor thesis for tourism management. The success of this thesis will be determined on receiving answers to this new topic, reaching the three goals stated and attaining results that the commissioner finds useful. It is important to highlight that the research is for illustrative purposes only and not to give an absolute insight to the question.

2 Terminology, Effects of Tourism and Goals of Responsible Tourism

This chapter will help the reader understand product quality and the relationship with quality and sustainable products. Then three important terms related to responsible tourism: sustainable, eco -and alternative tourism will be explained. These three terms should then be understood as forms of responsible tourism that are discussed throughout this thesis. Next I will describe and discuss three dimensions that effect on tourism. These dimensions are economical, environmental and socio-cultural aspects and can be directly linked to sustainable development (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 17). Sustainable development is the term which describes that the development of humankind should respond to the needs of current generations without endangering the possibilities of the future generations to satisfy their needs. Economical, environmental and socio-cultural responsibilities are all interdependant aspects to the development of the well-being of humankind. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 16.) Finally the goals and principles of responsible tourism will be clarified.

2.1 Product Quality and Quality within Sustainable Products

Defining and understanding product quality is necessary in for this thesis. Garvin (1984, 25) defines product quality with five different approaches: superior definition, product-based definition, user-based definition, manufacturing-based definition and value-based definition. Next I will discuss these approaches.

The first approach is the Superior definition which suggests that quality is equal to distinctive excellence. The problem with this definition is that it is imprecise and can only be gained through customer experience. This definition can also be considered the philosophical quality definition as it is subjective. (Garvin 1984, 25.) The product-based definition is where quality is a measurable and specific factor. Quality is measured by the quantity of a specific attribute or characteristic within the product. For example quality ice cream is considered to have more butterfat than normal ice creams. This can however only be measured if most of the consumers believe the specific char-

acteristic of the product to bring more value. This also concludes to the fact that a quality product is only obtained at a higher than normal price because of the relation to higher quantity of a specific attribute or characteristic. (Garvin 1984, 25-26.) Examples of such attributes can be seen in image 1.

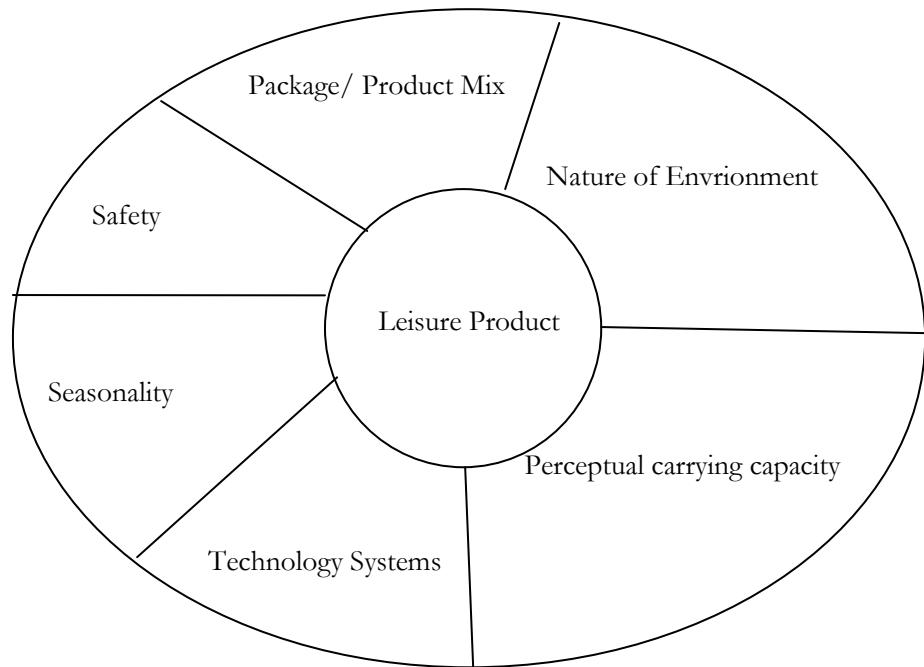


Image 1. Influences on Tourism Products (Williams & Buswell 2003, 15).

Another approach to quality is the user-based definition which comes from the consumer's perspective. All consumers are thought to have variable wants or needs and the product that best fulfils their personal wants and needs is of best quality. Like the superior definition of quality this user-based definition is also highly subjective and means different things to every consumer. (Garvin 1984, 26.) In tourism the needs or wants of the traveller could be the six motivations or benefits of leisure. These are: psychological (e.g. sense of freedom), educational, social, relaxation, physiological (e.g. development of physical fitness) and aesthetic (e.g. the destination is interesting). (Williams & Buswell 2003, 33.) The manufacturing-based definition implies on the manufacturing and supply side of the product. Here quality is when the product has been done right on the first try without any failure in manufacture or supply. A car manufactured right the first time should have less repair bills or problems during its life-cycle and can therefore be considered of good quality. (Garvin 1984, 27.) In tourism it is important to understand that while there might be a core product (e.g. golf course)

there are usually peripheral products included (e.g. food and beverages) and therefore quality can only come by using many suppliers and not only one (Williams & Buswell 2003, 28.) Finally the value-based definition defines quality within costs and prices. A quality product therefore should bring performance at an adequate price and conformance at a tolerable cost. (Garvin 1984, 28.) In tourism however price is most commonly not considered the most important attribute but rather reliability is the value bringer (Williams & Buswell 2003, 35). Additionally Garvin (1984, 28) suggests there to be 8 dimensions that are the basic features of product quality which are explained next.

These are illustrated in image 2.

- Performance: these are the operating characteristics of the product for example for a television they would be sound and picture clarity.
- Features: These are secondary attributes that support the previously mentioned performance. E.g. free drinks on a flight.
- Reliability: This refers to the probability of a product failing within a certain time period. This can be calculated e.g. with the average time between buying and first failure.
- Conformance: This is closely related to reliability. It refers to the ability of the product to match pre-established standards. If a car for example matches all standards it won't need to be repaired as fast as a car which has not matched all standards.
- Durability: This refers to how much and how many times the consumer can use the product in general or before it breaks down.
- Serviceability: This refers to the speed, politeness and skill of the repair of a broken product or failed service.
- Aesthetics: this refers to how a product feels, looks like, smells like or tastes like. This is subjective as all of these vary in every person.
- Perceived Quality: Similar to the aesthetic dimension, perceived quality is also subjective. It refers to the quality the customers believe they are receiving most commonly based on advertisement, images, brand names and reputation.
(Garvin 1984, 29 – 33.)

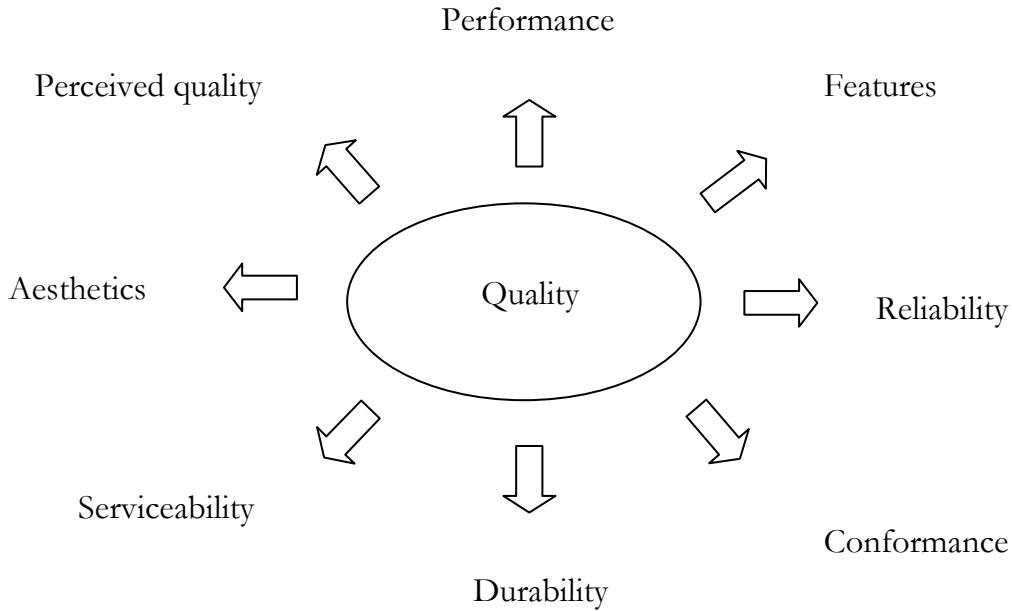


Image 2. 8 Dimensions of Quality (Calfa 2010).

ISO, the international standards organization ensures products to be safe, reliable and good quality. They are the organization who has officialised the standards for quality among other standards. (ISO.) It is furthermore suggested that sustainability is the new quality. The term that sustainability can be best compared to is quality as they have many similarities. One similarity includes for example that quality was in earlier times with no meaning and companies did not do much about it but it has emerged into an important term to which companies are reactive towards. This can also be seen with sustainability which has slowly become a term which companies more frequently react to. Another similarity is that both quality and sustainability can never be achieved perfectly: there is no end in trying to achieve perfect quality or being sustainably perfect instead both are terms that will forever be tried to be accomplished even better than today. Additionally it is difficult to reach a strong reputation with quality or sustainability and takes usually many years to build it but a short time to potentially break it. Furthermore for both terms consumers used to believe that they could not be achieved while today consumers both demand and expect these from their products. Finally both terms are considered to bring satisfaction, safety and well-being. Therefore it can also be argued that a sustainable product is a quality product. (Sheehan 2012.) Today there is a visible long-term shift in consumer values towards responsible products.

Therefore the fact that people want to buy sustainable products is not just a temporary trend but instead a paradigm. (TFT 2014.)

2.2 Sustainable Tourism

The first term associated with responsible tourism is sustainable tourism which is becoming a dominant term within the field of tourism (Weaver 2006, 1). Sustainable tourism is the term used when a sustainable development idea is implemented within the tourism sector. The tourism sector is one of the world's largest industries and also has a large effect on the environment and social heritage. (Theobald 2005, 172.) This means that sustainable tourism should correspond to the ideas mentioned in the beginning of this chapter about sustainable development. It is the basic concept to minimizing negative effects and maximising positive effects within the economical, environmental and sociocultural effects of tourism. (Weaver 2006, 10.) Sustainable tourism is a rather flexible term and can mean different things to different people: for others it means growth of tourism and for others it means minimizing it (Weaver 2006, 19). These two different points of views can also be explained with the terms minimalist sustainable tourism and comprehensive sustainable tourism. While a minimalist thinks more simply the comprehensive thinker has a more holistic view of sustainable tourism. (Weaver 2006, 25.)

With the term sustainable tourism it is also important to know the Bellagio Principles (attachment 5), which act as a guideline to implementing sustainability within the tourism sector. Bellagio principles state 10 guidelines including number 6: openness: where everyone should understand the techniques in implementing sustainable tourism and number 7: effective communication where sustainable tourism can be communicated to customers. (Weaver 2006, 32.) As sustainable tourism is such a wide term it also means there is no effective way to measure how effectively it is being used. Thus many companies can get away with using the absolute minimal requirements and call themselves a sustainable tourism company. (Theobald 2005, 180 – 181.) Certification is a technique that has been used to officialise sustainability (Theobald 2005, 217). Sustainable tourism can be said to fall into two different categories: ecotourism and alternative

tourism (Spenceley 2008, 310). These two terms will be explained in the following sub chapters.

2.3 Ecotourism and Alternative Tourism

Alternative tourism is an early form of sustainable tourism that developed in the 1980s. This term includes more conservative products and activities than mass tourism is thought to have. Alternative tourism can be said to have been within the tourism industry already for a long time and has included for example religious tourism, educational tourism and backpacking. (Weaver 2006, 38-39.) Alternative Tourism is said to be the opposite of mass tourism. While mass tourism offers high volume and package tours, alternative tourism offers low volume and personally arranged tours. The length of stay in mass tourism tends to be short while alternative tourism aims for longer stays. Mass tourism takes travellers to purposely built generic sites while alternative tourism concentrates on authentic pre-existing sites. Ownership of accommodations within mass tourism is commonly non-local and corporate while within alternative tourism the accommodations are from locally owned mostly small businesses. Alternative tourism includes many different types of tourism within itself: education tourism, volunteer tourism, urban heritage tourism and ecotourism. Today ecotourism can be thought of a term of its own within sustainable tourism rather than a form of alternative tourism. (Weaver 2006, 40 – 41.)

Ecotourism is another form of sustainable tourism. There is a lot of literature which strive to explain this term. In many of the cases ecotourism has a direct link to the conservation of nature. Many definitions define ecotourism as travelling to undisturbed natural environments, helping the local community and giving economic assistance to conservation projects. Additionally low impact tourism is a term often associated with ecotourism. This means that the people travelling should have as little impact as possible towards wildlife, natural resources, scenery and water. Definitions also mention that ecotourism includes the ways of conduct mentioned for sustainable tourism. (Fennel 2008, 22-24.) Like alternative tourism, ecotourism is also the opposite of mass tourism. Mass tourism depends on the built environment around while ecotourism depends on the natural and cultural environment. (Diamantis 2004, 4.)

Ecotourism can be said to have four main components: natural based component, sustainability component, local component and educational components. The natural based component suggests that the ecotourists go to preserved natural areas, national parks and/or wildlife and biological reserves. The sustainability component is that what was mentioned under sustainable tourism. The local components refer to the involving of the host community. This means sharing the revenue generated by travelling within the community, giving jobs to locals and controlling the tourism sector within the area. The locals should be considered as the experts rather than the tour guides. The educational component refers to educating the local community but in addition the domestic and international travellers. The education is about learning the local ways and therefore appreciation. (Diamintis 2004, 7-12.)

To conclude the difference between alternative and ecotourism with sustainable tourism is that ecotourism and alternative tourism are types of tourism like beach, health and adventure tourism. Sustainable tourism can be applied to all types of tourism. A good example of an ecotourism destination is Costa Rica who works as successful pioneers in the ecotourism field. (Integra 2012.) Costa Rica is for example on the way of becoming the first carbon neutral country in 2021 (The International Ecotourism Society). In this thesis the terms sustainable tourism, eco-tourism and alternative tourism fall under the responsible tourism category. Therefore as whenever one of these terms is mentioned it should lead back to the word responsible tourism. Image 3 will help conceptualise this.

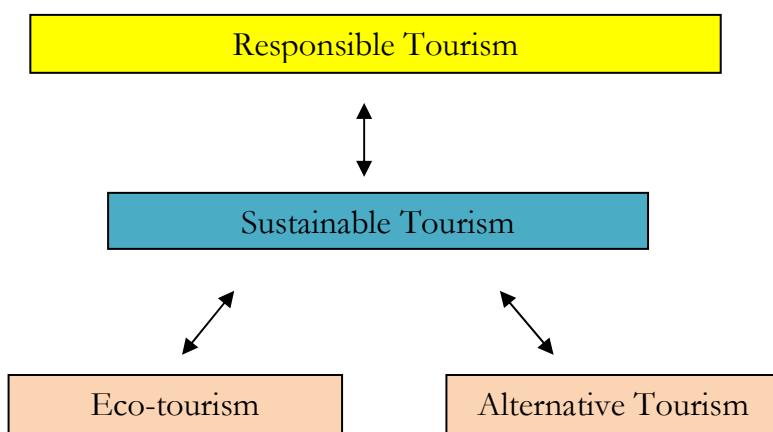


Image 3. The Relationship of the Terms Used in This Thesis

2.4 The Effects of Tourism

There are three effects of tourism: economic, environmental and socio-cultural. First the economic effects of tourism shall be discussed. When considering the economical effects of tourism it needs to be thought on how tourism can bring economical welfare to society. This includes the flow of capital within salaries, taxes and dividends and how tourism can provide jobs and healthy economical activities within different countries. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 17-18.) The main problem with the economical factors of tourism are the leakages of income since the goods and services for tourism are often bought and produced outside of the destination. This is said to be unsustainable and tour operators and agents can contribute to this by ensuring that they maximise the local economic benefits. These benefits could be for example direct: the food bought, souveneers and excursions or indirect: the jobs generated through the direct benefits. (UNEP 2005, 9.)

Environmental effects of tourism are next to be discussed. When thinking about the environmental effects of tourism it should be considered that the tourism industry should act in a way that is optimal for the environment. Some main aspects to be considered in this section are preservation of water, air and land, reductions of greenhouse emissions, preservation of the biodiversity of the nature, an effective and efficient use of natural resources, declining waste production and the health and enviromental risk management of chemicals. (Harmaala & Jallinoja 2012, 22.) The biggest problems concerning the environment within tourism are the harmful effects of constructions such as airports or hotels or the CO₂ emissions caused by airplane travel. Tourism can also be said to bring positive envrionmental effects. For example the revenue generated by tourism can be invested into national parks or the preservation of forests and coral reefs. (UNEP 2005, 10.)

Socio-cultural effects of tourism are last to be discussed. Tourism can bring national pride and empowerment to local residents. When the tourism experience is enjoyed and positively impacted by both the visitor and the local residents, tourism can be said to have positive socio-cultural effects. When talking about the socio-cultural effects of tourism it means that touristic activities ensure community stability and wellbeing

through economic means but also through local participation. It also ensures the benefits to a broad spectrum of the host population. (Weaver 2008, 130.) The negative socio-cultural effects are evident. Such effects are for example the intrusion of the culture and society of the host community, construction of an unfamiliar value system to locals, domination of foreign companies and subsidiaries, inequalities to locals and the tourists disrespect towards the cultural norms of the host country. The negative socio-cultural effects should be avoided completely. (Weaver 2008, 132.)

2.5 Goals and Principles of Responsible Tourism

Responsible tourism's main goal is to face how mass tourism has concluded into a wide range of problems over the years. This includes environmental, social and economic problems: unequal distribution of economic benefits, harming the environment and degrading the culture. The harmful effects towards the environment are most apparent: the current condition of the Mediterranean Sea, garbage along the Nepalese mountain tracks and disturbance of wildlife in African safaris. Sustainable tourism and ecotourism strive to confront these problems by organizing trips to the third world countries and to protected areas. Costa Rica, the example of responsible tourism ways is a leading destination where tourists go visit the multiple protected areas of the country. (Mowforth & Munt 2007, 90 – 93.)

There are six main goals or objectives of sustainable development which should also apply to sustainable tourism development: the maintenance of essential ecological processes, preservation of biological diversity, sustaining the use of species and ecosystems, developing prospects for some non-materialistic uses of natural resources, maintenance and improvement of the quality of life, and developing long-term sustainable economies. These goals also act as guidelines to further develop sustainable principles. (Sharma 2007, 75-76.)

Sustainable tourism additionally has its own more specific objectives. These are: the environment should have an intimate value and its long-term survival shouldn't be prejudiced with short-term actions, tourism should be thought of as a positive activity with benefits towards the community, place and visitors, the relationship between tour-

ism and the environment should be such that tourism does not damage natural resources, deny the future pleasures within the environment or bring other negative impacts towards the environment, tourism activities should respect the size and nature of the place, mutual harmony between the visitor, place and host community should be pursued. Changes within the tourism industry should not be in disrespect of these principles and objectives, and finally the tourism industry, governments and environmental agencies should commonly and together respect these goals and achieve them. (Sharma 2007, 77-78.)

3 Responsibility within Tour Operators and Travel Agencies

In this chapter ways on how tour operators and travel agencies can act responsibly and what they should take into consideration when building a responsible tourism product will be explored. Corporate social responsibility is explored first which can be said to be a minimum requirement. Next how the travel companies can contribute to acting responsibly within the company's operations will be explained. Finally the demand for responsible tourism which explains the reasons towards the rise in responsible travel operators and why travellers want to buy more responsible travel products will be clarified.

3.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

The European Commission defines corporate social responsibility (later referred to as CSR) as an enterprise's responsibility of its impacts on society (European Commission 2013). CSR is a voluntary practice that supports the company itself. It is important that every company defines what responsibility means to them. (Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto 2013.) CSR additionally refers to the moral ethics of how a company operates. Many countries have CSR laws for companies but some organizations may decide to exceed their CSR policies to that of what is stated by law. For this reason CSR is a complex term and means different things for every company. (Mirvis 2012, 153.) A company effects on society when choosing distributors, suppliers, customers and clients. They should be chosen carefully and in a way that supports the economic and social development of the population. Today the biggest concern for CSR management is climate change and environmental sustainability. (Mirvis 2012, 154.)

CSR additionally refers to certain responsibilities that a company should undertake. A recent clarification of these responsibilities state that the company should not only consider their financial shareholders but additionally every stakeholder. Furthermore companies increasingly come across the non-governmental organizations to upkeep their positive image and stay up to date in current issues within society. (Mirvis 2012, 155.)

With human resource management (later referred to as HRM) CSR policies are conducted to ensure the wellbeing and fair treatment of each employee of the company. (Mirvis 2012, 155.) CSR is furthermore said to bring profit to the company. Hawkins (2006, 191) mentions that stakeholders today look for companies who conduct responsibly, where customers can monitor their own responsibility and favour companies who have a CSR policy. Benefits of implementing a CSR policy are illustrated in Image 4.

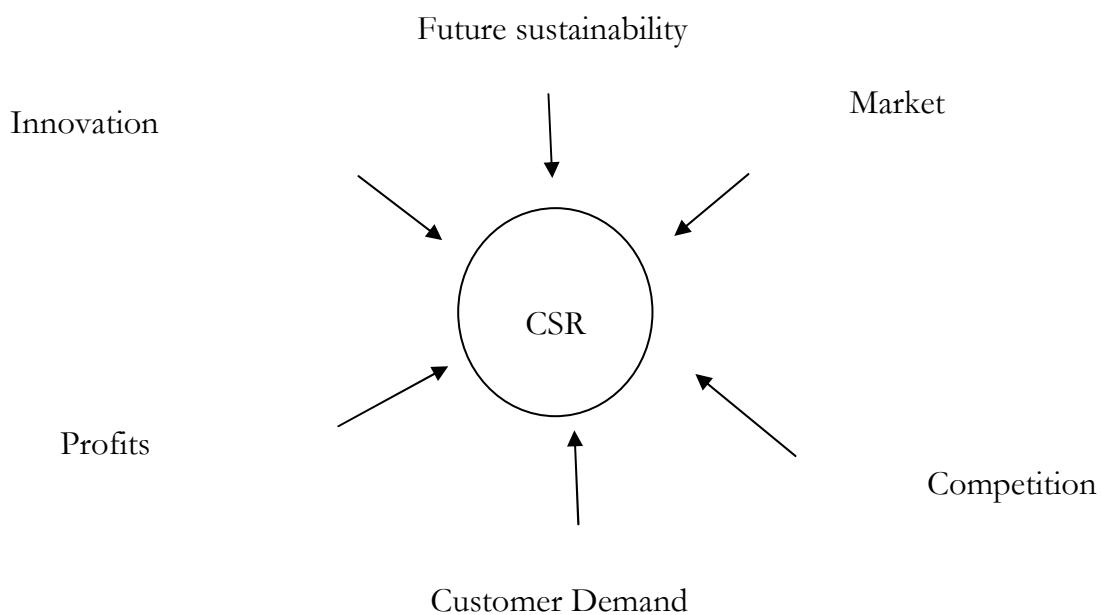


Image 4. Benefits of CSR Strategy (Hawkins 2006, 191)

3.2 How Travel Companies can Contribute to Acting Responsibly

It can be said that travel companies can contribute to acting responsibly in five ways: within internal management, product development, supply chain management, customer relations and the co-operation with destinations (UNEP 2005, 13). Internal management refers to all the operations within the tour operator's headquarters and offices. For example how the company controls the reduction of paper usage, water usage and energy usage in addition to waste disposal. As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter HRM policies also ensure an improved working environment which contributes to the positive working morals of the employees. Furthermore the education

of the staff to sustainable issues is also a way to detect responsibility within a tour operator. (Khairat & Maher 2012, 216-217.) Changes that a travel company could make within internal management to act more responsibly are: using sustainably produced paper for their brochures and ensuring improved staff working conditions (UNEP 2005, 13).

Product development and management refer to the tour operator's destination management: which destinations they decide to include in their products and how sustainable or environmentally friendly these products are. Within product development all components of the travel should be taken into consideration: transport, accommodation and tours. Tour operators should favor local businesses with local employment. With transportation the tour operators should take into consideration the green gas emissions. (Khairat & Maher 2012, 217.) The challenge in acting responsibly within product development is that tourism packages should be conducted with the least environmental and social effects towards the host community while still receiving acceptable economic returns (UNEP 2005, 13).

Supply chain management refers to ensuring the sustainable qualities from all parts of the supply chain. Tour operators mostly sell products from suppliers. Thus the responsibility of the tour operator is to choose its suppliers carefully with sustainable qualities in mind. (Khairat & Maher 2012, 218.) A good way to conduct this is to set sustainability standards with the suppliers and offer incentives to those who meet them (UNEP 2005, 13).

Customer relations refer to how well the tour operators educate their customers about the eco-friendly way to travel. Tour operators should be aware that travelers are commonly unaware or inconsiderate of their responsibilities to the local community and/or nature. They should get support towards sustainable travel habits. (Khairat & Maher 2012, 218). A way to ensure a company's customer to travel responsibly is to educate him or her on the negative impacts like littering and the positive impacts like buying food from locals bring (UNEP 2005, 12).

Co-operations with destinations refers to a co-operation where the tour operator supports sustainable development within the destination. This can be done by working with the local community, gaining local partners and supporting local enterprises. (Khairat & Maher 2012, 219.)

Another way a tour operator or agent can contribute to acting responsibly is getting certified or accredited. This is one of the most known and obvious ways to ensure a customer of responsible manners of the company. Certifications are where the companies are individually tested and/or evaluated to prove its responsible conduct of business. Accreditation is where a business itself decides to follow already conducted guidelines and thus they become accredited for these specific standards. (Fennel 2008, 192.)

3.3 The Demand for Responsible Tourism

Travelers want improved quality within their vacations. They seek to travel to unknown destinations with clean environments and adventurous activities. (Edgell 2006, xiii.) The growing knowledge of the unsustainable consequences of tourism has grown immensely. Many tourists now expect sustainability from their holidays which also means tourism companies must operate sustainably to remain a competitive choice for the consumer. (UNEP 2005, 12.)

The Center for Responsible Travel (CREST, 2) asked tourism experts on how they perceive the demand for responsible tourism to be at the moment. One mentions that today travelling responsibly is not only a trend but also a way of life. It also mentions that a survey done in 2011 states that 93 % of a travel magazines reader think that their travel agent should act with consideration towards the environment and 58 % choose their accommodation according to the support it gives to the local community. In 2012 it was found in a survey that a big amount of oversea travelers to the USA look for cultural experiences: 40 % look to visit historical sites, 23 % want to visit cultural sites and 20 % are looking to visit national parks. Another survey was made where it was found that 66 % of travelers around the world prefer to buy their product or service from a company that gives back to society and 46 % are willing to pay more for a re-

sponsible company. Today there is an increase in demand for authenticity. By 2010 half of the world was living in cities and therefore an increased demand for nature travel and authentic travel experiences have amplified. (CREST, 3.) Authenticity also increases the attractiveness of the travel destination and improves satisfaction within the traveler (UNEP 2005, 12).

4 Responsible Tourism Products, Destinations and Companies

In this chapter I will first explain ways how to identify a responsible tourism product. Next I will give example of responsible tourism products in each of these sectors: destinations, attractions, business tourism, accommodation and transportation. In addition I will explain some ways of responsible travelling that a customer should consider when planning their travel. Lastly I will give example of tour operators and travel agents which are responsible and where you can buy responsible tourism products. The theoretical part will be concluded with combining all aspects together to prove that responsible tourism products are of improved quality.

4.1 Responsible Tourism Products and Ways of Responsible Travel

Mowforth and Munt (2007, 10) suggest that a sustainable tourism product should fulfil four certain criteria: 1. Is the product ecologically, socially, culturally and economically sustainable?, 2. Is the product educational?, 3. Does it promote local participation?, and 4. Does it help conservation? This is one way of testing if a tourism product is sustainable. Ecotourism programmes will include programme areas, programme formats, program setting, programme mobility and programme lodging. Programme area is the reason for travelling: hobbies, nature, recreation, etc. Programme formats are for example ‘trips and outings’ or ‘instructional’ programmes. Programme setting is the environment of the touristic activities. Programme mobility is the form of transportation and programme lodging is the means of accommodation. (Fennel 2008, 176 – 177.) The reason for the existence of ecotourism products is due to the outbound responsible tour operators, the inbound responsible tourism operators and the responsible service providers such as hotels and restaurants. Today almost all tour operators are taking measures to become more responsible. One of Germany’s biggest tour operators TUI is also already selling their own eco-products. (Fennel 2008, 184 – 185.)

Tourism products can be seen as nontangible products. Products can be classified into two categories: goods and services. A tourism product in most cases can be seen as a good as the product can be sold again. (Fennel 2002, 8.) Many touristic products can

also be viewed as programmes where a vacation or trip is a programme for the client. A responsible product or programme should concentrate in fulfilling some basic requirements. The need of the participants should come first. This refers to both the traveller and the locals of the destination. The products should be committed to the ideals of ecotourism or sustainable tourism that have been previously discussed. Protecting the rights of participants and the product/program planners should educate themselves before commencing a product plan and then keep themselves up to date. (Fennel 2008, 170.) Tourism products can be categorized into 5 different sectors: tourist destinations, tourist attractions, business tourism, accommodation and transportation (Holloway & Humphreys 2012, viii – ix).

A tourist destination is where the traveller is primarily going. This is most commonly the country or city which the traveller wants to see but can also be a cruise line or train. All destinations however have attractions that can be offered to the travellers for example the Eiffel Tower in Paris or Cape Town in South Africa. In addition all destinations have an image and promotion to upkeep to attract visitors. (Holloway & Humphreys 2012, 202 – 203.). An example of a responsible tourism destination is Madagascar. It is located in the Indian Ocean between Mozambique and Mauritius. The reason that makes this a responsible tourism destination is because of the islands many ecological wonders that have been preserved: it is home to 5 % of the world's plant and animal species, it owns an almost 5000 km of mostly untouched coastline, it has the third largest reef in the world, 46 protected areas and offers travellers many sustainable options: sun and sand tourism, nature and cultural tourism, and adventure tourism. (Spenceley 2008, 41.)

As mentioned previously every tourist destination includes tourist attractions. Tourist attractions are the benefits that the destinations have. Some attractions are historical or natural sites that are in the destination by ‘accident’ for example the Notre Dame in Paris or the Pantanal wetlands in Brazil. But some attractions are purposely built or made to attract tourists for example Disneyland. (Holloway & Humphreys 2012, 250.) In the previous example of Madagascar, this destination includes responsible attractions such as protected areas or the third largest reef in the world. Another example is

one of the world's most sustainable theme parks in Costa Rica " Rainforest Adventures". The park offers aerial tram rides to customers but was built without cutting any trees. In addition they educate their customers about the local nature and conservation while encouraging the visitors to buy local products. (The International Ecotourism Society 2013.)

Business tourism is the travel for commercial, professional and work related reasons. It includes travelling to meetings and conventions, incentive travel, attending exhibitions or trades and individual business travel. (Holloway & Humphreys 2012, 299.) Business tourism unlike to leisure tourism cannot be substituted with other destinations. However there are some ways to conduct a business meeting differently. For example with the goal to reduce CO₂ emissions many companies have started using video conferences and phone calls instead of travelling to the site. (Roland & Buck 2008, 194.)

The next tourism product is accommodation. This includes all hotels, motels, hostels, apartments, lodges, or anywhere else where you can stay the night. (Holloway & Humphreys 2012, 327.) Examples of responsible accommodations include Sleeping Around and Eco-Resort Pedras Salgadas. Sleeping Around is located in Antwerp, Holland in which rooms have been built into basic shipping containers with sustainable resources. Another reason that makes this accommodation responsible is because its location changes to ensure not ruining nature permanently. Pedras Salgadas located in Portugal is a collection of cabins that are perfectly blended within a national park. The park has been damaged as little as possible and the windows of these cabins make sure the guests interact with nature around them. (Pedro 2013.)

The last tourism product type that shall be discussed is transportation which includes air transport, water transport and land transport (Holloway & Humphreys 2012, ix). With all the types of transportation to make them responsible some implications towards sustainability have to be considered: extraction and production of fossil fuels, air pollution, usage of natural resources and safety. Air travel is considered to be the least sustainable way of travelling but airlines are operating in more sustainable ways today. Leaders in this are American Airlines and British Airways. Water transport vessels are

known to produce the most waste that is extracted into the environment and are therefore unsustainable. Therefore it can be concluded land transport to be the most sustainable mean of travelling. (Weaver 2006, 79 – 82.)

Now some ways of responsible travel that tour operators and travel agencies can offer will be explained. Examples are: farm-based travel, volunteer travel, guesthouse travel, backpacking and education travel. (Weaver 2006, 38.) Farm-based travel is such that the traveller visits vacation farms in different countries. For these farms to qualify as a sustainable travel destination the farm owners should receive almost all of their income through agriculture. This is also economically a good option for the local farm owners who often have extra space in their houses and thus there are minimum costs for hosting the traveller. The traveller on the other hand learns about local agriculture and supports local establishments. (Weaver 2006, 43-44.) Volunteer travel or voluntourism is a kind of tourism where the traveller goes to a destination to work without receiving any kind of compensation. Usually the work is involved with nature preservation or social work. This kind of travel is not only beneficial to the community of the host country but also to the traveller as it increases their awareness. (Weaver 2006, 45.) Guesthouse travel refers to the type of tourism where travellers choose their accommodation carefully. The term guesthouse has no common international meaning but is usually locally owned and has fewer beds (therefore rejecting mass tourism). (Weaver 2006, 46 – 47.) Backpackers are those travellers who usually travel for a specific time period to more than one destination. They plan their routes, transport, accommodation and free time activity themselves. They commonly choose smaller locally owned businesses. (Weaver 2006, 47.)

4.2 Responsible Tour Operators and Travel Agencies

The English company *Responsible Travel* offers a wide range of products from city trips to beach holidays for the budget travellers or the spenders. They offer traditional holidays with accommodation and flights e.g. to Italy and they offer trips with itineraries to e.g. Costa Rica. They choose all their partners according to strict sustainable requirements. The famous newspapers ‘The Guardian’, ‘Daily Telegraph’ and ‘The New York Times’ all recommend *Responsible Travel* as the place to buy your sustainable travel

product. (Responsibletravel) In 2012 in The World Responsible Tourism Awards the tour operator *Explore* won the prize for best tour operator promoting responsibility. Explore believes that their customers will have better experiences by operating sustainably. Explore explains their customers on how to act more responsibly before, during and after their travel. This is a good example on how you can detect responsibility within tour operators. (Responsibletravel 2012.)

The tour operator *Gadventures* is a leader in sustainable adventure travel. They offer low impact tour which strive to benefit both the host and visitor. They work with local communities, businesses and individuals in order to develop sustainable tourism practices and help the local economies. Their cooperation work to minimize the negative environmental and cultural effects. (*Gadventures*.) *Wiser World Travel* is a sustainable travel agent which connects the customer according to their wishes to the most suitable and responsible travel product. They work with sustainable tour operators. (*Wiser World Travel*.) The commissioner of this thesis *Oekoplusreisen* is a responsible tour operator in Germany which works according to responsible travel guidelines given by the association *Forum Anders Reisen*. They offer tours that have been built with sustainable development in mind. (*Oekoplusreisen*.)

4.3 Quality in Responsible Tourism Products

Tour operator's initiative (TOI 2011) states the reason for sustainable tourism to be:

- To improve the quality of the tourism experience at the local level
- To guarantee the quality of the product that TOS package for their clients
- To safeguard destinations
- To safeguard the future of tourism business

As seen in the first two reasons above quality is a characteristic in responsible tourism. To support this point I shall illustrate Garvin's (1984, 28) 8 dimensions of quality (as done previously in chapter 2) but with examples of how responsible tourism products correspond with each dimension (Image 5).

The characteristics placed in each dimension (image 5) need to be justified. For performance Garvin (1984, 29–33) said that the operating characteristics for a television

would be sound and picture clarity. Therefore the operating characteristics of a tourism product could be the untouched nature of the destination or authenticity of the experience. As mentioned previously in chapter 3, authenticity is an increasing demand and additionally improves attractiveness and satisfaction (UNEP 2005, 12). Garvin (1984, 29–33) explained the features to be the secondary characteristics that support the performance dimension of the product. For a flight they are the free drinks but for a responsible tourism product they could be the educational qualities or different ways of travel: farm-based travel or volunteer travel which were discussed about in chapters 2 and 4. Garvin (1984, 29–33) mentions that the reliability of a product comes from the average time between buying the product and first failure. Responsible tourism products are low volume (as discussed on p. 10) which means that there are a minimum amount of factors that are affected on by the traveler. This would result to the fact that there are not many factors that are possible to ruin the travel. In addition, as discussed in chapter 4, responsible tourism products have a personal touch made by the consumer. Therefore when the consumer is making the choices, the possibility for failure would be on the hands of the traveler itself.

Conformance, as Garvin (1984, 29–33) explains is the ability of a product to live up to certain standards. As previously explained on page 11, responsible tourism supports local communities and preserves nature. Therefore if a sustainable tourism product can live up to even these two simple standards, it would result into a destination that is not ruined from nature destruction (caused by humans) or a scarcity in services as they are locally supported. (UNEP 2005, 10.) Durability was said to refer to how much or many times the product can be used before it breaks down (Garvin 1984, 29–33). Repeating the fact that the destinations will be more durable due to nature not being destroyed, additionally, as mentioned in page 10, the lengths of stay in a responsible tourism product aim to be longer than in mass tourism (Weaver 2006, 400–41). This would mean a travel to last longer than non-responsible products. Serviceability is the speed, politeness and skill of a repair (Garvin 1984, 29–33). As mentioned in an article in the Wall Street Journal (2011) a Greek man who owns a Greece -specialized travel agency gives the best tips and knows what to see and do in Greece. With this it can be concluded that with responsible tourism, local businesses are favored and therefore they

know best how to fix any uncertainties to do with travelling in their country. (Weaver 2006, 40–41.)

Garvin (1984, 29–33) explains aesthetics and perceived quality to be completely subjective. However the aesthetics of responsible travel can be said to be optimal because as mentioned on page 12, responsible tourism strives to reduce the CO₂ emissions and therefore can be said that fresh air can be smelled with responsible tourism. In addition as responsible tourism is considered to be low volume therefore the sight of untouched beaches is more likely as in the case of Mauritius (discussed on page 21) (Spenceley 2008, 41). As for what to implement on the perceived quality it shall be referred back to page 18 of this thesis where it is mentioned that today's travelers seek to go to unknown destinations with clean environments and adventurous activities which is said to bring improved quality to vacations today (Edgell 2006, xiii).

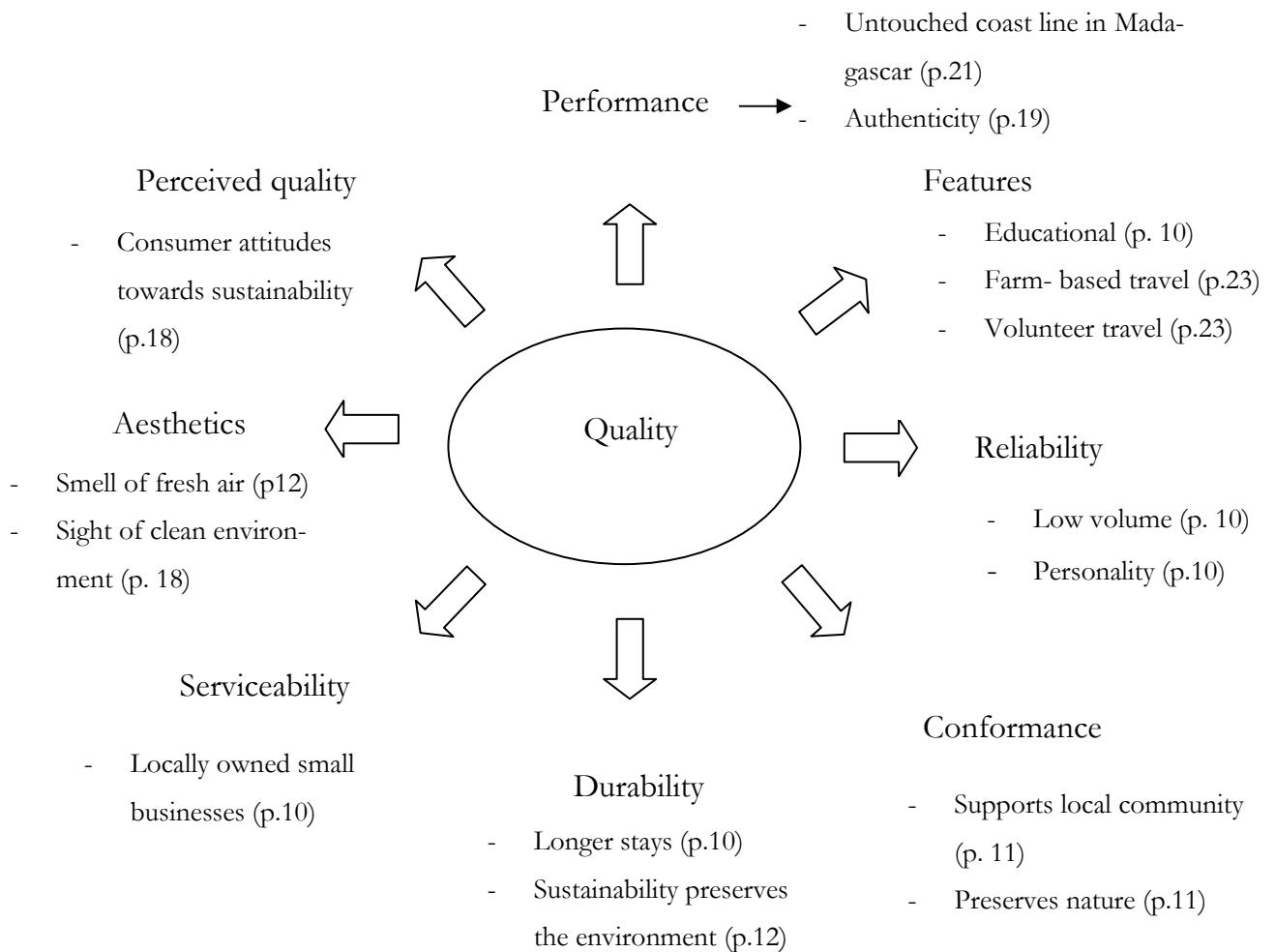


Image 5. 8 Dimensions of Quality (Calfa 2010) with Responsible Tourism Characteristics to Correspond with Each Dimension.

5 Research Methods and Hypothesis

In this chapter the aims and the research question will be discussed and clarified. Furthermore the research method will be made clear along with the sample and progress of the questionnaire conducted. The process of conducting the questionnaire will be explained and lastly the hypothesis for the results will be stated.

5.1 Aims and Research Question

The research question of this thesis and the primary reason for writing it was to answer the question: do tour operators and travel agents understand a responsible tourism product to bring improved quality? For this kind of research a quantitative research approach is most suited because with this it is easy to retrieve a holistic view and analysis of what a group of people in general thinks. To research this topic is important because of the changing way of thinking towards sustainability (discussed in the theory). Also what tour operators and travel agents think this is not known yet. Because this topic has not been researched before it is not possible to compare it to prior researches.

As I mentioned in the introduction my aims for this thesis were threefold. First it was hoped to build a theoretical background which proves that a responsible tourism product is of better quality to the reader. Next it was hoped to retrieve an answer to whether travel agents and tour operators agree to the findings made in the theoretical part: responsible tourism products bring improved quality. Lastly it was hoped to get an answer to a question that has not been answered before to best satisfy the commissioner's hopes and to construct an innovative idea.

The framework of a thesis is the theoretical part of the study. In the framework you explain the limits and introduce perspectives about your topic. Here you will find information that has previously been studied which include the definition of the necessary terminology. (Tuomi 2007, 60.) In this thesis the framework is constructed in an order which should build up the reader's knowledge step by step so that before reading

the results of the research they have an understanding of the necessary terminology and to why this research has been conducted. The framework also includes images which conceptualize some main ideas of the theory.

5.2 Research Method, Sample and Progress

A quantitative research approach was chosen because with this it is possible to measure the ideas that come from a group of people according to many variables after which you can see how the variables relate to each other (Punch 2003, 23). When conducting a quantitative research you have to take four things into consideration:

(Punch 2003, 23)

- The objectives, purposes and what you are trying to find out must be clear
- How variables will be measured and how the data will be collected must be decided
- It must be decided from who you will ask the questions
- You must decide how to analyze your data to retrieve the answers to your original question.

Data collection is how you administer your survey according to the sample selected. It should be done in a realistic manner with relevance to your available resources. (Punch 2003, 40–41.) For data collection a quantitative survey was chosen because with this many people, in this case tour operators and travel agencies, can be asked the same questions. Results from a survey are easy to analyze which in this case is good because an overall view of what a group of people think was hoped for. A survey approach also has its weaknesses: it is impossible to know how seriously the questions have been answered and the chance of having a high number of no responses is likely. (Hirsjärvi 2007, 189–190.) For my thesis an internet survey was conducted on Webropol which was then easy to send by e-mail to the target group (attachment 1). The survey was a 10 question survey. For most of the questions the likert scale was used where the opinion of the company for a certain statement can be searched for (Hirsjärvi 2007, 195).

The group of people you choose to collect information from is the sample. With a sample we mean smaller part of a larger group of people because it is impossible to collect answers from an entire population (e.g. from every person that is between 20 and 30 years old). (Punch 2003, 38.) When considering the sampling of your survey you should consider two general questions:

(Punch 2003, 40.)

- What is the sampling strategy
- How important is variability

After these questions are answered two more specific questions should be asked:

(Punch 2003, 40.)

- How big should the sample be and the reasons for this
- How will you select the sample and the reasons behind this

The research question has to do with finding out what companies think and in specific what tour operators and travel agencies think. Therefore choosing the sample group was quite simple. It was hoped to reach tour operators and travel agencies. Variability was only important between these two different types of companies but how old the companies were and from which countries they were from were not important variables due to scarcity of time. The size of the sample was to be as big as necessary before at least 100 answers were received. The questionnaire was first sent to 400 companies and was sent to more until the goal is reached. Because this survey was sent through e-mail it is known that the answer percentage will be low. It was expected to get 10% answers from all the surveys I sent out.

5.3 Conducting the Questionnaire

When conducting a survey questionnaire you need to keep in mind the framework you have written and make sure the questions within the questionnaire are consistent to the framework. A questionnaire is directed by your framework and research question. A questionnaire is always good to conduct undertaking former questionnaire templates.

(Punch 2003, 30.) However for this survey a wholly new questionnaire was necessary as the topic had not been researched before.

In general when conducting questionnaires using questions with scaled responses is the best way rather than dichotomous questions (two option questions). With scaled answers you receive more information and variety. Additionally they are easy to analyze. Scaled questions are also easier to answer and are an effective way to get survey information. (Punch 2003, 57.) For these reasons the questionnaire was mostly produced of scaled questions. The response scale should always have four or more answer options. Having five options creates the problem of having an uninformative middle option. (Punch 2003, 59.) For this thesis a six scaled answer option was chosen.

The commissioner asked me to conduct the questionnaire myself. He would then analyze and accept it. This was the first ever survey that I conducted. A first draft was made which was a failure and it was realized that it was not in context to the theory. With the first draft it was also realized that some important elements were missing in the framework. After improving the theoretical part, a second completely new draft of the questionnaire was made which was thought to have just the right questions to receive an answer to the research question. A few minor changes had to be made but this questionnaire was accepted.

The questionnaire consisted of ten questions (attachment 1). The length of the questionnaire is good as it is short enough and would only take 10 – 15 minutes to answer. A shorter questionnaire is better because then it is more likely to get a higher response rate (Punch 2003, 59). In addition to answer the research question and to retrieve easily analyzable data these 10 questions were thought to be enough. The first two questions were open questions where names of the companies and the country they work in were wanted to know. The company name was desired to know so it could be tracked from answers have already been received from and to whom reminders to answer the questionnaire could be sent. The country is wanted to know because it was possible that the questionnaire would be distributed to more than one country and for this reason it is possible to get data that should be analyzed according to the country it has come from.

The next two questions (3 and 4) were multiple choice questions. It was wanted to know whether the answering company was a travel agent, tour operator or other (question 3, attachment 1) because there could be distinctive differences with the different types of companies when thinking of the next questions in the questionnaire. It was wanted to know how much of the total revenue of the company comes from sustainable products to give a holistic view of how much do tour operators and travel agencies already sell responsible tourism products.

Questions 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 were done with scaled answer options. Question five was to get an overall idea of what tour operators and travel agencies see a sustainable tourism product to be at the moment. The statements were retrieved from the theoretical part from chapter two. Question six was to see what the respondents understand quality to be in general. The statements for question six were retrieved from my framework from chapter 2 from the eight dimensions of quality. Question seven combines quality and a tourism product. Question seven and six are interlinked with each other as has been demonstrated in sub-chapter 4.5. Therefore the answers for question seven should be the same as for those in question six if the answerers understand the link between quality and sustainable tourism products. Question seven is the most important in this survey as it directly answers the research question. Question eight is to see if the tour operators and travel agents understand why responsible tourism is important. The statements were retrieved from sub-chapter 4.5 from the reasons of sustainable tourism. Question nine was to see if the answerers understand a responsible tourism product to be of importance for their company. Statements were retrieved from the theory from chapters 2 and 3.

5.4 Hypothesis

For this thesis it is important to conduct a hypothesis because it is a question that has not been researched before. Therefore to understand what is expected and believed to come out as results the hypothesis to the question "Do Tour Operators and Travel Agents Understand a Responsible Tourism Product to Bring Improved Quality" shall be discussed.

As already mentioned in the introduction sustainable tourism is an emerging paradigm that works towards developing quality tourism products without affecting the natural or cultural environment negatively (Sharma 2007, 78; Weaver 2006, 1). In addition to this, in chapter 2, it is mentioned sustainability to be a synonym to quality. Furthermore the commissioner of this thesis believes, with his background in the field of sustainable tourism, that responsible tourism brings improved quality. Referring to all of these small facts my educated assumption would be that this research will result into positive results where tour operators and travel agencies do believe a responsible tourism product to bring improved quality. However the time before this thesis was started has to be referred to where it was only thought that responsible tourism products bring the writer better quality because they corresponded to her values towards sustainability. It was not yet thought that tour operators and travel agencies believe the same thing. For this reason it was thought that a lot of professionals have not educated themselves enough yet to understand a responsible tourism product to in fact bring improved quality. For question seven in the questionnaire (attachment 1) the answerers are not expected to see the link between quality and sustainable tourism products that were discussed in the previous sub-chapter. Therefore the answers will be different to that of question six.

In the end it is believed that there will not be a clearly positive or clearly negative (where positive is that tour operators and travel agencies do believe a responsible tourism product to bring improved quality and negative is the opposite) answer but rather a mixture since the questionnaire is thought to be answered more according to personal opinions rather than educated opinions.

6 Research Results

Answers were received from 37 companies. All questions from the questionnaire were compulsory to answer and through the survey making program Webropol 2.0 it was made impossible not to answer any questions. For this reason in all table presented 100 % = 37. Results are conceptualized in the form of graphs or tables to give a better view of the results when wanting to compare and analyze results.

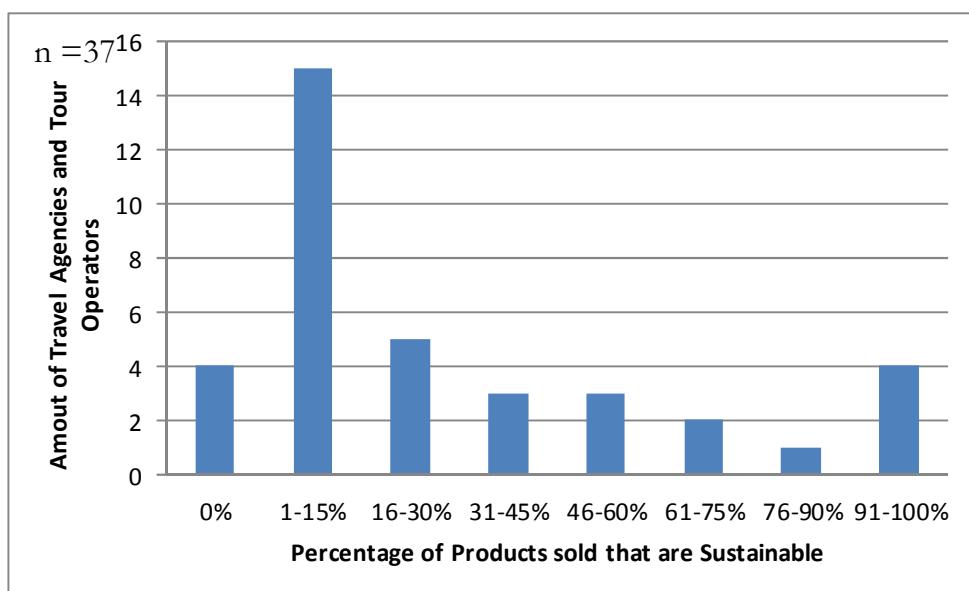
6.1 Respondents

The first three questions in the questionnaire (attachment 1) were: name of company, which country they are from and as what kind of company do they receive most of their income. The names of the company will not be stated or analyzed as they are not considered useful in regards to the results of the research question. In addition when the questionnaire was sent it was assured to all companies in the e-mail (attachment 2) that their names would not be published in the thesis. The names were only useful to follow who the questionnaire had already been sent to. Due to scarce time resources the questionnaire was only conducted in German and therefore sent to companies in German speaking countries or to companies where the business language is German. It is interesting to know from which countries answers were received from because that confirms the fact that the results of the survey are only based on these answers.

Most answers were received from Austria and Germany. This was most likely due to the fact that more questionnaires were sent to these two countries. With this data it can be concluded that results can be later analyzed in context to that what German and Austrian companies generally believe. For holistic views however, all the answers shall be used to for the results. Most companies that answered were tour operators however some companies operate as both travel agency and tour operator. For this reason even though perhaps more travel agencies did answer they received more of their revenue as tour operators. It is good to know that the large majority of the answers came from travel agencies and tour operators because these belong to the hoped sample.

As mentioned in the previous sub chapter most answers were received from travel agencies and tour operators. A few other tourism organizations also answered. From these companies it was also asked how much from their total revenue comes from sustainable products. This is interesting to know in order to see if some companies are already perhaps acting sustainably or not and to what extent. In table 1 it is shown how much each answered company receives revenue from sustainable products. As can be seen the majority of the companies answered 1 – 15 % of their revenue to come from sustainable products. Otherwise the answers are quite even. It is interesting to see that most companies sell at least some amount of sustainable products and only a minority don't sell any sustainable products. The variety of answers to this question will hopefully help receive varied answers to the scaled questions of the questionnaire. The percentage answer options were every 15 %. This means that it is unknown for example whether the companies that answered 1 – 15% sell only 1% or 15%. This division was made to get a rough idea on how much the companies sell sustainable products. It was not important to receive an exact percentage on each company for this question. In addition it was considered easier for the companies to answer an estimate rather than potentially produce more work for them to give an exact percentage of how much of their revenue comes from sustainable products. The only exact answer option is 0% which was considered to be important to know if there were companies that do not sell any sustainable products.

Table 1. How much of the Company's Revenue Comes from Sustainable Products

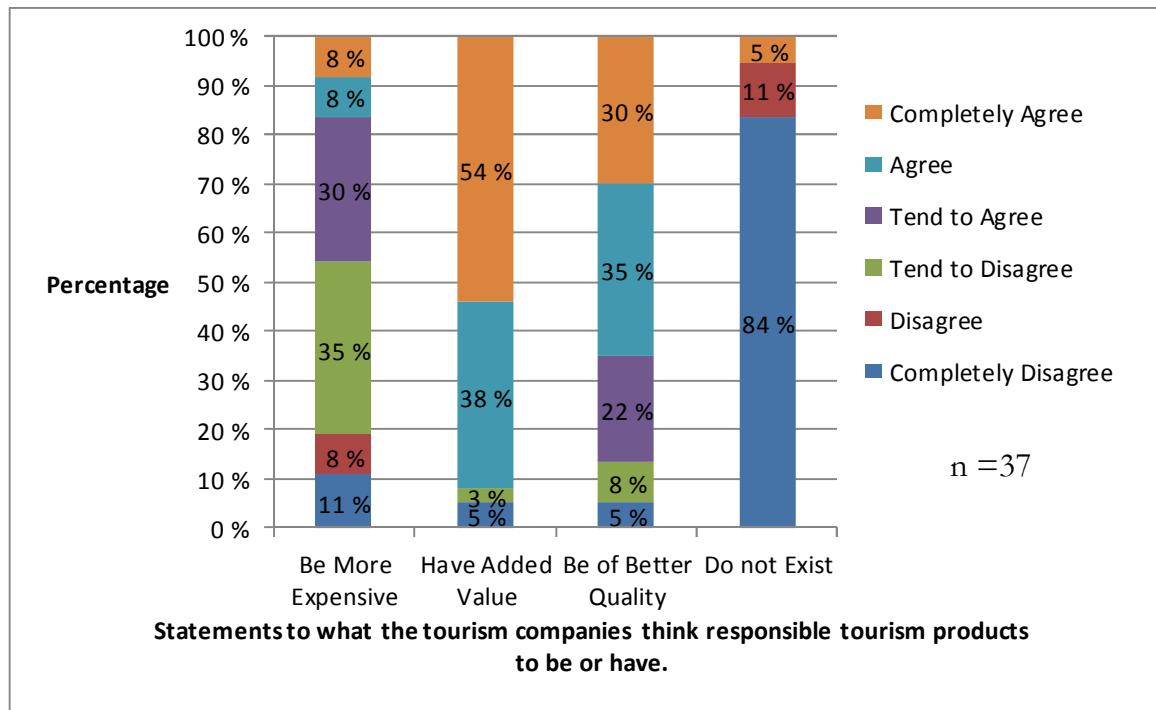


6.2 Sustainable Tourism Product at the Moment

The next questions in the questionnaire (attachment 1) were scaled to receive an idea of what the companies think to a certain statement. These results are presented in a way where it can be seen to what extent (percentage) the respondents agree to the statement made. In table 2 it can be observed what the organizations that answered believe a responsible tourism product to be at the moment. This is interesting to know to understand what the respondents believe a sustainable tourism product to be in general. It shows that most respondents tend to mostly disagree (35 %) or agree (30 %) that a sustainable tourism product is more expensive.

Furthermore only 8 % agree completely that sustainable tourism products are more expensive. 11 % of the respondents completely disagree that sustainable tourism products are more expensive. Others either agree (8 %) or disagree (8 %) with the statement. Over half of the respondents (54 %) believe a sustainable tourism product to have added value. 38 % agree to this statement and the rest (8 %) either completely disagree or tend to disagree. It is good to know that a responsible product in general is more commonly thought to bring additional value. Results are more equally distributed in the next statement. 30 % completely agree, 35 % agree and 22 % tend to agree that a sustainable tourism product is of better quality. This adds up to over three quarters (87 %) believe a sustainable tourism product to be of better quality in some way. This is a good sign and gives preliminary information that in general a sustainable tourism products are understood to be of better quality. Only 5% completely disagree with this statement and 8 % tend to disagree.

Table 2. What tourism companies believe a sustainable tourism product to be

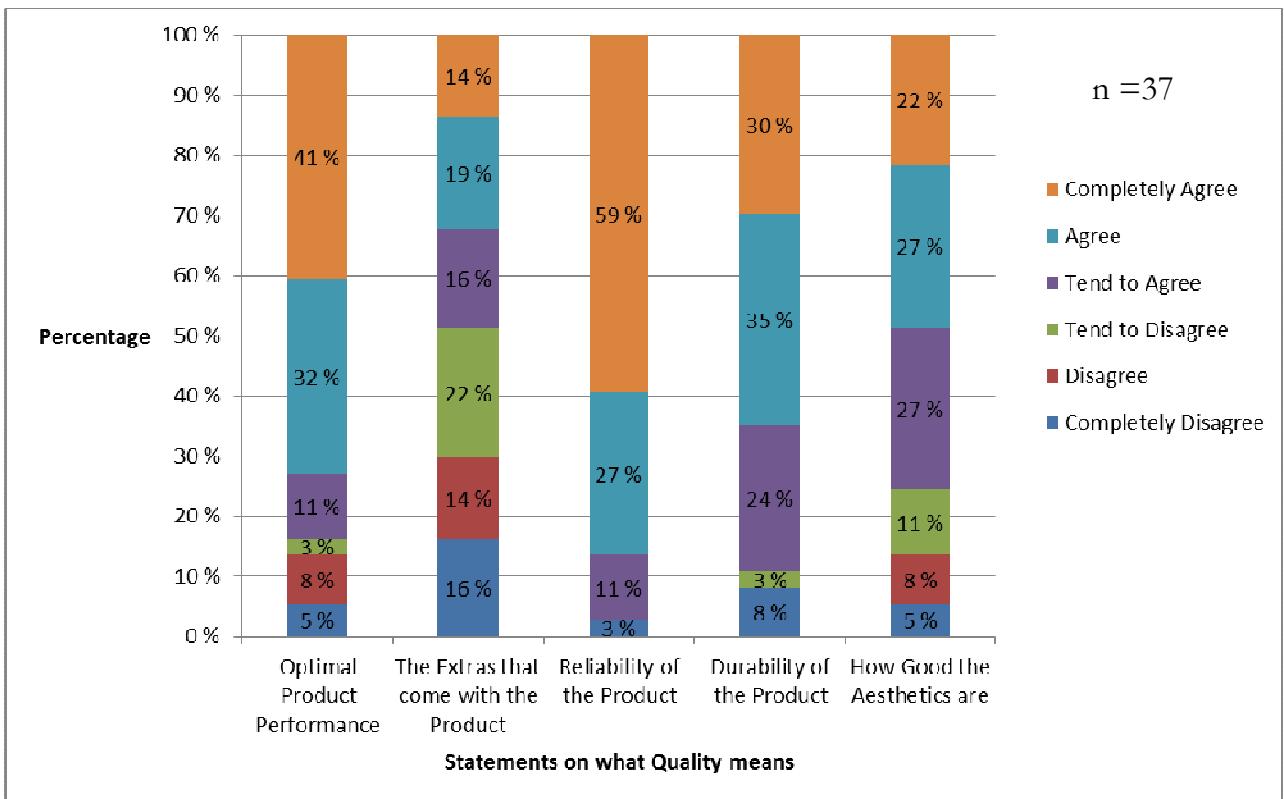


In addition it can be seen in table 2 that most (84 %) respondents completely disagree with the statement that sustainable tourism products would not exist. Only 5 % completely agree with this statement. This could be due to the 4 % that answered they do not receive any revenue from sustainable products (table 1). This was interesting know to see if there are still some companies out there who do not believe a responsible tourist product to exist.

6.3 Quality

Next it was important to see how the respondents understand quality in general and only later compare these answers to quality tourism products. There were five statements which were formed with context to the framework. In table 3 you can see the results.

Table 3. What Quality Means to Tourism Companies



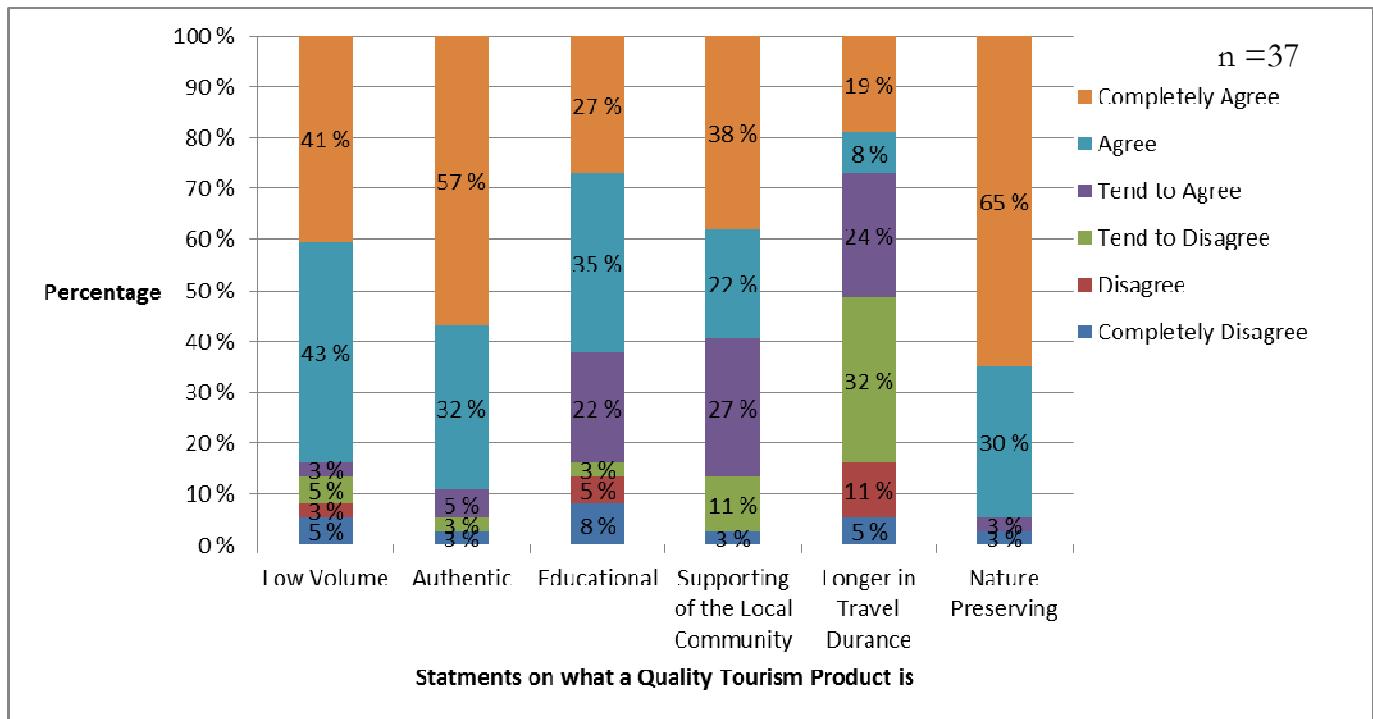
As can be observed from table 3 most respondents either completely agree (41 %) or agree (32 %) that quality means optimal product performance. 11 % tend to agree to this statement and the remaining 16 % disagree in some way. It is good to see that to this statement respondents are in context to what the framework of this thesis (chapter 2) mentions quality to be. The next statement: the extras that come with the product, was very equally agreed and disagreed to. A small majority (22 %) tend to disagree with this statement. 19 % agree with this statement which was the second most popular response. Only a small minority (14 %) completely agrees. Over half of the respondents (59 %) completely agree that quality means the reliability of the product. 27% agrees on this statement and 11 % tend to agree. This means that almost every company (97 %) agrees in some way that quality means reliability of the product. Only 3 % completely disagree. The fourth statement refers to the durability of the product. 35 % agree and 30 % completely agree that quality means that the product lasts as long as possible. 24 % tend to agree with this statement which means that 89 % agree in some way that quality means the durability of the product. Only 8 % completely disagree.

with this statement. An equal amount of respondents tend to agree (27 %) or agree (27 %) that quality means that the product should smell, look or/and taste as good as possible. 22 % completely agree to this statement which means that a majority 76 % agree that the aesthetics of the product are important in quality. Only 5 % completely disagree, 8 % disagree and 11 % tend to disagree. It is interesting to see that most respondents do not completely disagree or disagree with the statements which prove that most companies understand quality to be that what has been researched in the framework. The error margin for table 3 is +1 %.

6.4 Quality Tourism Product

The next statement that was answered in the questionnaire " I believe a quality tourism product to be..." is most important because the answers to this statement are the answers that best answer the research question. The statements are all from the framework in what a quality tourism product should be or entail. The statements are also directly linked to that of the previous question (table 3) and these answers can later be compared. As can be seen in table 4 most respondents either agree (43 %) or completely agree (41 %) that a quality tourism product means a low volume holiday. Only 5 % completely disagree or tend to disagree with this statement and 3 % tend to agree or just disagree. Over half of the respondents (57 %) completely agree that a quality tourism product should be authentic. 32 % agree which makes it over three quarters (89 %) that agree or completely agree a quality tourism product should be authentic. Only 6 % all together disagree in some way to this statement.

Table 4. What Tourism Companies believe a Quality Tourism Product to be

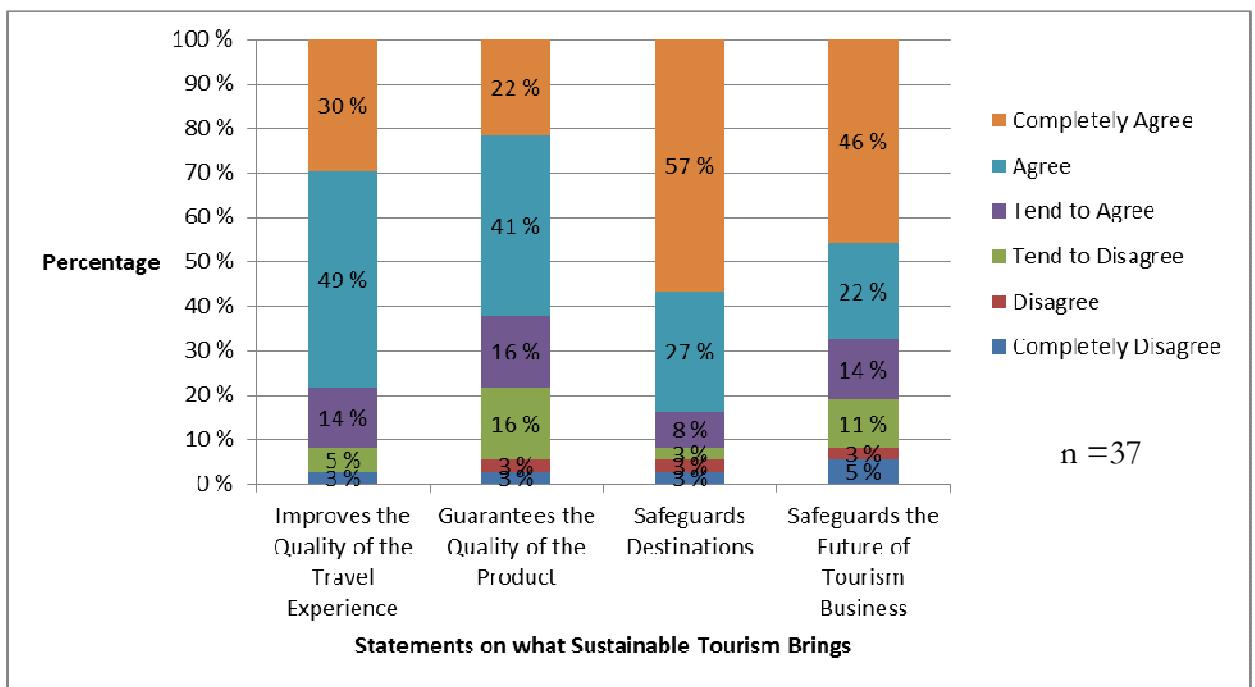


Additionally it can be observed from table 4 that 35 % agree that a quality tourism product should be educational, 27 % completely agree and 22 % tend to agree. This means almost three quarters of the respondents (84 %) agree in some way that a quality tourism product is educational. 16 % all together disagree in some way to this statement. Most respondents (38 %) completely agree that a quality tourism product is that which supports the local community, 27 % tend to agree and 22 % agree. This again adds up to over third of a quarter (87 %) in some way agree that a quality tourism product is that which supports the local community. 11 % tend to agree and only 3 % completely disagree. Nobody only disagreed. In the next statement the answers were more varied. Most respondents (32 %) tend to disagree that a quality tourism product is that which means a longer vacation. 24 % tend to agree and 19 % completely agree with this statement. Only 5 % completely disagree and 11 % just disagree. Over half of the respondents (65 %) completely agree that a quality tourism product is nature preserving 30 % agree and 3 % tend to agree on this. This adds up to most respondents 98 % agree in some way that a quality tourism product is nature preserving. The error margin in table 4 is + - 6 %.

6.5 What Responsible Tourism Products Bring

As stated in chapter four there were four reasons for sustainable tourism: it improves the quality of the travel experience, it guarantees the quality of the product, it safeguards destinations and it safeguards the future of the tourism business (TOI 2011). It was considered important to see if the tourism companies agree that sustainable tourism brings all these four aspects. In table 5 the results are seen.

Table 5. What Tourism Companies Believe a Sustainable Tourism to Bring



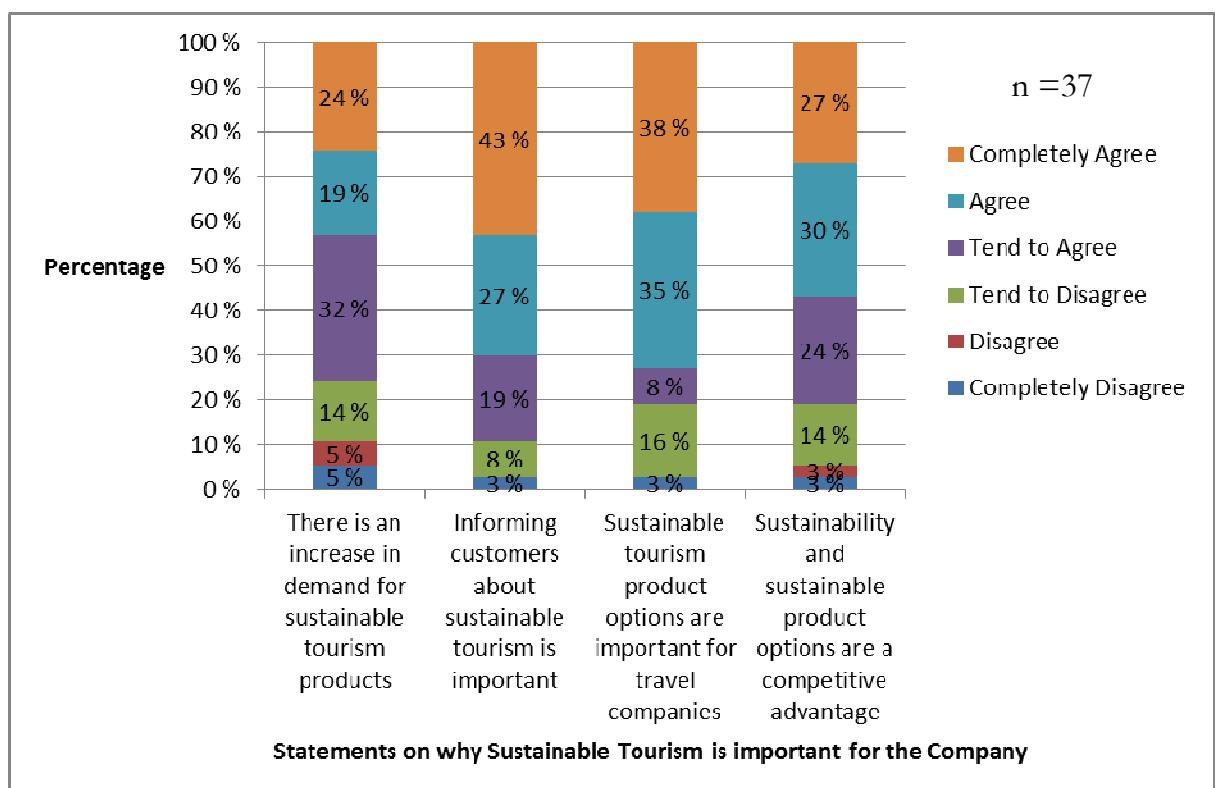
As can be seen in table 5, 49 % of the respondents agree to the fact that sustainable tourism improves the quality of the travel experience and 30 % completely agree. 14 % tend to agree to this statement and only 8 % all together disagree in some way that a sustainable tourism would improve the quality of the travel experience. However slightly fewer respondents completely agree (22 %) and agree (41 %) that sustainable tourism guarantees the quality of the product. Slightly more tend to agree (16 %) or tend to disagree (16 %) but only 6 % altogether disagree or disagree completely to this statement. Over half of the respondents (57 %) believe that a sustainable tourism safeguards destinations, 27 % agree with this and 8 % tend to agree which means 92 % agree in some way to this statement. Only 9 % disagree in some way. Almost half of the respondents (46 %) believe that the future of the tourism business is safeguarded

with sustainable tourism. 22 % agree and 14 % tend to agree with this statement. This gives a total of 82 % that agree in some way to this statement and 19% disagree in some way. The error margin for table 5 is +1 %

6.6 Importance of Sustainable Tourism

The next question in the questionnaire was to see if the tourism companies believe sustainable tourism to be important for the company and its shareholders. There were four statements where it was seen to what extent the respondents agree to them. Below in table 6 the results are presented.

Table 6. Is Sustainable Tourism Important to the Companies?



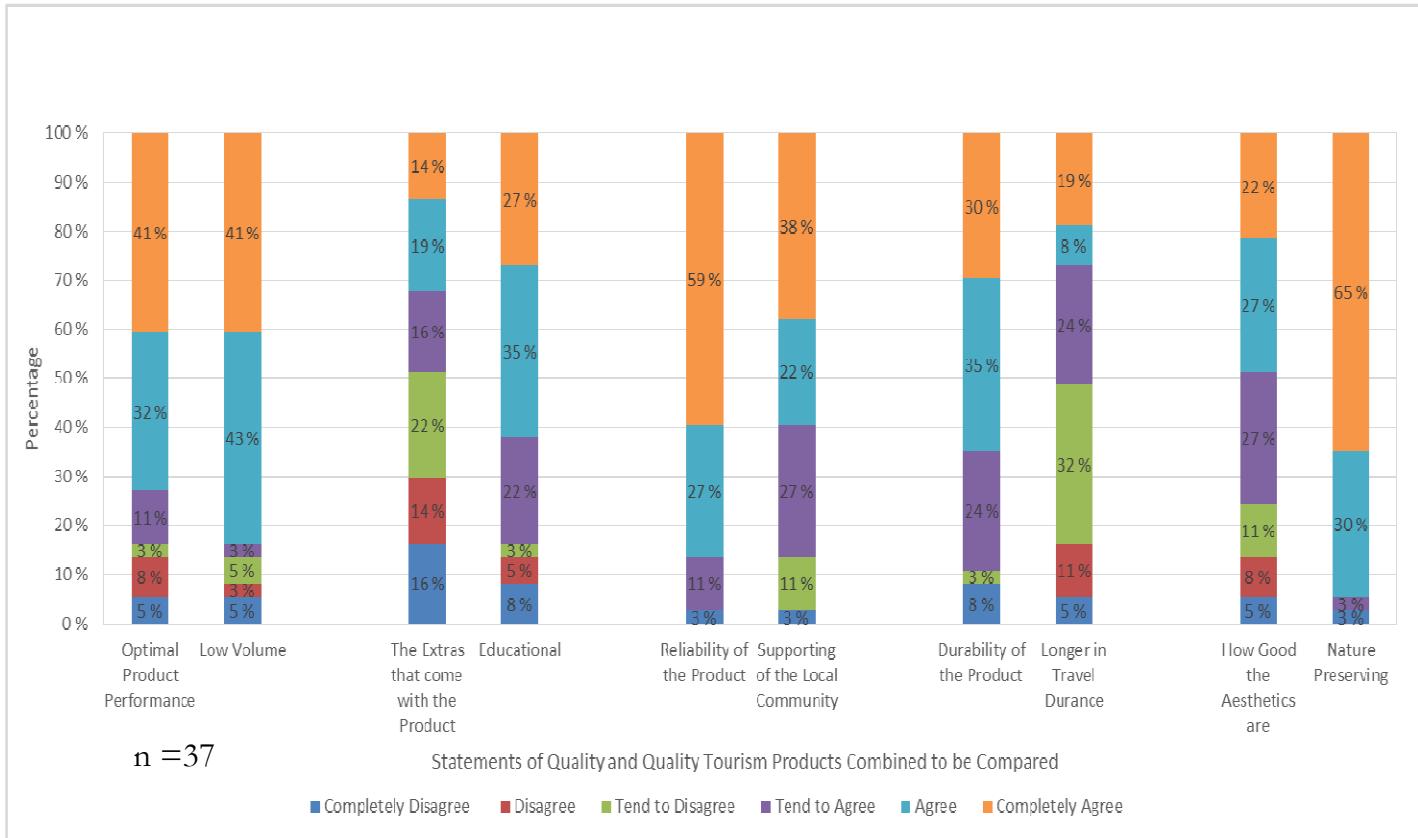
As seen in table 6 the majority of the respondents agree in some way that there is an increase in demand for sustainable tourism. Most only tend to agree (32 %), 19 % agree and 24 % completely agree. 14 % tend to disagree with this statement and only 10 % altogether either disagree or completely disagree with this. Almost half of the respondents (43 %) believe that informing the customers about sustainable tourism is important. 27 % agree and 19 % tend to agree with this statement. Only 11 % alto-

gether disagree with this statement is someway. A majority of the respondents (38 %) completely agree that sustainable tourism options are important for travel companies. 35 % agree with this and 8 % tend to agree. 16 % tend to disagree and only 3 % completely disagree with this statement. For the last statement the answers were quite more equally distributed. 30 % agree that sustainable products options are a competitive advantage, 27 % completely agree with this and 24 % tend to agree. 14 % tend to disagree with this statement and only 6 % altogether completely disagree or disagree. The error margin for table 6 is +8 %.

6.7 Comparing the Results

As mentioned in chapter 6, the answers for questions six and seven in the questionnaire (attachment 1) are to be compared. This is because they are interlinked as mentioned in chapter four within my framework. In table 7 results of question six and seven are placed next to each other where the interlinked statements are next to one another. Quality means optimal product performance and the statement linked to this to a quality tourism product is that it would be low volume. As can be seen in table 7 the same amount of respondents (41%) completely agree that quality in general means optimal product performance and a quality tourism product is low volume. 11% more of the respondents believe that a quality tourism product is low volume than that quality in general means optimal product performance. 9% more of the respondents tend to agree that quality in general means optimal product performance than they tend to agree that a quality tourism product should be low volume. An equal amount of respondents completely disagree to both of these statements. In general comparing all answers to these two statements the differences are small and mostly have an under 10% difference.

Table 7. Ideas of Quality and Quality in Tourism Products Compared



The next statement which referred to quality in general was that it means the extras that come with the product. This statement would correspond to the statement where a quality tourism product means that it is educational. The differences with these two statements were rather noticeable. While 27 % completely agree that a quality tourism product is educational, only 14 % completely agree that quality comes from with the extras of the product. Additionally up to 35 % agree to that a quality tourism product should be educational only 19 % agree to the corresponding statement of quality in general. Furthermore as much as 22 % tend to agree that a quality tourism product is educational while only 16 % tend to agree to quality's corresponding statement. Only 3 % tend to disagree that a quality tourism product is educational but 22 % tend to disagree that quality means the extras that come with the product. Altogether only 16 % disagree in some way that a quality tourism product is educational while 52 % disagree in some way that quality means the extras that come with the product.

For the statements where quality means the reliability of the product and the corresponding statement to a quality tourism product means supporting of the local com-

munity, the answers were similar and comparable. In both cases the majority of the respondents completely agree that quality means reliability of the product (59 %) and that quality tourism products are supportive of the local community (38 %). There is a 5% difference in how many respondents agree with these two statements: 22 % agree to the quality tourism corresponding statement and 27 % agree with the quality corresponding statement. However more respondents tend to agree (27 %) that a quality tourism product is supporting of the local community than respondents tend to agree with corresponding statement for quality (11 %). The same amount of respondents (3 %) completely disagree with both statements.

Next it was stated that quality means durability of the product which corresponds to the fact that a quality tourism product is longer lasting in travel durance. With these answers there were again more noticeable differences. 30 % of the respondents completely agreed that quality means that the product is durable but only 19% completely agree that a quality tourism product is also longer in durance. As many as 35 % agree with quality corresponding statement but as little as 8% agree to the quality tourism product corresponding statement. However and equal amount of respondents (24 %) tend to agree to both these statements. Furthermore 32 % tend to disagree that a quality tourism product is longer in travel durance and only 3 % tend to disagree to the corresponding statement to quality. 8 % of the respondents completely disagree that quality means durability of the product but only 5 % completely disagree that a quality tourism product means that the travel durance is longer.

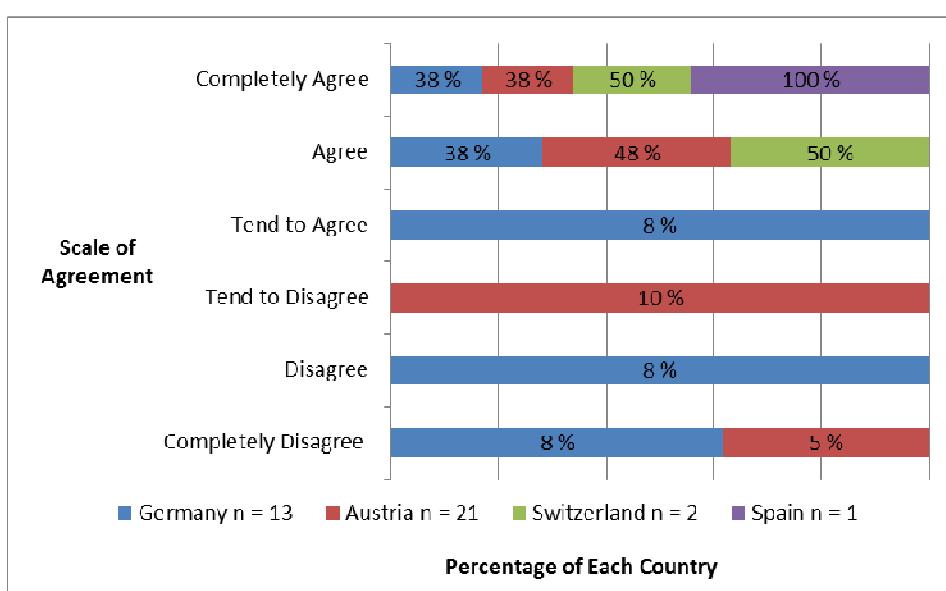
The final statement that refers to quality is about the aesthetics of the product. Quality means that the aesthetics should be as good as possible. The corresponding statement of this to a quality tourism product is that the tourism product should be nature preserving. Again with these two statements there were obvious differences. As much as 65 % of the respondents completely agree that a quality tourism product is preserving of the nature but only 22 % completely agree that quality means that the aesthetics of a product should be as good as possible. The amount of respondents who agree to these two statements is similar with only a 3 % difference. However as much as 27 % tend to agree that quality means that the aesthetics of the product should be as good as possi-

ble but only 3 % tend to agree that a quality tourism product is preserving of the nature. 5 % completely disagree that quality is about the good aesthetics of the product and 3 % completely disagree that a quality tourism product is nature preserving.

6.8 Cross Tabulation of the Results

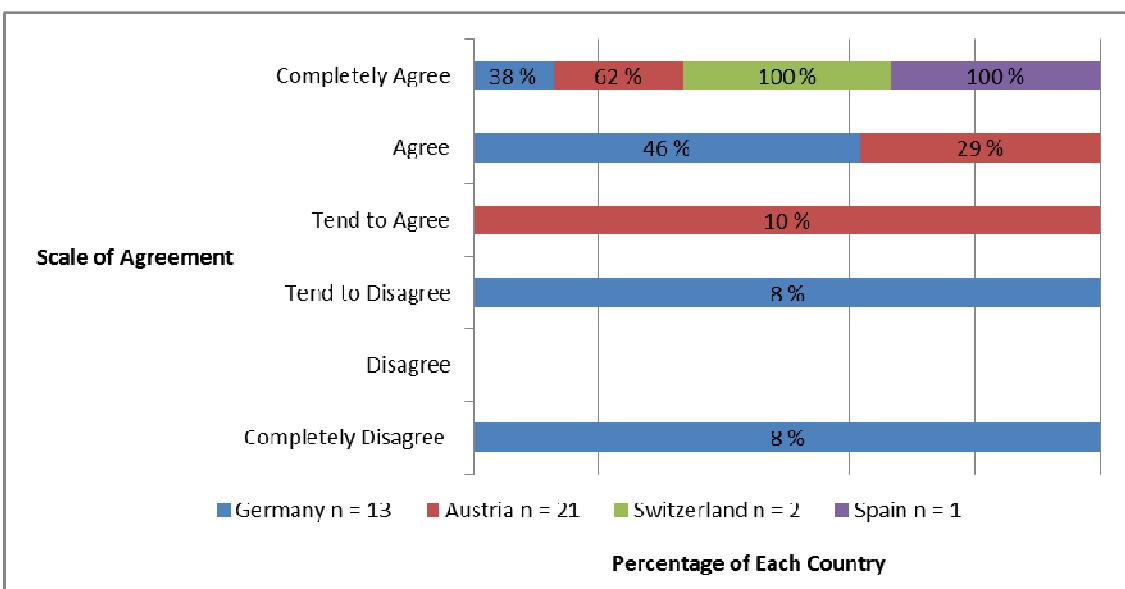
Cross tabulating results is where two different results are combined which are then analyzed and compared simultaneously. The results from this research were cross tabulated using excel. It was chosen to cross tabulate what companies from each country (question 2, attachment 1) answered as their agreement level for question seven (attachment 1). The reason for this is that question seven is best thought to answer the main research question asked in this thesis. It is interesting to see whether one of the countries understands a responsible tourism product to be of better quality better than the other countries. Because question seven had scaled answers as option, each of the statements had to be cross tabulated separately with each country. In tables 10 – 15, 100% is different for each country as the cross tabulation was done in reference to what percentage of each respondent of each country had answered to the given statement. Therefore, in tables 8–13, n = 13 for Germany, n = 21 for Austria, n = 2 for Switzerland and n = 1 for Spain.

Table 8. How Companies from Different Countries Believe That a Quality Tourism Product is Low Volume



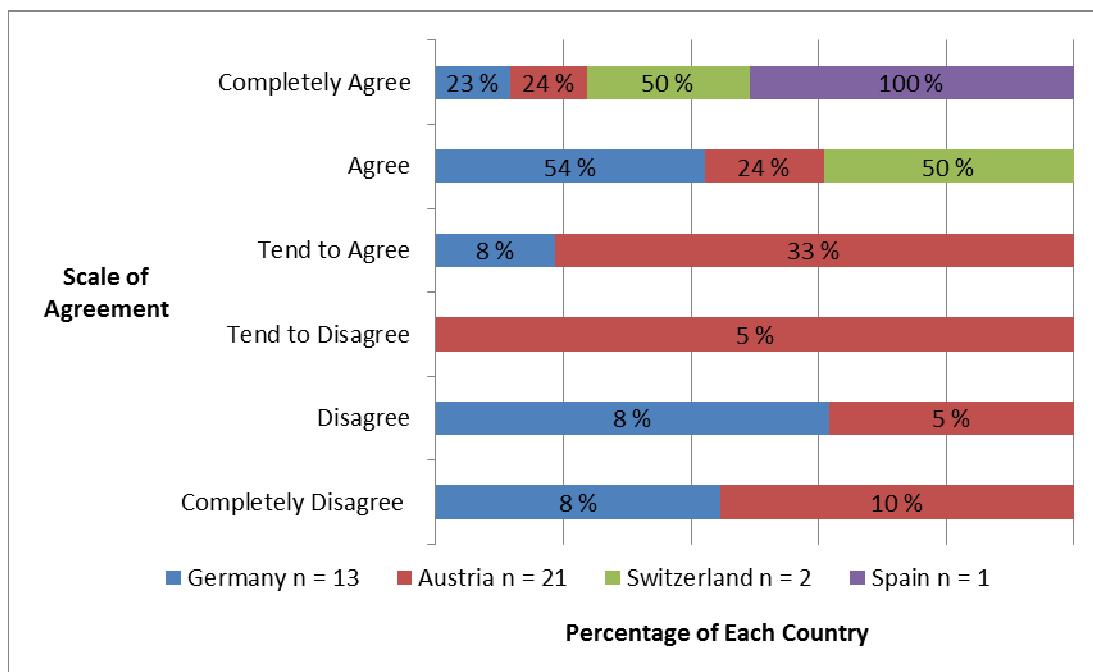
As seen in table 8 above, most German companies completely agree (38 %) or agree (38 %) that a quality tourism company is low volume. Others either tend to agree (8 %), disagree (8 %) or completely disagree (8 %). Most Austrian companies agree (48 %) to this statement, the second most completely agree (38 %). Others either tend to disagree (10 %) or completely disagree (5 %). Companies from Switzerland either completely agree (50 %) or agree (50 %) that a quality tourism product is low volume. The only Spanish company, therefore 100 %, completely agreed to this statement.

Table 9. How Companies from Different Countries Believe That a Quality Tourism Product is Authentic



As seen in table 9 above, Most German companies agree (46 %) that a quality tourism product is authentic, the second most companies completely agree (38 %) to this and others either tend to disagree (8 %) or completely disagree (8 %). Over half of the Austrian companies completely agree (62 %) that a quality tourism product is authentic, the second most companies agree (29 %) to this statement and the rest (10 %) tend to agree. Both of the Swiss companies and the only Spanish company, therefore 100 % for both countries, completely agree that a quality tourism product is authentic.

Table 10. How Companies from Different Countries Believe That a Quality Tourism Product is Educational



From table 10 above it can be seen that over half of the German companies agree (54 %) that a quality tourism product is educational. The second most companies completely agree to this statement (23 %) and the rest either tend to agree (8 %), disagree (8 %) or completely disagree (8 %) to this. A majority of Austrian companies tend to agree (33 %) that a quality tourism product is educational. 24 % of the Austrian companies completely agree to this statement. The same percentage agrees (24 %). The rest either tend to disagree (5 %), disagree (5 %) or completely disagree (10 %) that a quality tourism product is educational. Swiss companies either completely agree (50 %) or agree (50 %) to this statement. The one Spanish country, therefore 100 % also completely agrees to that a quality tourism product is educational.

As seen in table 11 below most German companies either completely agree (38 %) or agree (38 %) that a quality tourism product is supporting of the local community. The rest of the German companies either tend to agree (15 %) or completely disagree (8 %) to this statement. Most Austrian companies tend to agree (38 %) that a quality tourism product is supporting of the local community. The second most companies completely agree (29 %) to this statement and the rest either agree (14 %) or tend to disagree (19 %). Both of the Swiss companies and the only Spanish company, therefore 100 % for

both countries, completely agree that a quality tourism product is supporting of the local community.

Table 11. How Companies from Different Countries Believe That a Quality Tourism Product is Supporting of the Local Community

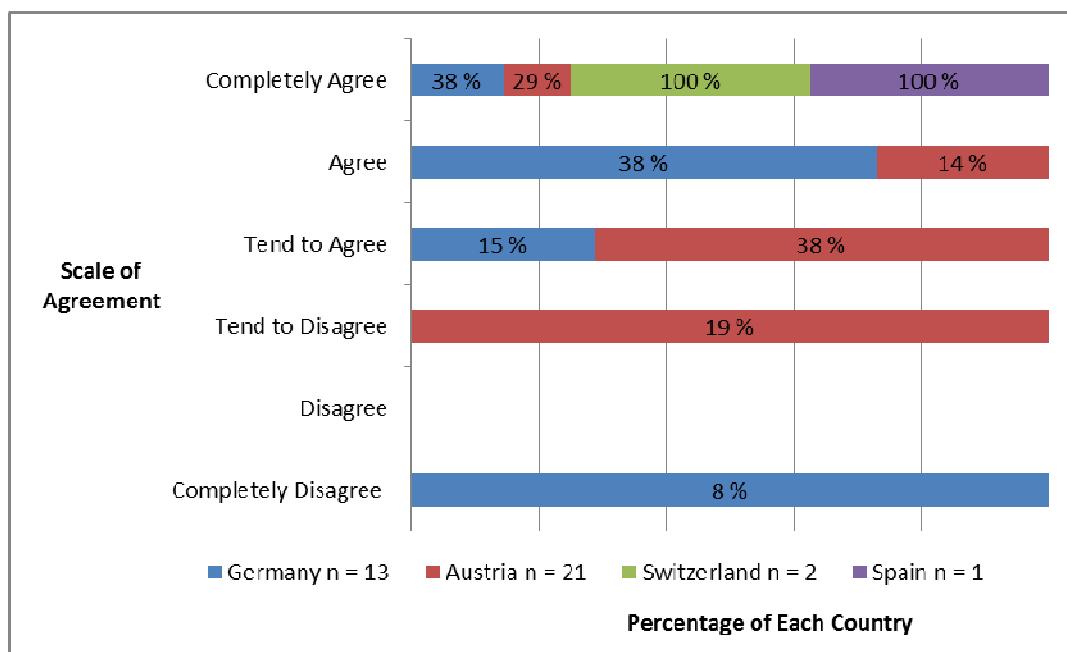
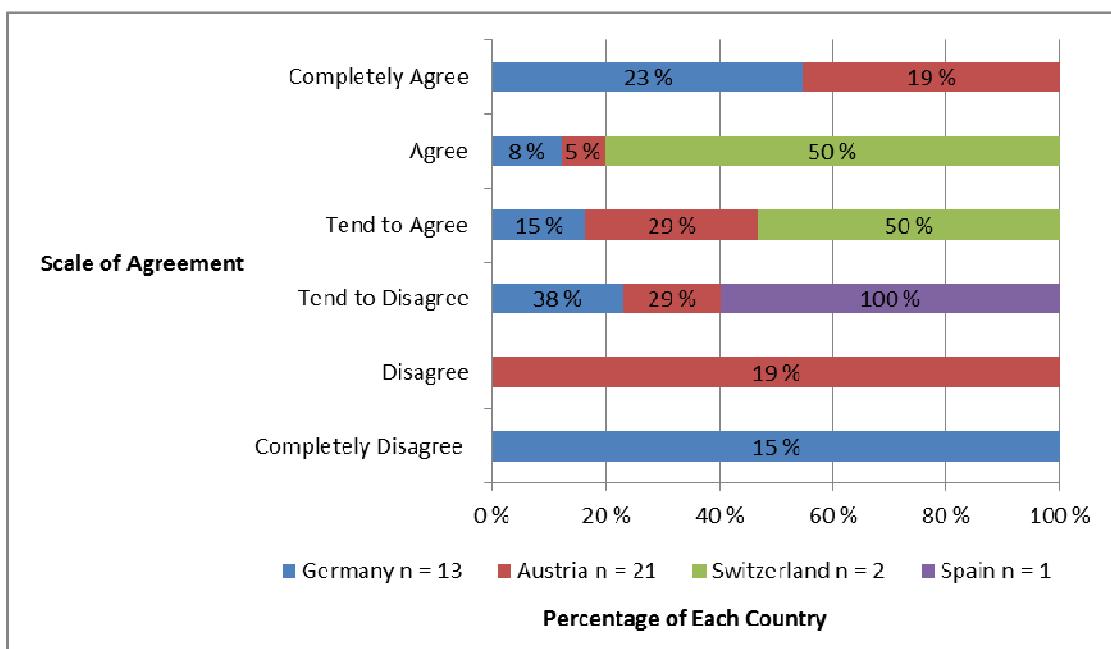
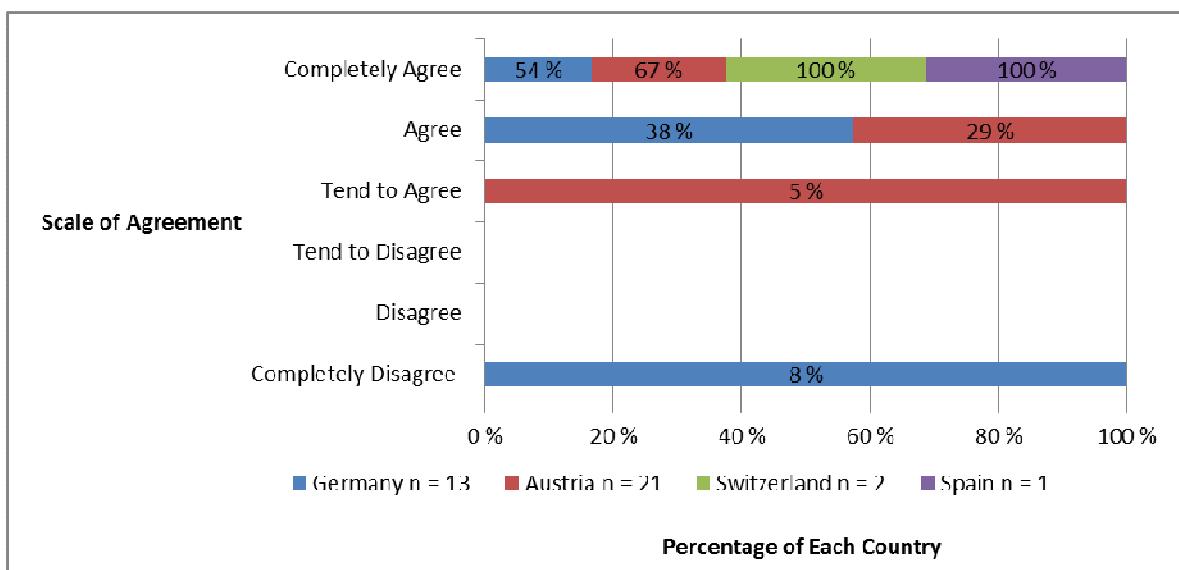


Table 12. How Companies from Different Countries Believe That a Quality Tourism Product is Longer in Travel Durance



As seen in table 12 above most German companies tend to disagree (38 %) that a quality tourism product is longer in travel durance. The second most German companies completely agree (23 %) to this statement and the rest either tend to agree (15 %), completely disagree (15 %) or agree (8 %). The answers for Austrian companies were quite equally varied: 29 % tend to agree and 29 % tend to disagree that a quality tourism product is longer in travel durance. 19 % of the Austrian companies completely agree and 19 % disagree to this statement and the rest (5 %) agree. 50 % of the Swiss companies agree and 50 % tend to agree that a quality tourism product is longer in travel durance. The only Spanish company, therefore 100 %, tends to disagree to this statement.

Table 13. How Companies from Different Countries Believe That a Quality Tourism Product is Nature Preserving



As seen in table 13 above over half of the German companies (54 %) completely agree that a quality tourism product is nature preserving. The second most companies (38 %) agree to this statement and the rest (8 %) completely disagree to this statement. Additionally only German companies disagree in some way that a quality tourism product is nature preserving. Similarly, over half of the Austrian companies (67 %) completely agree to this statement. The second most (29 %), like German companies, agree to this and the rest (5 %) tend to agree. For the Swiss and Spanish companies both completely agree 100 % that a quality tourism product is nature preserving.

7 Research Results Analysis

In this chapter the results of the research will be analyzed and discussed. The validity and reliability of the results will be critically evaluated. The importance of the research will be highlighted and further research propositions will be given. This chapter and thesis will be ended with a conclusion where the learning process and experience are evaluated, and the success of the work will be determined.

7.1 Results Analysis

All three aims were reached through the results of the research. The first aim where I wanted to build a theoretical background to prove that responsible tourism is of better quality was well supported through the results from the questionnaire. From table 7 it can be seen that there is a link between quality and responsible tourism products. The second aim where I wanted to receive results through a quantitative research method was also achieved. This could have worked better but 37 answers were received as mentioned in the beginning of chapter 6. The third and final aim where it was hoped to receive an answer to a question that has not been researched before was also reached. In table 7 we see the innovative approach to linking quality and responsible tourism products and that the research question of this thesis was possible to be answered.

The research results can be analyzed in reference to what Austrian and German travel agencies believe since over three quarters of the respondents were from one of these two countries (table 1.) While this is not an important factor to the research question itself, it does however clarify that this research is not in context to what is thought in every country but gives a direction to what is thought about the fact that responsible tourism products are of better quality in a smaller context. It is also to be concluded, from the research results, that the answers can be analyzed in reference to what tour operators think since a large majority (78 %) of the respondents were from this type of company (table 2).

Through the answers that were received from question four of the questionnaire (attachment 1) it can be concluded that most companies do already sell at least some amount of responsible products and only a small majority don't sell any kind of responsible products (table 1). This proves that today's tourism companies are already reacting to the increased demand for responsible tourism that was discussed in chapter three in this thesis. This also shows that most companies have some understanding of what responsible tourism products are which will make it easier to answer all other questions of the questionnaire (attachment 1).

From question five's answers from the questionnaire it can be said that already today the respondents do see in some way that responsible tourism products are of better quality and have added value (table 2). This gives a preliminary insight to what the responded companies believe a responsible tourism product to be and helps answer the research question. In addition these results concur with topics discussed in chapter two about quality within sustainable products. Very good to know was that almost none of the companies thought that responsible travel companies do not exist (table 2). Finally it can be concluded that approximately half of the respondents believe a responsible tourism product to more expensive in some way and half do not. This shows that responsible tourism products don't necessarily have to be more expensive and can be sold within a price range of other tourism products. However it also shows that the responsible tourism products are thought to be more expensive in some way. This is perhaps because responsible tourism is still an emerging paradigm (as mentioned in the introduction) and not yet the most popular product to be bought.

From the research results it can be concluded that most companies understand quality in the way Garvin has presented as discussed in chapter two. All respondents mostly agreed in some way to the dimensions of quality (discussed in chapter 2) as seen in table 3. From this it can be said that respondents agree to what quality means in general and perceive it the same way. These results are then interesting to compare to the quality components of a tourism product to determine if responsible tourism product are thought to be of better quality.

According to the results (table 4) it can be said that responsible tourism products are of increased quality. The tourism product components of quality were presented in chapter 4 and the results correspond to the educated hypothesis as done in chapter 6 where It was believed that the respondents would understand in some way that a responsible tourism product is of better quality. Almost all respondents (table 4) agreed in some way to the statements that make a quality tourism product. The only aspect that was half agreed on in some way and half disagreed on in some way was that quality means a longer travel durance (table 4) which would correspond to the durability dimension of quality as discussed in chapter two. This could mean that many of the respondents believe that a responsible travel product does not necessarily need be longer. However the results, as shown in table 4, reach one of the goals of this thesis where it was hoped to see if the tourism companies understand that a quality tourism product does include the aspects that a responsible tourism product includes.

Additionally to concur to the fact that quality tourism products include responsible aspects of a tourism product, the results show that respondents mostly agree to in some way that responsible tourism improves the quality of the travel experience and that it guarantees the quality of the product (table7). With this in mind it can be concluded that the link between quality and responsible tourism is realized. Furthermore it is mostly agreed to in some way that responsible tourism safeguards destinations and safeguards the future of the tourism business. With this it can be said that the importance of responsible tourism in reference to the future is realized which corresponds to the goals of responsible tourism, as discussed in chapter 2, where the environments and destinations long-term survival is discussed.

Moreover through the results conceptualized in table 6 it can be said that respondents understand the importance of responsible tourism for their company. Chapter three of this thesis discusses the demand for responsible tourism and as seen in table 6 most respondents agree in some way that there is an increased demand for it. Chapter three also mentions that companies can contribute to acting responsibly by educating the customers about sustainable tourism. In table 6 it can be seen that most respondents agree in some way to the fact that informing customer about sustainable tourism is

important. With this it can be said that the respondents believe in the importance of sustainable tourism and want to educate their customers. Additionally most respondents agree in some way (table 6) that responsible tourism product options are important for travel companies. This concurs to the fact mentioned in the introduction that sustainable tourism is an emerging paradigm and in today's world many demand for a sustainable option. The competitive advantage of sustainability is not yet noticed wholly (table 6). Over half of the respondents see it but 43% do not. With this it can be analyzed that companies don't see that they lose customers for lack of sustainable options or gain customers for their sustainable ways.

Table 8 – 15 show the results according to the companies in different countries. From these table it can be seen that for most statements made in question 7 (attachment 1) a bigger percentage from each country agree in some way to all statements which shows that there is not one country which is more evolved in the paradigm shift toward sustainability mentioned in the introduction. As there were only two Swiss companies and only one Spanish company, their comparison to Germany's and Austria's results is unrealistic.

In conclusion travel agents and tour operators most commonly do understand that a responsible tourism product is of improved quality. As seen in table 7, the link between quality and responsible tourism product is most commonly understood. However the results also show that the link could also be understood better. Moreover in table 2 and 7 the direct questions where it is asked if the respondents think responsible tourism to be of better quality is mostly agreed on. This also proves that most commonly tour operators and travel agencies do understand a responsible tourism product to be of improved quality. Therefore it can be said that the hypothesis was wrong where it was thought that the link would not be seen (chapter 6). Furthermore in the hypothesis it says that there would not be a clearly positive or negative answers, however it is seen in tables 1-7 that most statements on quality and quality within responsible tourism products are agreed on in some way. Finally the aim was reached where it was hoped to receive an answer to a question that has not been researched before. I believe the commissioner will be happy to know the results that were of positive frame.

Travel agencies and tour operators should concentrate in acting responsibly within all parts of their operations as discussed in chapter 3. This way these companies will be able to offer quality products that also fulfill sustainable requirements.

7.2 Validity and Reliability Analysis

Reliability refers to whether the questionnaire respondents would answer in the same way if they were asked again. If the respondents would answer again then the data is very reliable. When the respondents are answering the questionnaire, factors like state of mind, attitude and straightforwardness affect the answers especially in a questionnaire where the questions are scaled. (Punch 2003, 42.) The reliability of the results of this questionnaire were strongly influenced with the scaled questions that were present (attachment 1). The options for questions five to nine were scaled with six options with each option closely related to the one another. This means that the difference between e.g. strongly agree and agree is quite small to each respondent. For this reason even if the respondent did agree with the statements within question five to nine they could easily think completely agreeing to be too strong of a statement for their opinion at the moment. If the respondents were to answer this question again I believe they might answer differently because for scaled questions the answer is often influenced by the state of mind and for this questionnaire what has been learnt so far. If the respondents were asked the same questions again they could very well answer differently due to new things they have learnt or the changed attitude towards responsible tourism. Additionally, the questionnaire was sent by e-mail where it was stated what is being researched. This means that the answers of the respondents could have been influenced by the fact that they knew what was being researched. Therefore the reliability of the results is not completely reliable.

Validity refers to whether it is thought that the answers represent what is thought they would represent. It should be asked if it is thought that the variables do in fact measure what was wanted them to measure. Another thing to consider in terms of validity is whether it is thought that the respondents have answered honestly and if they were able to answer the questions. (Punch 2003, 42.) The validity of the results can be said

to be good in terms of the respondents answering honestly. The respondents were assured that their company names and opinions would not be individually stated in this thesis therefore answering honestly should not have been difficult. However their ability to answer the questions might have been difficult due to the scaled questions where each answer response was closely related to one another. The variable of the questionnaire were thought to measure quite precisely what they should measure. There were straight forward questions to whether responsible tourism brings quality and there were statements that would refer to the respondents understanding responsible tourism products to be of better quality. The questions were directly collected from the framework which was thoroughly researched with appropriate sources. For this reason it can be said that the validity of this research has been thought of throughout the making of this thesis. The variables could have however been differently formed which could affect the validity of the answers. Some companies mentioned that they answered "completely disagree" to all statements because they are not practicing responsible ways. This implies that some of the respondents did not answer honestly to the questions.

The response rate is the percentage of answers that is received from the sent questionnaires. Response rates are rarely over 40% when choosing a mail distribution strategy as was to this research. With a low response rate it is questionable whether the received responses represent the chosen sample well enough. (Punch 2003, 42.) Approximately 3000 e-mails, with the questionnaire, were sent to companies to German speaking countries: Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The total amount of responses to the questionnaire was 37 which results to a response rate of 1.2%. There were additionally some responses to the e-mail where the companies state their uninterest to participate in the questionnaire. With this it can be said that the received answer amount was too small to represent the chosen sample very well. For this bachelor thesis, where the purpose of the research was illustrative rather than absolute, the response rate is however acceptable.

7.3 Meaning of the Research and Further Research Propositions

As stated in the introduction, the meaning of this research is important to the commissioner Oekoplusreisen. It is a responsible tour operator and wants to know if companies selling trips and holidays believe that responsible tourism products are of better quality. The research question has not been researched before which adds to the significance of this topic. Moreover as mentioned in the beginning of the introduction sustainability is an emerging paradigm and therefore it is important to see how the tourism companies are following this shift. It also highlights the timeliness of the research. The results of the research prove whether tour operators and travel agencies think that a responsible tourism product is of improved quality. The fact, that was presented in the analysis of the results, that they do understand responsible tourism products to be of better quality shows that tourism companies have changed their way of thinking in terms of sustainability. This research was small scaled and for illustrative purposes only. Therefore further research can be made to better answer the question and further develop the idea of responsible tourism products being of better quality.

There are larger and smaller scale further research propositions. A larger scale proposition is to do the same questionnaire but to every country. This kind of research would take time and would be more suited for professional researchers within the field of tourism. However this kind of research would give a more absolute answer to what was found out in this smaller and illustrative research done in this thesis. Another larger scale further research proposition is to carry out a comparative research where the quality of mass tourism products would be compared to that of responsible tourism products. With this research it could be seen more precisely which one is thought to be of better quality rather than only research if responsible tourism products are thought to bring improved quality.

A smaller scale and similar further research proposition that would be good to conduct is to research the same question as in this thesis but ask the questions from the people who buy the holidays and trips. This information would be useful for the travel agencies and tour operators and might change their way of thinking towards quality and sustainability when they understand what the customers think. Additionally this re-

search that was conducted in this thesis could be done again every 10 years to see if answers remain the same or if the way of thinking about responsible tourism products is changing within years.

7.4 Conclusion

The thesis process began in 2011 when the owner of Oekoplusreisen presented the topic. After this the topic was discussed for a while with the commissioner and me and it was decided that in 2013 it would be carried out. The timeliness, unfamiliarity and fascination of the subject were motivating factors throughout the whole process of the thesis. Furthermore the interest towards sustainability helped the speed of the process of writing. Further information and new things were learnt when writing the framework which made conducting the questionnaire and finding out the results and exciting process. The support of the commissioner was always present but his trust towards my work and my ways of conducting the thesis was also always noticeable. This also helped me trust in what I was doing. The timetable of this thesis was done according to my schedule. The commissioner had promised the subject to me and to when the thesis would be ready was of no matter to him. I however informed him that I would have it done by the end of December 2013. The writing of the framework started in April 2013. This was the same time a new internship of mine started in Costa Rica which slowed down the process. When I returned to Finland on October my full attention was on the thesis. Furthermore at this time more resources became available to me. The quality of the work was not seen to be in jeopardy due to the internship. It was decided that the questionnaire would be sent beginning of November 2013 and it was hoped that 100 responses would be received. In the end approximately 3000 questionnaires were sent and only 37 answers were received. One month was given to answer the questionnaire which was seen as enough time. The amount of questionnaires that were sent proves the dedication to receiving a good amount of responses. Beginning of December the analysis and presentation of the results was started.

Before the research was started it had to be decided how it would be limited. At first I was ambitious to receive answers from as many countries as possible but closer to November it was realized that time resources would not account to this. Therefore it was

decided to send the questionnaire only to German speaking countries. Additionally the framework could not consist of everything to do with the tourism industry. It was decided that travel agencies and tour operators are obvious terms in context to the thesis and should not be separately explained. The questionnaire was to be conducted by the writer. This was a good learning experience as it was never done before in such a large scale. Furthermore the fact that the topic has not been researched before increased the learning experience in conducting questionnaires. The questionnaire was approved by the commissioner who also thought that the variables within the questionnaire were good to receive the final answer to the research question. Conducting a questionnaire from scratch and for a new research topic proves intellectual skills and analytical thinking. The challenges of this thesis were conducting the questionnaire, deciding the limitations of the framework and sample, receiving answers and deciding on an appropriate title for the thesis. These challenges were however well handled with help from the commissioner and thesis supervisor. However overcoming the challenges was also a part of a rich learning experience for me as a lot of them were solved independently.

As mentioned in the introduction one of the aims of this thesis was to find an answer to a research question through a quantitative method. This aim was well attained: the questionnaire was self-conducted and an answer was reached. In addition the aim where it was hoped to get an answer to a question that was not answered before was fulfilled. The innovative research approach and questions gave formerly unknown information to the tourism industry. The aim where it was hoped to build a theoretical background which proves a responsible tourism to be of better quality was difficult to reach, however this was also very well reached with advanced academic thinking. The process of writing this thesis and conducting the research could have been planned better and might have helped for better results especially in the amount of answers to the questionnaire. However motivation was never lost and an absolute deadline helped the progress of the process.

As mentioned in the introduction the success of my work will be based on receiving answers to this new topic that give an illustrative view, reaching the three goals and attaining results that my commissioner finds useful. With this in mind it can be said

that the thesis and research was successful. Even though fewer answers were received than hoped to the questionnaire, enough was received to draw a basic idea. All aims were successfully reached and the commissioner is approving of the thesis and research results.

Personal academic skills and intellectual knowledge have well been challenged throughout this thesis and the outcome gives an excellent start to further continue in the field of tourism professionally and academically. Especially project management skills have been established through this process. Writing a thesis requires self-discipline and time management which were both well dealt with. Furthermore intellectual independence was attained through the framework when the challenge of proving a responsible tourism product to be of increased quality was proved. The expertise on sustainable tourism will be of use when thinking about future career opportunities.

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Attachments

Attachment 1. Questionnaire in German



Ob und wie Reiseveranstalter und/ oder Reisebüros wahrnehmen, dass nachhaltige touristische Produkte mit einer höheren Qualität einer Urlaubsreise verbunden sind.

1. Name des Unternehmens: *

2. Land: *

3. Wir erzielen den größten Teil unseres Gesamtumsatzes als: *

- Reisebüro
- Reiseveranstalter
- Andere (was)

4. Wie viel Prozent (Schätzung) des Gesamtumsatzes stammt aus nachhaltigen Angeboten? *

- 0% 1-15% 16-30% 31-45% 46-60% 61-75% 76-90% 91-100%
- Prozent

5. Wir glauben, dass nachhaltig touristische Produkte (Pauschalreise, Flugtickets, Unterkunft, etc.): *

Wählen Sie bitte zwischen 1 und 5, wobei 1 = stimme überhaupt nicht zu, 2 = nicht einverstanden, 3 = eher nicht zustimmen, 4 = eher zustimmen, 5 = stimme zu, 6 = stimme voll zu

1 2 3 4 5 6

Teurer sind	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Mehrwert haben	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Bessere Qualität haben	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>
Nicht existieren	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>

6. Qualität bedeutet: *

Wählen Sie bitte zwischen 1 und 5, wobei 1 = stimme überhaupt nicht zu, 2 = nicht einverstanden, = eher nicht zustimmen, 4 = eher zustimmen, 5 = stimme zu, 6 = stimme voll zu

	1	2	3	4	5	6
optimales Leistungsprofil (z.B. Authentizität, Klarheit in der TV-Werbung)	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
Extras, die zusätzlich zum Original-Produkt gegeben werden (z. B. Getränke auf einem Flug)	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
Zuverlässigkeit (Wahrscheinlichkeit zu scheitern innerhalb eines bestimmten Zeitraums) des Produkts	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
Haltbarkeit des Produkts (wie viel und wie oft kann der Verbraucher das Produkt verwenden)	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
Wie gut ist die Ästhetik (sehen, fühlen oder riechen)	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					

7. Ein Qualitäts-Tourismusprodukt ist: *

Wählen Sie bitte zwischen 1 und 5, wobei 1 = stimme überhaupt nicht zu, 2 = nicht einverstanden, = eher nicht zustimmen, 4 = eher zustimmen, 5 = stimme zu, 6 = stimme voll zu

	1	2	3	4	5	6
geringere Gruppengröße (weniger Menschen / Touristen im Zielgebiet, Reisen in kleinen Gruppen,)	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
Authentisch	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
Lehrreich	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
Unterstützen der örtlichen Gemeinschaft	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
Längere Aufenthaltsdauer	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
Natur bewahren	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					

8. Ein nachhaltiger Tourismus ist wichtig, weil: *

Wählen Sie bitte zwischen 1 und 5, wobei 1 = stimme überhaupt nicht zu, 2 = nicht einverstanden, = eher nicht zustimmen, 4 = eher zustimmen, 5 = stimme zu, 6 = stimme voll zu

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Verbessert die Qualität des Reiseerlebnisses	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
Garantiert die Qualität des Produkts	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
bewahrt Reiseziele	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					
sichert die Zukunft des Tourismus-Geschäfts	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					

9. Wir glauben: *

Wählen Sie bitte zwischen 1 und 5, wobei 1 = stimme überhaupt nicht zu, 2 = nicht einverstanden, = eher nicht zustimmen, 4 = eher zustimmen, 5 = stimme zu, 6 = stimme voll zu

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Es gibt eine Zunahme der Nachfrage nach nachhaltigen touristischen Produkten	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>					

- Kunden über nachhaltigen Tourismus zu informieren ist wichtig
- Angebote mit Produkten des Nachhaltigen Tourismus sind für Reiseunternehmen wichtig
- Nachhaltigkeit und nachhaltige Angebote sind ein Wettbewerbsvorteil

10. Weitere Kommentare:

Sehr geehrter Reiseveranstalter oder Reisebüro,

ich bin eine Studentin des Faches Tourismus-Management an der HAAGA - HELIA Fachhochschule in Helsinki, Finnland. Für meine Bachelorarbeit untersuche ich, ob und wie Reiseveranstalter und/ oder Reisebüros wahrnehmen, dass nachhaltige touristische Produkte mit einer höheren Qualität einer Urlaubsreise verbunden sind.

Ich wäre Ihnen sehr dankbar, wenn Sie mir helfen würden, plausible Untersuchungsergebnisse zu erzielen, indem Sie in ca. 10-15 Minuten meinen Fragebogen mit 10 kurzen Fragen beantworten.

zum Fragebogen: <https://www.webropolsurveys.com/S/DDDF46E2ABF826F5.par>

Anleitung:

Bitte wählen Sie 1-5 Mitarbeitende Ihres Unternehmens aus und bitten diese, den Fragebogen zu beantworten. Die Fragen sollen bitte entsprechend Ihrer Unternehmenspolitik und nicht nach der persönlichen Auffassung beantwortet werden. Bitte entscheiden Sie sich jeweils für eine Antwort und wählen Sie bitte keine Zwischenlösung. Bitte beantworten Sie alle Fragen, auch wenn Ihr Unternehmen selbst keine nachhaltigen Reisen anbietet. Am Ende des Fragebogens können Sie weitere Kommentare hinzufügen.

zum Fragebogen: <https://www.webropolsurveys.com/S/DDDF46E2ABF826F5.par>

Definition von Nachhaltiger Tourismus: Der Begriff „Nachhaltiger Tourismus“ wird verwendet, wenn der Gedanke einer nachhaltigen Entwicklung innerhalb der Tourismusbranche umgesetzt wird. Mit dem Begriff „Nachhaltige Entwicklung“ wird beschrieben, dass die Entwicklung der Menschheit der Erfüllung der Bedürfnisse der heutigen Generation dienen soll, ohne die Möglichkeiten künftiger Generationen zu gefährden, deren eigene Bedürfnisse ebenso befriedigen zu können. Nachhaltiger Tourismus umfasst die Begriffe Öko-Tourismus und alternativer Tourismus. Beispiele für nachhaltigen Tourismus sind: freiwilliger Arbeits-Tourismus-, Bildungs-Tourismus und Natur-Tourismus.

Zusicherung:

Ich versichere Ihnen, dass Ihre Firma nicht namentlich in meiner Bachelorarbeit erwähnt wird. Alle Antworten werden dazu genutzt, ganzheitliche Erkenntnisse über das Hauptthema zu erlangen.

Vielen Dank.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Kia Lindroos

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zum Fragebogen: <https://www.webropolsurveys.com/S/DDDF46E2ABF826F5.par>

Attachment 3. English Translation of Questionnaire

1. **Name of company:**

2. **Country:**

3. **We create the major part of our total revenue as: (tick your option):**

- Travel Agent
- Tour Operator
- Other (what):

4. **What percentage (estimate) of your total revenue is from sustainable offerings (circle the right option)?**

0% 1-15% 16-30% 31-45% 46-60% 61-75% 76-90%
91+%

For all of the 5 next questions please choose between 1 and 5 where 1 = completely disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = tend to disagree, 4 = tend to agree, 5 = agree, 6 = Completely agree

5. **We believe a sustainable tourism product (tour package, flight tickets, accommodation, etc.) to:**

Be more expensive: 1 2 3 4 5
6

Have added
value: 1 2 3 4 5
6

Be better quality: 1 2 3 4 5
6

Not exist: 1 2 3 4 5

6

6. Quality means:

Optimal product performance (e.g. authenticity, clarity on television):

1 2 3 4 5 6

The extras that come with the original product (e.g. drinks on a flight):

1 2 3 4 5 6

Reliability (probability of failing within a certain time period) of the product:

1 2 3 4 5 6

Durability (how much and how many times the consumer can use the product) of the product:

1 2 3 4 5 6

How good the aesthetics (look, feel or smell) are:

1 2 3 4 5 6

7. A quality tourism product is:

Low Volume (less people/tourists in destination, travel in small groups, locally owned businesses) :

1 2 3 4 5 6

Authentic: 1 2 3 4 5 6

Educational: 1 2 3 4 5 6

Supporting of
the local community:

1 2 3 4 5 6

Longer in travel durance:

1 2 3 4 5 6

Nature preserving:

1 2 3 4 5 6

8. A sustainable tourism is important because:

Improves the quality of the travel experience:

1 2 3 4 5 6

Guarantees the quality of the product:

1 2 3 4 5 6

Safeguards destinations:

1 2 3 4 5 6

Safeguards the future of tourism business:

1 2 3 4 5 6

9. We believe:

There is an increase in demand for sustainable tourism products:

1 2 3 4 5 6

Informing customers about sustainable tourism is important:

1 2 3 4 5 6

Sustainable tourism product options are important for travel companies:

1 2 3 4 5 6

Sustainability and sustainable product options are a competitive advantage:

1 2 3 4 5 6

10. Further Comments:

Attachment 4. English Translation of e-mail Message

Dear Tour Operator or Travel Agent,

I am a Tourism Management final year student at HAAGA - HELIA, University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, Finland. For my bachelor thesis I am researching if and how tour operators and/or agents perceive responsible tourism products to be of better quality to a vacation/travel/holiday. I would appreciate your time (approx. 10-15min) to answer my short 5 question questionnaire to help me get plausible results.

Instructions:

Please choose 1 – 5 representatives of your company to answer this questionnaire. Answer all questions (1-5) honestly and according to your company's ideal or policies, not your individual opinions. Only choose one option and do not choose "in between" options. Even if your company does not offer sustainable travel options or does not practice sustainability answer all questions.

In the end of the questionnaire you can add any further comments.

Definition of Sustainable Tourism: Sustainable tourism is the term used when a sustainable development idea is implemented within the tourism sector. Sustainable development is the term which describes that the development of humankind should respond to the needs of current generations without endangering the possibilities of the future generations to satisfy their needs. Sustainable tourism includes the terms eco tourism and alternative tourism. Examples of sustainable tourism are: volunteer tourism, educational tourism and nature-based tourism.

Assurance:

I assure you that your company name will not be individually mentioned in my thesis. All answers will be used to draw holistic results about the main theme.

Thank you.

Kind regards,

Kia Lindroos

Haaga Helia, University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki, Finland

+358 40751 7306

kia_lindroos@hotmail.com

Attachment 5. Bellagio Principles

(borrowed from IISD. Complete Bellagio Principles. URL:
http://www.iisd.org/measure/principles/progress/bellagio_full.asp)

1. Guiding Vision and Goals

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should be guided by a clear vision of sustainable development and goals that define that vision

2. Holistic Perspective

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- include review of the whole system as well as its parts
- consider the well-being of social, ecological, and economic sub-systems, their state as well as the direction and rate of change of that state, of their component parts, and the interaction between parts
- consider both positive and negative consequences of human activity, in a way that reflects the costs and benefits for human and ecological systems, in monetary and non-monetary terms

3. Essential Elements

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- consider equity and disparity within the current population and between present and future generations, dealing with such concerns as resource use, over-consumption and poverty, human rights, and access to services, as appropriate
- consider the ecological conditions on which life depends
- consider economic development and other, non-market activities that contribute to human/social well-being

4. Adequate Scope

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- adopt a time horizon long enough to capture both human and ecosystem time scales thus responding to needs of future generations as well as those current to short term decision-making
- define the space of study large enough to include not only local but also long distance impacts on people and ecosystems
- build on historic and current conditions to anticipate future conditions - where we want to go, where we could go

5. Practical Focus

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should be based on:

- an explicit set of categories or an organizing framework that links vision and goals to indicators and assessment criteria
- a limited number of key issues for analysis
- a limited number of indicators or indicator combinations to provide a clearer signal of progress
- standardizing measurement wherever possible to permit comparison
- comparing indicator values to targets, reference values, ranges, thresholds, or direction of trends, as appropriate

6. Openness

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- make the methods and data that are used accessible to all
- make explicit all judgments, assumptions, and uncertainties in data and interpretations

7. Effective Communication

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- be designed to address the needs of the audience and set of users
- draw from indicators and other tools that are stimulating and serve to engage decision-makers
- aim, from the outset, for simplicity in structure and use of clear and plain language

8. Broad Participation

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- obtain broad representation of key grass-roots, professional, technical and social groups , including youth, women, and indigenous people - to ensure recognition of diverse and changing values
- ensure the participation of decision-makers to secure a firm link to adopted policies and resulting action

9. Ongoing Assessment

Assessment of progress toward sustainable development should:

- develop a capacity for repeated measurement to determine trends
- be iterative, adaptive, and responsive to change and uncertainty because systems are complex and change frequently
- adjust goals, frameworks, and indicators as new insights are gained
- promote development of collective learning and feedback to decision-making

10. Institutional Capacity

Continuity of assessing progress toward sustainable development should be assured by:

- clearly assigning responsibility and providing ongoing support in the decision-making process
- providing institutional capacity for data collection, maintenance, and documentation
- supporting development of local assessment capacity

