



**15th Annual Conference of the
EuroMed Academy of Business**

Sustainable Business Concepts and Practices

Edited by: Demetris Vrontis,
Yaakov Weber,
Evangelos Tsoukatos

Published by: EuroMed Press

15th Annual Conference of the EuroMed Academy of Business

CONFERENCE READINGS
BOOK PROCEEDINGS

September 21-23 2022
Palermo, Italy

Sustainable Business Concepts and Practices

Copyright ©

The materials published in this Readings Book may be reproduced for instructional and non-commercial use. Any use for commercial purposes must have the prior approval of the Executive Board of the EuroMed Research Business Institute (EMRBI).

All full papers and abstracts submitted to the EMRBI Conference are subject to a peer reviewing process, using subject specialists selected because of their expert knowledge in the specific areas.

ISBN: 978-9963-711-96-3

Published by: EuroMed Press

Published at: October 2022

ACTION RESEARCH IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: ORIENTATION OF DECISION-MAKERS AND DEVELOPMENT CONDITIONS

Tafuro, Martina; Signori, Paola

University of Verona, Department of Business Administration, Research Assistant, Verona, Italy

ABSTRACT

Minor rural areas rely on local decision-makers to development towards sustainability.

This qualitative study, conducted with an action research approach, aims to help decision-makers of a rural area to convey to an integrated strategy for sustainable development through slow tourism. It highlights four sustainability orientation profiles of decision makers, with different levels of reactivity or proactivity orientation in response to sustainability issues, depicting different personal motivations.

PURPOSE

Minor rural areas often suffer of being a marginalised economy (Briedenhann *et al.*, 2004) and local decision-makers play an important role to drive suitable development conditions. Their personal motivations and orientation to sustainability may influence their actions. The dual purpose of this research is: (1) to contribute to the practical need of local decision-makers to discover the conditions for the sustainable tourism development of a rural destination; (2) to explore the emergent issue of personal orientation towards sustainability (Khizar *et al.*, 2022).

DESIGN, METHODOLOGY, APPROACH

This study adopts a qualitative approach using the action research (AR) methodology (Naslund *et al.*, 2011). This method requires a team of researchers and organisational actors working together, sharing ideas and reflections. In this study, we apply action research in terms of “theory building” and “diagnosis” for two types of contributions (Alfaro-Tanco *et al.*, 2021). The “theory building” phase aims to find an explanation of the specific research question from exploration (Alfaro-Tanco *et al.*, 2021, p. 5). Our RQ is “*How personal motivations affect sustainability orientation and actions for sustainable tourism*”. To practitioners’ contribution approach, AR contributes in describing and analysing a particular issue, in order to identify root causes for the issues at hand (Alfaro-Tanco *et al.*, 2021, p. 5). Our issue is helping a rural destination to identify its development conditions for sustainable tourism. The data collection relies on interviews, video recorded and transcribed, with 18 decision makers of a rural area in Northern Italy (7 policy makers, 9 entrepreneurs and 2 change makers). Four other follow up meetings and conferences engaged local citizens, politicians and family businesses. This small

geographical area is characterised by the preservation of its cultural and natural heritage, but also for the fragmented nature of political, economic and social decisions. Decision-makers are majors of 24 small towns, few entrepreneurs of local businesses, mainly manufacturers and farmers. They want to leverage their local strengths (i.e., nature, typical products and authenticity), and identify slow tourism to lead the entire community moving towards sustainable development (Di Clemente *et al.*, 2015, pp. 23-37). We conducted the data collection and analysis in a team of diverse researchers (2 professors and 2 research assistants) in order to reduce our own bias (Eisenhardt, 1989; Oppermann, 2000). Triangulation approach helps for strengthening the validity of the analysis. Due the fact that AR projects are cyclical (Ballantyne, 2004; Coghlan and Brannick, 2001), our research is divided into several stages:

1. Preliminary meetings to define objectives and research question (3 meetings);
2. Data collection (18 interviews);
3. Follow-up meeting with practitioners (15 participants);
4. Conference to discuss results and review them under new perspective/suggestions (3 conferences with about 40 participants each).

RESULTS

This research offers a dual contribution. From a theoretical perspective, we have coded through Nvivo coding, adopting the GIOIA methodology for analysis and interpretation (2021). It permits to identify four clusters of sustainability orientation individual profiles. These profiles are characterised by different level of reactivity or proactivity orientation in response to the sustainability issue, and show different personal motivations. The table below (Table 1) depicts the results:

Table 1 Sustainability orientation profiles of decision makers in a rural area

Profile name	Motivation	Orientation	% of sample
Soldier	Extrinsic	Reactivity (-/+)	34 %
Self-focused	Absent	Absent	16 %
Explorer	Intrinsic	Proactivity (-)	22 %
Athlete	Intrinsic & Extrinsic	Proactivity (+)	28%

From a practical perspective, these sustainability orientation profiles have been review and discussed, discovering peculiar strengths and weaknesses. The AR diagnosis helped in highlighting some urgent development conditions for sustainable tourism: (a) increasing attention to educated leisure; (b) education for sustainable consumption (i.e., marketing and gentle nudge); (c) stimulation of

sustainable practices together with politicians and entrepreneurs; (d) growth of slow tourism trend; (e) tax relief and funds for investing in sustainability.

IMPLICATIONS

The study recognises both theoretical and practical implication. Theoretically speaking, in response to our RQ, this study highlights four sustainability orientation profiles of decision makers, revealing a variety of personal motivation approaching sustainability in action, based on the proactivity/reactivity that people show in response to sustainability issue.

Moreover, this action research helped managers in profiling and diagnosing their own development conditions. These results, reviewed and largely discussed with participants, are helping decision-makers of this rural area to convey to an integrated strategy for sustainable development through slow tourism. This action research project is still at an early stage, and as such it is not possible to measure the real impact of these different sustainable profiles.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE

The main originalities are: (1) the application of action research design to tourism field, it is quite common mostly in supply-chain area of research; (2) the study of sustainability orientation of decision makers in a rural area.

Keywords: sustainability orientation, development, rural destinations, slow tourism, motivations, policy makers, entrepreneurs, decision-makers.

REFERENCES

- Alfaro-Tanco, J. A., Avella, L., Moscoso, P., and Näslund, D. (2021), "An Evaluation Framework for the Dual Contribution of Action Research: Opportunities and Challenges in the Field of Operations Management", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 20.
- Ballantyne, D. (2004), "Action Research Reviewed: A Market-oriented Approach", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 38, No. 3/4, pp. 321-337.
- Briedenhann, J. and Wicken, E. (2004), "Tourism routes as a tool for the economic development of rural areas – vibrant hope or impossible dream?", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 25, Issue 1, pp. 71-79.
- Coughlan, D. and Teresa Brannick (2001), *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, Sage Publications, Inc., London.
- Di Clemente, E., Hernández-Mogollón, J. M., De Salvo, P., and Campón-Cerro, A. M. (2015), "Slow tourism: An alternative model for local and tourist development". (Ed.) *Sustainable performance and tourism: A collection of tools and best practices*, Chartridge Books Oxford, Oxford, pp. 23-37.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. and Graebner, M. E. (2007), "Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 50 No. 1, pp. 25–32.
- Gioia, D. A. (2021), "A Systematic Methodology for Doing Qualitative Research", *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol. 57, No. 1, pp. 20–29.

- Khizar, H. M. U, Iqbal, M. J., Khalid, J. (2022), "Addressing the conceptualization and measurement challenges of sustainability orientation: A systematic review and research agenda", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 142, pp. 718-743.
- Näslund, D., Kale R. and Paulraj, A. (2011), "Action research in supply chain management—a framework for relevant and rigorous research". *Journal of Business Logistics*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 331-355.
- Oppermann M. (2000), "Triangulation – A Methodological Discussion", *The International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 141-146.