

# The perception of sustainable tourism by students - in the case of the OFPPT students from the region of Beni Mellal-Khénifra

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## **Abstract:**

**Morocco is part of a development dynamic aimed at promoting tourism, as part of an advanced regionalization establishment, favoring the inter-regional balance in tourism, where durability remains the cornerstone to the sustainability of touristic destinations. In this perspective, an adapted academic training to the sustainable tourism crafts seems essential for a healthy tourism takeoff.**

**This research aims to study the perception of the sustainable tourism concept as well as the identification of other aspects or sustainable practices matured in the minds of students engaged in tourism training, and who will soon become involved by integrating the labor market. This allows us to re-establish bridges and fill the gaps between training and insertion.**

**To do this, an exploratory qualitative study will be privileged as sustainable tourism is a contemporary paradigm. The different aspects related to sustainable tourism according to the interviewees representations, demonstrate that the application of its principles is useful to the sector development. Starting from all the conclusions, some recommendations for professionals and politicians are proposed.**

## **Keywords:**

**Perception; Sustainable tourism; Sustainable development; Tourist destination**

## ***Introduction:***

The Rio Earth Summit (1992) identified tourism as one of the key sectors for sustainable development, which led the WTTC, UNWTO, and the Earth Council to launch Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism in 1994. This document was administered as a practical guide outlining appropriate actions and suggestions for the sound implementation of a sustainable tourism framework,

while emphasizing the importance of adhering to its principles in order to achieve sustainable development in tourism destinations.

Indeed, the ultimate goal of our study focuses on a very important part of the tourism ecosystem which is the students of the tourism professions, and focuses more precisely on the perception of these future professionals of the notion of "sustainable tourism", do they master well the connotations attributed to this scourge, their studies, their internships in tourism companies, do they contribute correctly to delimit the fundamental characteristics, the modules taught during the entire course, do they take into consideration the imperatives of sustainability, or the principle is provided independently of other content.

This sample represents a very important object of study, which will serve as a skeleton to the professional world of tourism, by a qualified and specialized workforce, having acquired professional attitudes and a level of languages more developed than the classic recurrent recruitments of the tourism establishments.

To do this, we used a totalitarian questionnaire, without claiming to be exhaustive, tested and validated by academics in the field, and whose items draw on both the content taught in class and in professional internships, and its effects on the learning cycle, and on the behavior and attitudes acquired by this group of students.

The outcomes of this study aim at adapting and improving the pedagogical content, to make more useful the classical methods of teaching the tourism professions, through recommendations to teachers, administrators, professionals of the professions, and especially to the laureates who aim at a career in tourism, so that the concept of sustainability takes a transversal place throughout the training curriculum.

## ***Literature review:***

In order to achieve and implement a comprehensive tourism development, it is obviously necessary to

inculcate the image of the different notions of this development in the memory and mind of the different stakeholders, as well as the principles attached to them in order to integrate them and take them into account in their committed behaviors and practices, from where it better exists education and training to imprint and profess such an orientation to promote the culture of sustainable tourism.

In fact, Previous studies that focus on the study of perception in the tourism sector, aim to understand the representations that the different parts of the tourism ecosystem have formed about sustainable tourism (Mello, Fernandes, Zimmermann, & Subhash, 2016). The work done has focused on studying the attitude and image perceived and engraved in the minds of tourists (Sair & Rahoua, n.d) and (Weijing, 2014) as a customer adopting responsible behavior and practice (Jain & Sharma, 2021), as well as that of residents (Cottrel , Vaske, Shen, & Ritter, 2007), (Hadinejad, Moyle, Noel , Anna , & Nunkoo, 2019), and internet users (Claire , 2012)... However, the study extends to understand the perception of the role of different stakeholders in promoting tourist satisfaction and the development of sustainable tourism (Halima, Ferdous , Nurain , Er , & A, 2014), starting from a comparison made in terms of the perception of tourism sustainability between rural and urban (Halim & Ervina, 2021), as well as between the female and male gender (Šenková et al., 2020), while raising the perception of the economic and social impact (Pinto Da Silva, Brandão , & Bruno , 2019), of the adoption of such a culture.

In addition, tourism is a discipline taught in higher education institutions (universities, colleges, vocational training institutes...) which are qualified by Unesco as a driver of change towards sustainability because they have a major role in achieving the goals of sustainable development by preparing learners to meet future challenges, and also by calling on them to take action.) which are qualified by Unesco as a driver of change towards sustainability as they have a major role in achieving the sustainable development goals by preparing learners to meet future challenges, and also calling on them to change their mindset and active engagement related to sustainable tourism (Dibra & Oelfke, 2013), hence each institution should follow its own path on the way to sustainability, depending on the evolution of its environment and situation (Unesco Commission, 2009). However, the concept of sustainable tourism, even if it takes space in the literature, it is not yet incorporated more in the educational programs of this discipline, so there is little research on the integration in higher education of such concept of sustainability (Busby, 2003) necessary to take the path to a more sustainable future (Tilbury, 2011). And thus, the inclusion of aspects of sustainable tourism in curricula (Henry & Jackson, 1995), as well as the inclusion of different pedagogical approaches that promote the development of competencies, skills, and

values in tourism education, remain essential (Belhassen & Caton, 2011).

In this sense, Research in tourism education has shown how student attitudes can be influenced by sustainability programs only if they are integrated throughout the curriculum, instead of being a separate component, as a single course (Slocum, Dimitrov, & Webb, 2019). Therefore, the educational system will have to respond to the challenge of providing graduate students in tourism with qualifying theoretical and practical training that allows them to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to enter the labor market as professionals (Hernández, Martín, Jiménez, Domínguez, & Bermúdez, 2010) capable of solving the problems they face, making good decisions based on reflection and analysis (Cárdenas-García, Pulido-Fernández, & Carrillo-Hidalgo, 2016), and fostering sustainable business practices that also stimulate tourism success (Belhassen & Caton, 2011).

For several decades, tourism has been a major concern for several countries whose growth and prosperity of the sector remain desirable. However, the rapid evolution of tourism is both an opportunity and a danger (Hugues, 2004) that requires a rational and rigorous management taking into account its impacts and its powerful effects both negative and positive on the environment and on the population, certainly in an era marked by shocks and convulsive crises. Faced with this observation, sustainable tourism appears as a major issue to meet the challenges of the 21st century by offering a clear strategic vision and planning likely.



*Source: Asset France.*

Moreover, sustainable tourism, which appeared in the early 1990s in the Rio Summit and Agenda 21 (Behnassi, 2008), is defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental

*impacts, meeting the needs of visitors, professionals, the environment and host communities* (sustainable-tourism.org, 2022)". It appears as a solution to the problems created by the current economic and climatic situation, the challenge is to see it in a broader context as a single development tool and to ensure that it is examined in the context of the local community as well as in a global perspective (Mcminn, 1997).

Sustainable tourism is one of the approaches in the tourism sector, which should help to make the best decisions in the tourism industry. They should be able to recognize its positive and negative benefits for the current and future population (Šenková, Vavrek, & Mitríková, 2020). Environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects are the foundations of sustainability, whose long-term maintenance is the result of the balance between these three aspects (United Nations Environment Programme & World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2005).

Nevertheless, sustainable tourism is a broader notion, and often confused with other sustainable forms of tourism (Juganaru, Juganaru, & Anghel, 2008), semantically close, or included in the lexical field of the term, which covers not only the protection of natural, environmental and ecological resources, but also focuses on the economic and social aspects that it contributes to develop. The confusion is made with concepts such as ecotourism, green tourism, rural tourism, agrotourism, solidarity tourism, responsible tourism... which are concepts that are opposed to mass tourism. The following diagram will tell you more about the scope of sustainable tourism:

In fact, the debate on perception has given rise to many psychological theories: "perceptual new-look" (Bruner & Postman, 1947), cognitive theory, (Marr & Vaina

In his reference work on phenomenology, (Maurice, 1945), emphasizes three rational approaches according to which one can apprehend perception: the physiological approach relating to visual perception which looks at the intrinsic performance of the vision system, the experimental approach aiming to apprehend the contextual and cognitive aspects of the visual, and phenomenology (Edmund, 1993) which is focused on the perceiving subject, and poses as a central question the meaning of "seeing" in the consciousness of the subject.

In addition, perception expresses the representation that any decision-maker makes of the national, regional or global environment (Hearn, 1986), it designates the cognitive and psychological process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environments (Robbins, et al., 2006). Visual or sensory perception results from the physiological capture of stimuli in the visual field according to

point of view of the perceiving subject on the one hand,

and the association of memory, attention, focus, selection of the relevant object and interpretation to meet personal expectations on the other hand (Lassance, 1998). It requires the integration of several sensations in order to make choices or decisions, taking into account factors that influence this perception such as personality, previous knowledge, past experiences, cognitive and affective motivations, attitudes, interests, expectations... (Robbins, et al., 2006).

However, this perception is influenced by invisible social and cultural conditions (The Washington Post, 2016), insofar as it is acquired and results from experience and learning according to William James, John Locke or Donald Hebb. This premise fits with our study of perception in an educational setting, and further justifies its choice of theme.

### **Methodology:**

In order to answer this problem concerning the perception of sustainable tourism by the students of OFPPT of Beni-Mellal-Khenifra region, an exploratory study using a quantitative research method took place, and this through a questionnaire administered to the students pursuing their training in 2<sup>nd</sup> year in a branch of the tourism professions. This questionnaire was validated by scientists and tested on twenty people, to validate its quality, its feasibility, and its understanding, whose findings have allowed the necessary reformulations to be intelligible.

Designed using the Google-Docs/Form platform, this questionnaire consists of 26 items, inspired by the literature on the perception of sustainable tourism, and which has demonstrated a high level of reliability. These items broadly correspond to Likert scale questions with a range of 1 to 5 in terms of agreement and satisfaction (from "Very little" to "A lot"), and other multiple-choice questions. It is structured in 4 main sections, with direct questions on the concept of sustainable tourism, its aspects and values (i), training as a factor that can inculcate the concept and influence the attitudes and perception of students (ii) through taught modules, as well as the sustainable behavior to be adopted (iii) by these students as professionals in the field, transforming the knowledge, experience and skills acquired into opportunities and practices that serve the sustainability, continuity, and prosperity of the tourism sector, while devoting the last section (iv) to information on the profiles of respondents age, gender, educational level ... etc.

In order to draw good conclusions, it is essential to ensure the existence of a sufficient amount of information (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010) that corresponds to the contributions of a careful selection of respondents offering great robustness to the sample used (Abt, et al., 2020) whose size must be optimal for more precision (Mooi, Sarstedt, & Mooi-Reci, 2018), and for the relationships to be statistically significant (Kline, 2015).

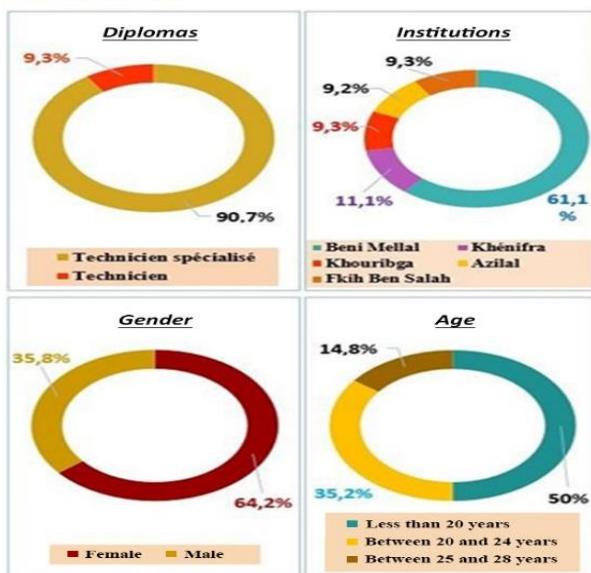
A Given this, our sample must be representative and of an optimal size to give more value and credibility to our results. The size of this sample is estimated at 180 respondents among a population of 319 students in the tourism professions, always keeping a confidence level of 95%.

### **Results:**

Based on the collected responses, the measurement of the internal consistency of the questions asked during the survey is an essential step to give more credibility and reliability to our results. For this purpose, Cronbach's alpha remains the most used indicator in psychometric research, whose value of 0.7 is necessary to attest to the homogeneity and consistency of the items measuring the same phenomenon (Nunnally, 1978), however, a value higher than 0.8 is recommended in research (Tappen, 2022). In this sense, the test results show a high degree of reliability of our questionnaire. With a very satisfactory alpha of 0.84 reflecting a good consistency of the items, which attests to the validity of the survey. The obtained answers reflect better the representations of the respondents on the phenomenon object of study.

By analyzing the results obtained, the socio-demographic characteristics of our sample, composed mainly of students of the OFPPT of the region, indicate that 64.2% are women against 35.8% of men, of which, 90.4% are specialized technicians, are distributed to 50% aged less than 20 years, 35.2% between 21 and 24 years, while 14.8% aged over 25 years. These students pursue their higher education at the training institutes of the cities of Beni Mellal and Khenifra, respectively to the tune of 61.1% and 11.1%, while the rest is distributed between

**Figure 1 : Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample**



Fkih Ben Salah and Khouribga to 9.3% each (Figure 1).

**Source: By the authors**

In order to assess the actual knowledge of the concept of sustainable tourism, respondents are asked to specify the source from which they first heard about sustainable tourism, and to define the phenomenon by offering them several response options. In this regard, 93.9% of the students declared having heard of sustainable tourism, compared to 6.1% of respondents who have never heard it before. The training institute (OFPPT, university), the media and social networks are the main sources where these students learned the notion respectively 49.5%, 31.3% of the answers (figure 2).

**Figure 2 : Distribution of sustainable tourism learning places (ST)**

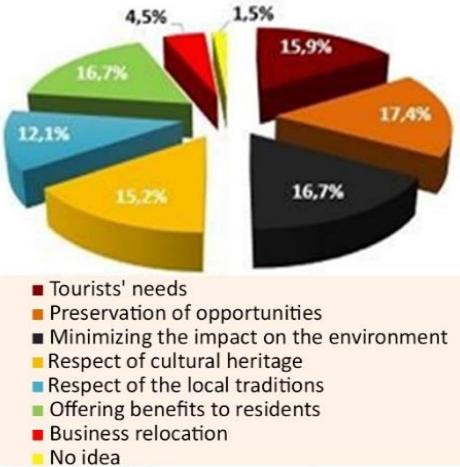


**Source: By the authors**

Indeed, following the attempt to define the concept of sustainable tourism (ST), the results show a strong confusion is clear in the learners' answers, who on average choose two propositions to form an incomplete definition of the phenomenon. The results indicate that only 1.5% of the respondents do not know anything about the concept of sustainable tourism, the rest of the students approached the concept of sustainable tourism by juxtaposing several propositions that better reflect their representations of the notion in question. Furthermore, 14.6% of the students consider sustainable tourism as a trip that meets the needs of tourists, 16.7% think that it minimizes the negative impact on the environment, 15.2% and 12.1% declare respectively that TD is based on respecting cultural heritage and local traditions, providing economic benefits

for residents and preserving opportunities for future generations (Figure 3).

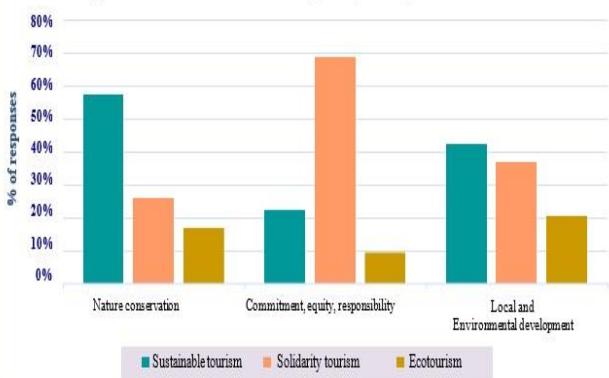
**Figure 3 : Distribution of responses by proposed definition of ST**



Source: By the authors

In addition, the responses indicate that learners find it difficult to grasp exactly what sustainable tourism means. Most respondents associated the notion of sustainable tourism with another form of tourism, including environmental or ecological tourism, mass tourism, business tourism, fair and solidarity tourism, these answers show that the learners were unable to distinguish the differences between the above-mentioned forms of tourism (figure 4). The notion of sustainable tourism is largely confused with that of ecotourism, while the notions of fair and solidarity tourism seem to be assimilable.

**Figure 4: Distinction between the different forms of tourism**

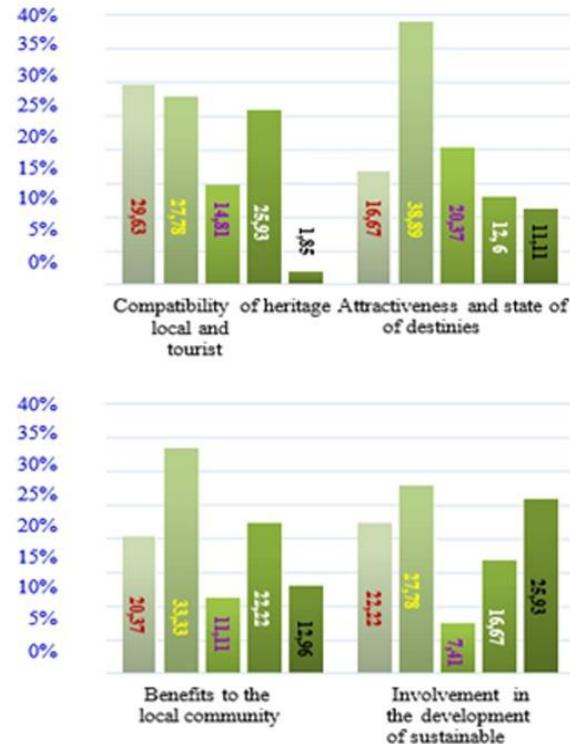


Source: By the authors

Given the learners' lack of knowledge, we attempted to investigate their perception of the phenomenon of sustainable tourism by asking them to express their level of agreement with a series of statements, using a Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". As shown in (Figure 5), over 58% of respondents

believe that there is no compatibility between local heritage protection and tourism activities.

**Figure 5: Degree of agreement with proposals in the field of sustainable tourism.**

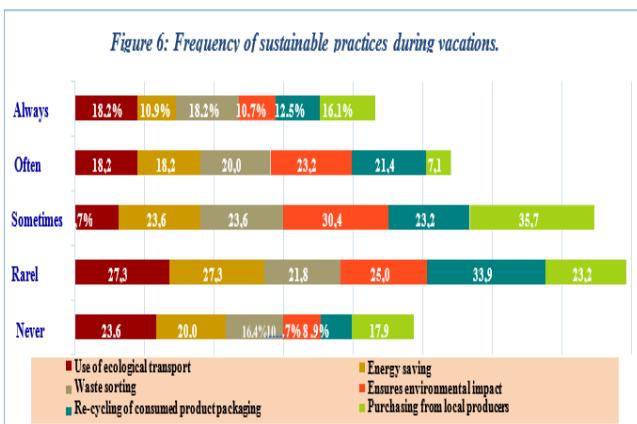


Source: By the authors

In fact, 55% of respondents disagree with the premise that ecologically managed tourist destinations, preserved in their natural state, are more attractive. However, 53.6% of the respondents recognize the obligation of the host community to take full advantage of the tourism activities, as well as half of them are not ready to adhere to sustainable development. This statement reinforces the lack of knowledge or even ignorance of the values and usefulness of sustainable tourism as an essential component of tourism development.

Insofar as behavior and attitude are influenced by knowledge and experience, we attempt to answer a question about the behaviors that these students adopt during their vacation. The results show that about 63.6% do not or rarely use bicycles or other low-impact transportation during their trip, 71% do not regulate their consumption level to save energy, and only 38.3% sort their waste in a habitual way.

On the other hand, 35.7% of students say that when purchasing a consumer product, do not consider its environmental impact, 33.9% prefer to buy local products to participate in the economic development of the residents, and only 33.9% ensure that the packaging is recyclable.



Source: by the authors

### Discussion and Conclusion:

According to the results of this survey, we note that the learners in the tourism profession find it difficult to delimit the contours of the notion of sustainable tourism, which means that their perception is still embryonic and barely influenced by the training provided in the matter, contrary to our initial hypotheses which predicted that these students would perfectly master the concept and the practices attached to it. However, the level of French of the respondents, the interest they showed in the questionnaires, and the adjacent terminology of the different sustainable forms of tourism are the main causes of bias in the results, which our conclusion is taken independently.

In fact, following the insights provided by this study, the best way to improve the implementation of a pedagogical vision of sustainable tourism remains the revision of the globality of the taught content, and to integrate transversally the notion throughout the training course, in order to have a global scope on the whole of school and extracurricular activities, and to manage to anchor its principles in the learners, and surely to see sustainable attitudes in the professional environment.

Moreover, it is also appropriate to deduce that such an approach, to see the day, will have to rely on partnerships at the international, national and local levels, based on the establishment of links between the faculty and the various actors mentioned above, as well as the development of consultations and round tables around the exchanges between academics and professionals in the field of tourism sustainability.

In order to join the useful to the pleasant, the sustainable tourism will have to be a real lever of territorial marketing, because it represents a very interesting track to be improved, allowing to conciliate at the same time: Protection of the environment and socioeconomic development of the territory, especially for the benefit of the host populations.

A study of content will follow, to highlight the strong

points, as well as the shortcomings noted in the content of the modules currently taught, which will aim to offer a richer and especially more "Sustainable" training.

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