AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN BUSINESS TOURISM

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Abstract

Purpose – Business tourism is recognized as the largest holder of income for a particular destination but it is problematic in terms of sustainability. More and more countries are beginning to recognize the negative effects of business tourism on environment, turning to the organization of environmentally friendly business meetings, which are the main subject of this paper.

Methodology – The research was conducted using a questionnaire with 23 questions which examined the attitudes of participants about the environmental sustainability of business meetings and the assessment of hotel performance, taking into account the environmentally sustainable performance during the business meeting. Since the one hotel that placed the congress has the "sustainable management" certificate, and the other one does not, the aim of this work is determining whether there is a difference in the business meeting participants' environmental awareness in different hotels.

Findings – Based on the results of the surveyed business meeting participants, it can be concluded that main hypothesis: Participants show awareness of the need for environmentally sustainable behavior, is confirmed since none of the respondents declared that they would initially choose a hotel without a "green" certificate if it is offered a possibility to go to a hotel with an environmentally certified business.

Contribution – In the near future, "green" meetings will become recognized as the main feature of business tourism, and that all business meeting organizers will follow the rules of sustainability, achieving greater benefits with less harmful effects for the whole community.

Keywords: green meetings, business tourism, sustainable development, "sustainable management" certificate

INTRODUCTION

Although there were numerous initiative for changing people manners about the environment, significant further actions are needed at the state, and local government level, as well as in industry, civic organizations, and individual households. Yet, a persistent lack of public engagement with the issue poses serious challenges to accomplishing these actions (Van Der Linden, Maibach, and Leiserowitz, 2015, 759). Recently, the use of the two terms "Climate Change" and "Global Warming" have become very visible to the public and their understanding of what is happening with respect to the climate (Weingart, Engels, and Pansegrau, 2000, 262). Climate change creates a wide range of impacts that tourism sector needs to respond and adapt to in the future (Kaján, Tervo-Kankare and Saarinen, 2015, 311).
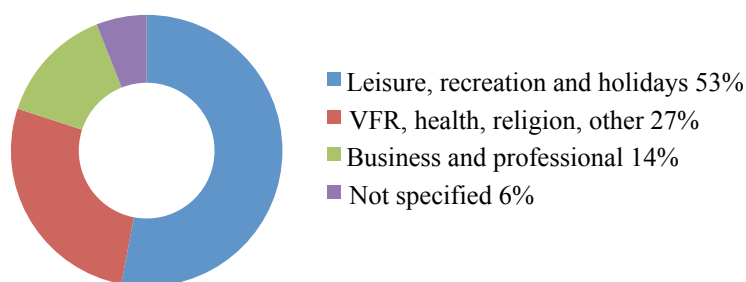
Recent studies highlighted the complexity of understanding tourist perceptions and reactions to the impacts of climate change as a means of anticipating the decline or increase of specific tourism markets and seasonal shifts in tourism demand. They argue that tourism stands out for its substantial adaptive capacity, which must be combined with other uncertainties concerning the implementation of future mitigation policies and their impacts on transportation systems, together with the wide range of climate change impacts on destinations and broader impacts on society and economic development (Rosselló-Nadal, 2014, 334).

To get a general idea of the volume of emissions, in 2008., the UNWTO confirms that the sector of tourism contributes 5% of the total global emissions of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The contributions by different tourism subsectors are as follows: aviation = 40%, road transportation = 32%, accommodation = 21%, various activities = 4%, other transport = 3% (Tourism Business Portal). In terms of radiative forcing, tourism contributes to 4.6% of global warming (WTO and UNEP, 2007).

Consistent with the literature reviewed, all respondents agreed that increased technological advancements in air travel, economic growth, infrastructure, increased education, and development of professional associations facilitated the growth of the business tourism (Lawson 1982; McCartney 2008; Swarbrooke and Horner 2001; and Buhalis and Law 2008; Ramgulam et. al. 2012).

Business tourism is one of the fastest developing and most profitable industries in the tourism sector nowadays (Šilerova, Maneva and Hřebejková, 2013). Internationally, business tourism has reached impressive levels; the World Tourism Organization estimated it at over 14% of the tourist movement and nearly 20 % of all tourist revenues (UNWTO, 2015, 5).

Graph 1: **The share of business travel in total tourism travel, 2014**

- Leisure, recreation and holidays 53%
- VFR, health, religion, other 27%
- Business and professional 14%
- Not specified 6%

Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

This niche market of tourism corresponds to very different domains, its field enrolling alike: global diplomatic meetings and meetings between representatives of different countries, economic and trade negotiations meetings, meetings for the exchange of scientific and technical information and communication of the results of certain research and development projects, cultural and educational meetings, as well as events specific to various forms of cultural manifestation, sports competitions, etc. Business

tourism is a form of tourism for commercial, governmental or educational purposes, with the recreational (leisure) part as a secondary motivation. There are many kinds of business tourism: individual trips, group trips, displacements at events (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions (MICE), team building and training trips (Virgil and Popsa, 2014).

Against the background of tourism's increasing contribution to climate change, this study seeks to explore business tourists' knowledge and awareness of meetings industry impact on the environment and their sense of personal responsibility.

1. BUSINESS TOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Business tourism has become a visible actor on the tourism map of individual countries and continents (Sikosek, 2012). Business travel and tourism, like leisure tourism, has a great impact on the physical environment. Figure 1 presents a balanced view of these impacts. This is a highly generalized picture and issues like building design are largely subjective matters. However, it appears that, in general, business travel and tourism is negative in terms of its environmental impacts (Swarebrooke and Horner, 2001, 77).

Figure 1: **The environmental impacts of business travel and tourism**
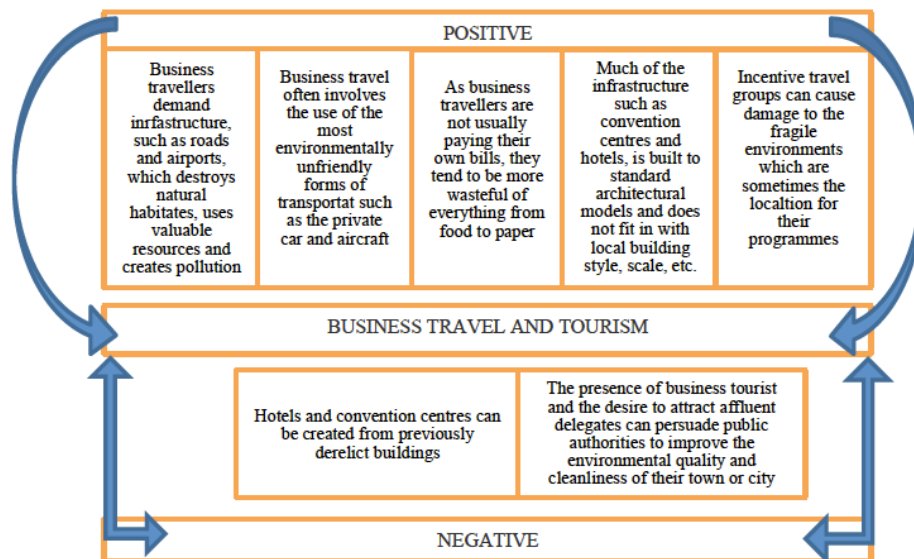
Source: Swarebrooke, J., Horner, S. (2001) Business Travel and Tourism, Butterworth Heinemann, London, p. 77.

Recognizing the remarkable impact of global climate change, "going green" is an issue of utmost importance in the meeting and event industry today (Boo and Park, 2013, 1129–1147). As well as a raft of other proposals for mitigating the carbon emissions associated with business events (for example, greater use of technology and video-conferencing, and more regional rather than international events), organizers are working hard to promote what is being termed as "green meetings" (Rittichainuwat and Mair, 2012, 147–158). This greening trend is coinciding with the pro-environment demands of convention travelers who recognize that regular conventions are extremely resource-demanding and potentially harmful to the environment (Hischier and Hilty, 2002; Whitfield et al., 2014, Han and Hwang, 2015).

Sustainability in the meetings industry concerns how the involved parties continue to run their activities in an economical successful way whilst contributing towards a stronger and more just society and reducing their impact on the environment (ISO 20121). Moreover, the notion of green meetings embraces three elements of sustainability: responsibility towards the environment; social responsibility; and economic responsibility (Lee, Breiter and Choi, 2012).

In 2004, the Convention Industry Council published The Green Meetings Task Force Report, which addressed the minimum guidelines for implementing policies of sustainability within the meeting and event industry. The report defined a green meeting or event as "a meeting or event (which) incorporates environmental considerations to minimize its negative impact on the environment" (CIC, 2004). Besides the environmental effect, the meeting industry has other reasons to select sustainable meetings, such as community's expectations, clients' preferences, attractiveness of cost-effective operations, and strength of regulations of businesses' environmental and social effects. Taken together, these factors force the meeting industry to move towards more sustainable meetings (Mykletun, Bartkeviciute and Puchkova, 2014, 211–233).

The ideal "green" meeting is the one that minimizes waste and use of energy in all phases of the tourist movement, from traveling to the venue of the meeting, the types and amounts of food that is used, the amount of energy consumed for lighting, amount of paper and plastic that can recycle up to the amount of waste that is left after the meeting (MCI, 2013).

The "green" behavior is also known as environmentally responsible, ecologically sustainable and environmentally friendly approach (Aese, 2009). It is defined as a quality action to reduce detrimental environmental impacts, such as for example eco-buying and recycling. However, in the business industry, "green " does not mean only personal undertaking action, such as recycling to reduce environmental impact, but also includes policies and practices of sustainability within own operations and management (Boo, Soyoung and Park, 2012).

In North America, a survey was conducted in 2008 with the aim of identifying features that encourage the organizers of business meetings to change the principle of its meetings, or trying to make meetings "green".

Graph 2: **Motivational factors affecting the introduction of "green" meetings**
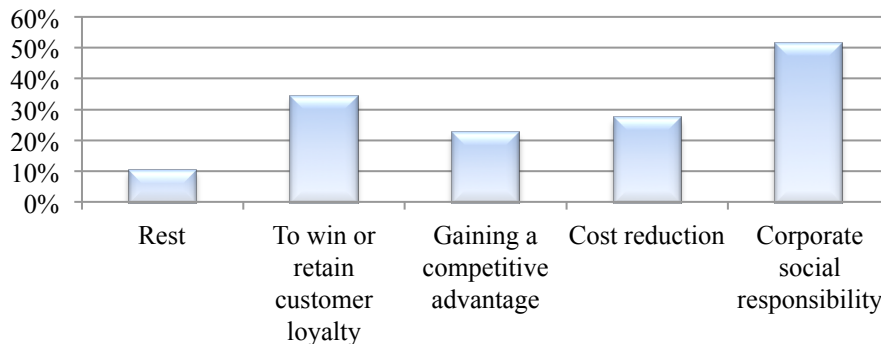
Source: World Wide Meetings Industry: http://micepoint.com/ (11.01.2016.)

From the obtained results it can be concluded that the main motivation for the introduction of "green" meetings was corporate social responsibility. Therefore, organizations have become aware of the importance of environmental awareness, and have found that by doing this will improve their business, but at the same time contribute to the entire community by reducing the negative environmental pressures. Another reason for the introduction of green meetings is to create a sense of loyalty with existing customers, but also with customers whose loyalty has yet to obtained. Only 27% of respondents agree that the reason for their introduction is cost reduction or increase in income, while 22% believe that in this order it is possible to earn an advantage over competitors. These data suggest that some organizations have not realized the benefits for the entire destination in their environmental behavior. Despite the positive fact that their business is based on "green" meetings, it is necessary to create awareness about environmental sustainability and its benefits, which should be an encouragement for "green" meetings rather than the fact that competitors are organizing green meetings in order to draw new and retain existing customers.

According United Nations Environment Programme (Agenda 21), education, including formal education, public awareness and training should be recognized as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential. Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address environment and development issues. While basic education provides the underpinning for any environmental and development education, the latter needs to be incorporated as an essential part of learning. Both formal and non-formal education are indispensable to changing people's attitudes so that they have the capacity to assess and address their sustainable development concerns.

The effects of "green" operations are not negligible. In addition to improving financial results, companies that establish a "green" reputation, can achieve much more than the increase in their sales. Therefore, they can increase reputation, they can attract talented employees and increase loyalty with their customers, but also they will have the ability to increase prices of their products (Yu Ting and Wu, 2009).

2. REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN BUSINESS TOURISM

In 2012, a research was conducted on sustainable programs among 750 CEOs from around the world. The results showed that 93% of directors considered that the introduction of the sustainability programs is one of the key features for future success of companies. The sustainable programs include development of completely new green programs, and development of recycled or renewable products. The survey was also conducted among consumers, thereby 93% of consumers said that they participate in promoting sustainability and protecting the environment, while 75% noted that they essentially buy from environmentally responsible companies (Borin, Lindsey-Mullikin and Krishnan, 2013). While companies from around the world gradually launch green campaigns, while retaining competitiveness, it also leads to the formation of numerous challenges for them. For companies it is important to understand many potential benefits if they continue with the environmental business in the long run (Frandsen and Johansen, 2001).

The growth of congress tourism in recent years often causes conflicts with contemporary concerns about the environmental impact of travel on the local community and the wider environment. Currently the most current problem, "act green'", is a topic of much discussion and characterized by an attempt to combat many types of environmental degradation. Various ecological efforts resulted in pressure on people to change their everyday behavior and consumption, and this applies to every individual and the authorities as well. These pressures result in a significant shift, as this may result with demanding the abolition of individual comfort and convenience in order to significantly improve environmental protection (Ruffolo, 2015).

Hotels, as the most common location of unfolding business meetings, have the highest energy and water consumption and the poorest energy efficiency in the field of accommodation. Due to the hotels one time facilities and products, systems for cooling and heating, requirements of living light and water consumption, hotels are often eco-hostile companies. Authors Lundie, Dwyer and Forsyth made a research on environmental protection from tourism side using the input-output analysis, and have demonstrated that the main segment that causes energy intake is exactly accommodation, which makes 16-29% of total energy demand (Park and Boo, 2010). From the above mentioned it can be concluded that all segments, including conference tourism and overall tourism, participating in greenhouse gas emissions, should contribute to solving the problem.

Green Meeting Industry Council is an important source of expertise on sustainability in the meetings, incentives, events and the meetings industry. GMIC helps its members and the industry to understand and realize the benefits of sustainability by increasing the effective protection of the environment, social values and business impact on their events and meetings. GMIC consists of individual members and supporting companies that want to change congress market in the direction of green meetings (Arnaudov and Koseka, 2012). Green meeting can be defined as a meeting in which the procedures that are in conflict with the environment cannot be used, for example, using the Internet instead of paper documents from recycled material, the use of porcelain tableware, etc.

Green strategy is seen as an initiative with a focus on reducing waste, efficient use of resources and focus on meeting the needs of customers with the lowest possible cost. It implies an abbreviation 3R, whose meaning can vary, but the most commonly used terms are: reduce, reuse and recycle (Duarte and Cruz-Machado, 2013).

Green meetings as part of business tourism are becoming more widespread around the world. Despite the fact that their implementation requires a large initial financial expenditure, over time investment in their development will result in higher profit than the initial cost, and this is recognized by more and more organizations which then decide on their introduction. Hotels that possess "sustainable" certificate become more recognized in the world as guests appreciate eco-friendly hotels and all the features that this implies.

Sweden is an example of a country where convention centers achieve the effects of environmentally sustainable meetings also outside of the hotel and conference halls. Their opinion is that all the sectors are related, from culture, gastronomy, entertainment all the way by transport. In an order for a business meeting to be sustainable, conference facilities, exhibition halls, hotels, catering, and transportation to and within a destination also must be "green". The goal is for others to see that their guiding principle for progress is exactly environmental sustainability (The Swedish Exhibition & Congress Centre).

The following graph shows which information and products are offered by Scandinavian countries to its customers to assist them in the implementation of environmentally sustainable business meeting. The offer is compared between the two years, 2012 and 2013, in order to conclude on what the help is mostly based, maybe on mobile applications or on information that is exposed on the Internet portals.

Graph 3:   **Information and products that are offered to customers to help them organize more "green" business meetings**
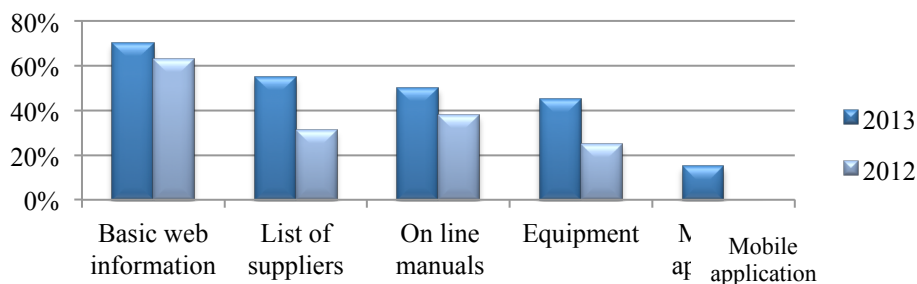
Source: Scandinavian Destination Sustainability Index, Scandinavian Chapter of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), 2013, p. 15.

In 2012, no single town from the Nordic region used the mobile application to provide help in the organization of "green" meetings, and the reason can be seen in the fact that at that time the importance of using mobile technology had not yet been realized, or, the advantages that it provides have not been recognized. However, already in the

following observed year, mobile applications were used by 15% of cities, 20 of them. List of suppliers whose work are based on environmental sustainability, were offered by 31% of the cities in 2012, and in 2013, over 50% of the cities. The biggest help with "green" meetings Convention Bureau see in providing useful information on the Internet. It can be concluded that the use of the enclosed information and products that serve as an aid increased in 2013 compared to 2012.

3. SURVEY RESEARCH ON ATTENDENTS PERCEPTIONS ON ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN MEETING INDUSTRY

A survey research was conducted in May 2015 for the purpose of drawing conclusions about the environmental awareness of participants of meetings industry. In order to research results to be credible, respondents were the participants of two different international congresses, in different cities. The research was conducted at the hotel Well in Tuheljske Toplice, Croatia, which possesses "sustainable" certificate and in hotel Bonaca in Bol, Croatia, which is not environmentally certified hotel. The questionnaire contains 23 questions covering the basic socio-demographic characteristics, participants' attitudes towards congress and thoughts of participants on environmentally sustainable business meetings. For the purpose of the credibility of the research results, the survey was divided to participants on the last day of the congress, which lasted three days. Of the total of 234 questionnaires divided on both congresses, 157 were valid.

Analyzing the demographic structure of participants of both conferences, it can be concluded that on both conference there was a larger number of men than women, in a ratio of 2:1, because there were 66 % males and 31 % females. This ratio confirms the fact that in the business industry there are more men than women, and that they more often and in greater numbers participate on national and international meetings. When it comes to age, the highest percentage of participants' age is between the 56 and 65 years since the business industry requires experienced and highly educated people. During one year the most congress participants went to one or two business meetings, while three to five times a year goes somewhat fewer respondents. Since it is known that the largest number of business meetings is held in the pre and post season, it is not surprising that 64% of respondents usually go to conferences during spring, following with fall (23%). The remaining 11% of participants said they usually go in winter on various business meetings, while only insignificant 2% said they went on conferences during the summer.

Once when sociodemographic characteristics of participants were explained, by the analysis of the following answers it will be explained how the respondents are familiar with environmentally sustainable business meetings, or, how they personally attach importance to environmental sustainability when choosing transport for arrival to a conference destination, and when choosing a hotel in which the business meetings are held.

When asked if they take into account environmental protection when choosing means of transport, the answers of participants were almost equally divided. So, only 53% of respondents said yes, while the remaining 47% do not think about it. Participants estimated that when choosing the congress for them the most important is the social program that conference offers, scientific program and the transport accessibility of destination. Program for escort is next criteria which is also very important, while the transport accessibility within the destination and the importance of congress seem less important.

With the development of various means of transport, especially aircraft, all parts of the world have become accessible, regardless of available funds and mutual distance of destinations. As for the distance in time, airlines offer the fastest arrival to any destination. For this reason it is not surprising that the participants of both congresses chose the aircraft as most commonly used means of transport (61%). After the aircraft, most of participants used a personal car (27%) in order to arrive to congress, while the boat was used by only 5% of the participants. Remaining 7% respondents used the possibility of reaching the conference by bus or train.

More than two thirds of transport-related greenhouse gas emissions are from road transport, however, there are also significant emissions from the aviation and maritime sectors and these sectors are experiencing the fastest growth in emissions (European Commission, 2012). Taking into account the answer to the previous question on awareness of participants of congress tourism on the selection of transport for the arrival to the destination and the actual choice of means of transport, it is concluded that the participants are environmentally conscious, but only in theory and not in practice.

Figure 4: **Greenhouse gas emissions for by sector and mode of transport**

- Road transport 71,9%
- Total navigation 13,9%
- Total civil aviation 12,8%
- Other 0,8%
- Railways 0,6%
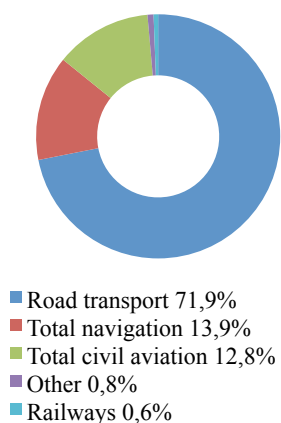
Source: European Commission: Climate

Figure 5: **The means of transport used arrival to destination**

- Road transport 63,7%
- Total navigation 15,1%
- Total civil aviation 16,8%
- Other 1,8%
- Railways 2,6%
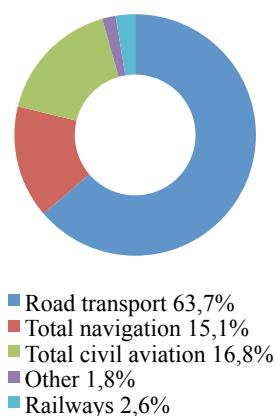
Source: Author actions in transport, 2012.

Participants were asked which hotel do they rather choose if you have a choice, is that a hotel with a "green" certificate, a hotel which does not posses one, or this feature is not important. Based on the results it can be concluded that all the participants are aware of the importance of environmental awareness, since not a single person stated that they will initially choose a hotel without a "green" certificate if they are offered the option of going to a hotel that is environmentally friendly. Despite the fact that the 62 % of respondents stated that they always rather choose a "green" hotel, the remaining participants did not attach importance to such a label when choosing hotel accommodation. This means that further training in business industry on environmental sustainability is necessary, because it is the only way for progress in the near future.

The questions below are particularly addressed to conference in an environmentally certified hotel, and separately for regular hotel. When the attendees were asked whether they are willing to follow the guidelines of the ecological behavior, 84% of participants at the hotel without ecological certificate said yes, while on the same question participants at the hotel who has the " sustainable " certificate answered 100% positive.

Through following questions, the opinion of the attendants on the conference they were attending was explored and if they have recognized specific guidelines of ecological behavior. According to 16% of answers, participants in the regular hotel concluded that the products of biological origin were used, and 30 % participants concluded that the organizers used recycled products at the congress.

Hotel which has "sustainable" certificate adhered to the use of products of biological origin as well as recycled products, what was recognized by participants in a higher percentage from previously analyzed. When asked about the use of products of biological origin or biodegradable products, there was a positive response of 89 %, while the use of recycled products was identified by 67% of respondents.

Graph 5: **Recognized environmental operations in hotel which has environmental certification and in the hotel without environmental certification**
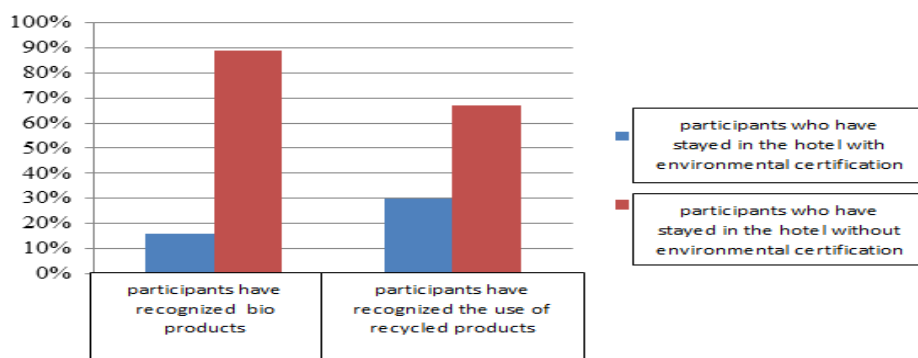
Source: author '

Based on the overall results of presented research on two conferences, one can conclude that the participants are aware of the importance of the ecological activities of the hotels, but also of the need for their own environmental awareness. But their activities are still not recognized enough as evidenced by respondents' answers. Therefore, greater focus on sustainability in all segments of business tourism and its stakeholders is necessary

4. CONCLUSION

After all the elements that are typical for business tourism and also for "green meetings" have been explained, research part of the work applied the theory to a system of organizing business meetings. Business tourists are becoming aware that the constant development of business and leisure tourism adversely affects the devastation of the environment and entire destination. For this reason, they are increasingly turning to sustainable development, and look for hotels that have "sustainable " certificate which proves their environmental awareness.

By conducting a survey research in hotel that is assigned a specified certificate and in hotel which does not have it, a difference between the responses of participants was expected. However, thoughts of participants in both hotels were similar. There has been disagreement whether the hotel uses recycled products, products of biological origin, local foods, etc. If the hotel has a certificate there should be doubt, whole business focus should be toward sustainability so these features would come to the fore.

Given that the number of hotels with the certificate for ecologically sustainable business is gradually increasing, this also announces the bigger progress not only in leisure, but also in business tourism sector because, as already mentioned above, the business tourists want an offer that does not destroy the environment and is based on quality and unique service.

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