

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION – SOURCE OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES AND SOLUTION FOR TOURIST PROTECTION

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Abstract

The recent preoccupations of national institutions and organizations and, especially of European and global institutions, regarding the responsible consumption of raw materials, resources and materials became more and more intense in the last years. In the same time, they contribute to the creation of a mentality of equilibrium in consumption and among consumers. With no connection with the area of activity, the XXIst century companies make real efforts to obtain competitive advantages by a consequent implementation of social responsibility, by assuring a responsible consumption in all the processes, and by protecting the consumer interests and rights.

It became more and more frequent for the companies from tourism industry to apply the principles of sustainable development and to follow a strategy of responsible consumption. Their efforts are focused on providing different and unique experiences to contemporary consumer. In this way, the responsible consumption becomes not only a competitive advantage, but, also, an efficient way of informing the tourists and protecting their interests and rights. Without having a well-determined “ideological motivation”, tourists become more careful in responsible selection of services, depending on their degree of sustainability. They choose those touristic services that have a big contribution at the environment protection and preservation, respectively that integrate in a harmonious and synergic way cultural, psycho-social and emotional considerations. The institutions that regulate the touristic services supply contribute, also, at the careful monitoring of messages submitted to tourists and the messages content.

To measure the way that the rural tourist guesthouses from Romania base their actions on the responsible consumption of raw materials and resources in their strategies of approaching the market and attracting tourists, in order to get sustainable competitive advantages and to offer efficient solutions to protect the tourists interests, the authors did a qualitative empirical research among the managers of these kind of accommodation units.

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Based on some matrix of importance considered dimensions of the responsible consumption in the analyzed guesthouses, the authors attempt is fulfilled by the development and emphasis of some strategies, which can increase the tourist safety and can contribute to a proper strategy defining, if they are implemented in an adequate way.

Keywords: touristic guesthouses; tourist protection; competitive advantage; competition; responsible consumption; perceived risk; the matrix of importance.

JEL classification: M14, M31, M38

Introduction

At the global level, the tourism industry provides about 284 million jobs and contributes with 9.8% to the global GDP. The 3.3% growth estimated for 2016 makes this industry one of the main engines locally, regionally and globally (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2016). Investments in tourism and implementation of offer differentiation strategies become absolutely necessary, being the result of the efforts to satisfy the tourist needs, to please the investors by increasing their incomes, and by a maintaining the employees in the companies (Ernst & Young, 2015). Implementing any strategy in tourism is not possible anymore in our society without the alignment and the tracking of sustainable development principles and their inclusion in the own business strategies (Dabija and Băbuț, 2013). This main objective is more important as tourists tend to consider not only a mentality focused on environmental protection and the decreasing of raw materials and resources consumption, but also an orientation to sustainability, to green products and services (Mah, 2004; Gosling and Voght, 2007; Fooks et al, 2013; Dabija and Pop, 2013), respectively to new forms of tourism – adventure tourism, eco-tourism, culinary tourism, tourism for hunting, and so on (Anglin, 2015; Postelnicu and Dabija, 2016). Of course, in the approaching of target-segments of tourists, beside following the principles of sustainability and the responsible consumption of resource, the companies should take into consideration the rules, the procedures and the regulations of different national and regional institutions and organizations, contributing to an adequate protection of the consumers rights and interests.

To determine the measure that the rural guesthouses from the Romanian environment base their strategies of approaching the market and attracting the tourists on a responsible consumption of raw materials and resources, that allows them to get competitive advantages and tourists protection, the authors did an empirical research among the Romanian agro-touristic guesthouses. One of the main objectives of this research was to find the measure that the responsible consumption is realized by the decisional level in the considered guesthouses and how it is transposed in concrete actions, in order to contribute at the tourists and local communities rights and interests protection.

The novelty and originality of this attempt consists in the development of some matrix of importance that correlate the responsible consumption – at conceptual, operational and strategic level – with the determinant factors (physical, financial, and time safety; the cultural, social and psychological dimension of the touristic service; touristic services sustainability), generators of competitive advantages for Romanian guesthouses. Based on them, in a holistic approach, finding efficient strategic solution for the tourists and local community protection is permitted.

1. Literature review

Sustainable development, social responsibility and responsible consumption become more and more connected with the company competitiveness and with the welfare of the contemporary society. In fact, they supposed to develop some correlations and an analysis of the connection between business, in general and society, in particular. Tourism is an important driver for economic and social development of the local communities, by contributing in a direct way at the economic growth of some countries (Cîrstea and Cîrstea, 2015). Of course, tourism may have, also, negative effects by the increase of people that travel annually and by the adverse effect on natural and anthropic heritage (Boghean and Boghean, 2006). To prevent the tourism negative effects on society, the literature and the regulation institutions refer more and more to sustainable development of tourism (Dabija and Băbuț, 2013), to responsible consumption of resources, to eco-tourism, etc (Castiaux, 2012; Borland and Lindgreen, 2013; Borland et al., 2016).

Bâc (2012) analysed the origins and the negative effects of tourism on the local host-communities, by highlighting the ways that the consumers-citizens succeed to support the society by their contribution to responsible consumption improvement. In fact, they have initiatives and they participate in some specific activities with the purpose of making aware the company's management and the authorities to decrease some excessive consumptions. Sometimes, individuals buy domestic products, boycotting products, services or trademarks of companies whose behaviour is considered irresponsible, immoral or non-ethic (Bhattacharya, 2009; Dabija, Pop and Postelincu, 2016). The preoccupations for studying the responsible consumption became more intense in the literature (Enderle, 2016; Uddin, Siddiqui and Islam, 2016), as the specialists realized the profound implication of this phenomenon on national economies. In the marketing strategies concerning the product and the promotion, some companies use the idea of responsible consumption as an asset for the competitiveness and at the same time, as effective information solution (Ulusoy, 2016) and as a way to protect the target audience. In this way, organizations contribute to a better information process through rationality, consumers become better informed more demanding and aware, to a higher level, of the repercussions of their consumption on the environment in which they live (Gonzalez et al., 2009).

According to some recent studies (Canada Newswir, 2012), responsible consumption refers to recycling, environmental protection, reducing consumption of raw materials and resources, environmental protection, including flora and fauna, reducing energy consumption, at local level, assuring sustainable transport based on green energy and so on. Though, the same study reveals the fact that often the consumers consider that they do not own enough information about the benefits and especially about the consequences of a responsible consumption on environment, society, companies and their own future.

Delpal and Hatchuel (2007) show that people seek arguments to protect themselves, achieving a certain social awareness when buying, refusing to buy products involving women and child labour, which cause animal suffering, pollution, etc. They are willing to pay more in order to achieve these commitments and buy products from companies that make credible arguments in favour of responsible consumption, and sustain by concrete actions these preoccupations. These aspects demonstrate that the responsibility for consumption is an expression of social and / or of environment concerns that people have when they decide to prefer products and/or to buy different services (Francois-Lecompte,

2005). They come from the need of security of individuals when they buy products or when they consider different services in order to satisfy their needs.

For Webb, Mohr and Harris (2009) the responsible consumption is represented by the synergic action of three dimensions: buying products based on the performance of companies on social responsibility; recycling; avoiding or reducing consumption based on negative environmental impacts. We can find these dimensions in the theory and, also, in the practice of development and implementation of marketing strategies regarding promotional messages associated to trademark and its capital (Torelli, Monga and Kaikati, 2012; Samu and Wimer, 2014; Sierra et al., 2015; Guzman and Davis, 2017), with possible applicability in tourism and connected with responsibility at demand and, also, offer level.

Sustainable development and, especially, sustainable consumption find applicability in the touristic field, abounding in definitions, descriptions and empirical researches (Butler, 1999b; Page and Dowling, 2002; Dabija and Băbuț, 2013). Strongly connected with sustainable consumption is the protection of the consumer from tourism (Greenwood and Dwyer, 2015), respectively the responsible consumption that companies are searching for in order to obtain competitive advantage, by creating and selling unique touristic services adapted to target segments needs (Pinto et al., 2011; Valor and Carrero, 2014; Giesler and Veresiu, 2014; Antonetti and Maklan, 2015; Jonkute and Stanikis, 2016; Shobeiri et al., 2016; Ulusoy, 2016). However, the literature is very poor in analysing the connection between responsible consumption, the sustainable competitive advantage and protection of touristic consumer, in general, and especially regarding the consumer of rural tourism services consumer. This idea might be correlated with a series of critics addressed to the traditional consumption, promoted even within the European Union, that encourage the consumer to increase shopping without considering the fact that the resources on Earth and the regenerative capacity are limited. In practice, the actual politics of international organisms are not always referring to consumption decreasing (Tonner, 2000). This must be recognized as strategic base of any viable strategy based on the principles of sustainability assuring a social responsible consumption. The politic of consumer protection should be reconfigured by considering the environment needs of the contemporary society. At the European level some legal acts regarding environment, consumer protection and competition were adopted (Moody, Kireeva and Butucel, 2010). Regarding the touristic field the legal acts cover the public safety guarantee, the tourists interests protection, no matter where they travel. A recent research shows that the level of satisfaction perceived by tourists from Europe regarding safety during their travel and the quality of accommodation is high (95%) (Eurobarometer, 2014).

Romania aligned its legal framework by adopting the Emergency Ordinance no. 14/2011 (OUG no. 14 from 2011), in order to regulate the legal issues between the touristic services seller and consumers, regarding directly the benefits of holiday products, to assure a high level of tourists interests and rights protection.

2. Research methodology

In order to find the measure that Romanian guesthouses from rural areas take into consideration, in their attempt to establish strategies for market approaching based on responsible consumption of raw materials and resources, that allow them to gain sustainable competitive advantages and the tourists protection, the authors conducted a

qualitative marketing research among guesthouse owners in rural areas (including agro-touristic guesthouses) in Brasov county.

The authors decided to have the research in this rural area, considering the high concentration of tourist accommodation in this county. The sampling base consisted of 259 guesthouses and 487 rural guesthouses. The sampling was conducted using the method of quotas, being considered the most representative as it has advantages in the qualitative research (Andrei, 2001; Morse et al.; Golafshani, 2003; Silverman, 2013). Regarding the sample, some authors consider that it has to be “enough” big and varied to assure the achievement of the objectives (Kuzel, 1999; Marshall, 1996, Patton, 2015); other authors sustain that it is necessary to approximate the dimension and to evaluate it during research, with no possibility to determine the sample dimension (Cho and Trent, 2016).

To determine the sample dimension, the authors took into consideration the concept of “*power of information*”, developed by Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2016). According to this, a sample should be bigger (there is no specified dimension of it) if the purposes/objectives cover multiple variations of the phenomenon and processes. Considering the fact that information got in the in-depth interview is highly powerful and the purpose of the research is to determine implicit and/or explicit correlations between regulations, practices and perceptions regarding the responsible consumption, competitive advantages and consumer protection, the authors estimated a number of 23 owners of rural guesthouses respectively 3% of the identified collectivity (8 agro-touristic guesthouses and 15 rural guesthouses). The validation of this kind of research can be realized by a strong interaction between researcher and the members of sample (transactional validity) and by the approximation of the sample to an ideal dimension (validation by transformation) (Seale, 1999; Lincoln and Guba; Denzin, 2003).

In conducting the research there were used the in-depth interview method and the semi-structured interview process. The respondents were the owners of the guesthouses and agro-touristic guesthouses. The structure of the interview guide is presented in Table no. 1 and the discussion topics are addressed *in the mirror*, as an adapted version of the transversal method of qualitative research (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016).

Table no. 1: The structure of the interview guide by themes

INTERVIEW TOPICS			
Explicitly presented by owners	1. ... safety (physical, financial, time)	Attitudes and opinions expressed by owners of tourist guesthouses in rural areas on the desired competitive advantages, the source of these advantages, the protection of tourists and communities	Explicitly presented by owners or implied by the researcher (implied)
	2. ... cultural dimension of the tourist services		
	3. ... social dimension of the tourist services		
	4. ... psychological dimension of the tourist services		
	5. ... sustainability of tourism services		

The participation to the interview was voluntary, using a recruiting questionnaire, so, the guesthouses owners expressed their approval to participate to the interview, by knowing the purpose and the objectives of research. The research was conducted between 1 and 30 November 2016; it is an exploratory research and the sample cannot be considered statistically significant. However, its results might be taken into consideration to make some recommendation regarding the management of the studied rural guesthouses.

To achieve its purpose in the research, the authors developed a preliminary flowchart (Figure no. 1), in order to facilitate the identification and analysis of the link between the use of the concept of responsible consumption in rural areas guesthouses' strategic initiatives, in order to obtain sustainable competitive advantages and, simultaneously to protect tourists and local communities (abbr. CSAP).

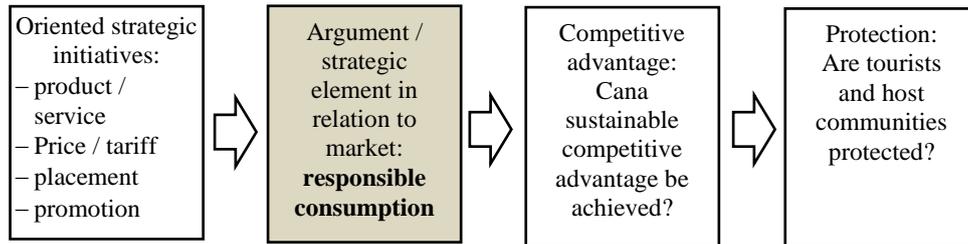


Figure no. 1: Preliminary flow chart identify and analyze the CSAP relationship

The authors do not consider a priori that the chosen strategic element and the responsible consumption are unique in relation to market, there are some other elements, such as prices, distribution, etc, that are not included in this research. The results from this research were categorized and analyzed depending on the similarity and compatibility of answers, respectively on the expressed opinions for each of the five themes (see Table no. 1), that they met at least two times. The isolated answers were thrown out from the analysis, being considered un-significant. To point the connections between the elements of research several matrix of importance were conceived, in order to obtain efficient strategic solutions for tourists and local community protection.

3. Results and discussions

By the research theme, the safety expected by tourists when they are accommodated, respectively by the perceived risk at touristic services acquisition, a series of different opinions of the managers were revealed. The main categories of risks considered relevant for tourists were: the monetary risk (the touristic service is too much expensive or it does not offer the expected satisfaction for the paid price), functional risk (the services and the material conditions do not offer the expected comfort), physical risk (the services and the material conditions may cause injuries, they may affect the physical safety, they may put in danger tourists life, health or security), social risk (lack of supplementary services, recreation services or the lack of personnel capable to answer to the tourists needs), temporal risk (reducing the staying to find another guesthouse that fulfils the tourist needs) and the risk perceived before buying, respectively during consumption and/or using the touristic packages (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005; Lepp and Gibson, 2008; Vlaev, Chater and Stuart, 2009; Pop et al., 2011).

The owners of the rural guesthouses appreciate in different ways the need for the safety of tourists. So, four of the eight owners of the rural guesthouses and six of the nine agro-touristic guesthouses say that using aspects regarding sustainability (clean environment, support for the local communities, durable products and resources the idea of a long-lasting of villages) in the communication process, respectively in the concrete presentation at tourism fairs give trust and diminish in a significant way the physical risk, the financial, and temporal risks, also. They consider that it is important that tourists accumulate positive

experiences in the guesthouses and, also, in the area they are visiting, situation that will lead to attenuate and even eliminate the main categories of the perceived risks. This situation is extremely important for all the target groups of tourists, with a special role and a highly intensity in the families with minor children. Exterior and interior design realized with traditional materials (wood, stone, ceramics, wool), the kitchen with dishes made from household items and / or locally sourced, the kindness and familiarity of hosts are the main instruments that managers use to contribute at the diminishing of the perceived risks. In fact, creating a pleasant ambiance, a unique, warm and familial one represents the strategy adopted by most of the guesthouses owners, in order to decrease considerably the risks.

By strengthening this image, important steps in achieving responsible consumption are made. The managers appreciate that tourists get a higher added-value when they decide to accommodate in agro-touristic guesthouses, because they reduce their expenses – compared to hotels and/or urban guesthouses – and especially because of the familiar atmosphere – the fact that during the accommodation the tourists consume healthy, traditional products, in accordance with nature. In the same time, they spend their leisure time in an unpolluted environment. These aspects are considered rightly to represent major competitive advantages of the touristic guesthouses, especially compared to urban accommodation units, by contributing at the increasing of tourist safety and to improve their welfare (Table no. 2). In this case, and, also, in the next cases, the appreciation “Weak”, “Medium” and “Strong” are implicit results from the contain of discussions and explicit results from the answers to the direct questions addressed to the guesthouses managers during the interview: “How do you consider the impact on the competitive relations? What about on demand/tourists?”

Table no. 2: The matrix of importance of safety and risk according to responsible consumption

Safety and risk	Guesthouses management perspective				
	Levels of response / action			Perception of RC*	
	C	S	O	Competitive impact	Impact on demand
The tourists perception on responsible consumption			Positive experience	Strong	Strong
	Exterior design with traditional materials, specific to the area			Strong	Strong
	Interior design with traditional materials, specific to the area			Strong	Strong
	The kitchen dishes from household items and / or locally sourced			Strong	Strong
	HACCP standards implementation			Medium	Strong
	Unpolluted environment		Unpolluted environment	Strong	Strong
	Rates lower than in urban competition	Rates lower than in urban competition	Rates lower than in urban competition	Strong	Medium

Note: C – Conceptual level (known); S – Strategic level (medium and long term planning); O – Operational level (applied on short term)

*Responsible consumption (RC) is considered a solution for tourist safety

Within the framework of the second topic the tourists' expectations about the cultural dimension of performance were discussed. Every owner of a agro-touristic and rural guesthouse pointed to varying degrees, the elements that they consider important in this dimension (Figure no. 2): traditional cuisine, archaic and authentic ambiance in the guesthouse, local fairs, celebrations, festivals, local artisans, religious holidays, carols, visits and, where applicable, eating at the sheepfold.

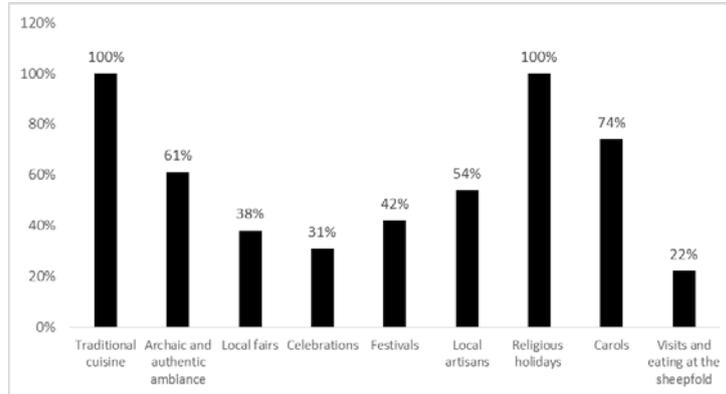


Figure no. 2: The presence of elements which are forming the cultural dimension of responsible consumption

The authenticity of these elements constitute, at the operational level, arguments for the use of responsible consumption as a strategic asset in the competitive context, but also in effective solutions to protect tourists and host communities. These communities represent indirect beneficiaries of the touristic services from the area. The importance of the cultural dimension of the touristic services (Table no. 3) is represented in a matrix form, presenting the way of perceiving the responsible consumption issues.

Table no. 3: The matrix of importance of cultural dimension according to responsible consumption

Cultural dimension of touristic service	Guesthouses management perspective				
	Levels of response / action			Perception of RC*	
	C	S	O	Competitive impact	Impact on demand
The tourists perception on responsible consumption	Traditional cuisine, gastrotourism			Strong	Strong
	Archaic and authentic ambiance			Strong	Strong
	Local fairs			Strong	Weak
	Celebrations		Celebrations	Medium	Medium
	Festivals			Medium	Medium
	Local artisans		Local artisans	Strong	Medium
	Religious holidays			Medium	Strong
	Carols			Medium	Strong
	Visits and eating at the sheepfold		Visits and eating at the sheepfold	Strong	Strong

Note: C – Conceptual level (known); S – Strategic level (medium and long term planning); O – Operational level (applied on short term)

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The social dimension of tourism services was the subject of the third discussion topic. In this regard, the interviewed owners of guesthouses believe that the expectations of tourists are aimed at access to services related to the accommodation (transport, sport equipment rental), the leisure services (pool, recreational games, horseback riding, sleigh rides or carriage rides, entertaining evenings) the presence in the online environment, some of which are, in their opinion, less consistent with the idea of responsible consumption and close to traditional consumption. During the interview, it could be inferred that, in the guesthouses from rural areas, they do not constitute advantages for sustainable competition because they have a weak capacity to be differentiated and are not equivalent to the idea of protection of tourists who request services from rural guesthouses and agro-tourism guesthouses. Regarding consumer protection, the impact is considered to be medium (Table no. 4)

Table no. 4: The matrix of importance of social dimension according to responsible consumption

Social dimension of touristic service	Guesthouses management perspective				
	Levels of response / action			Perception of RC*	
	C	S	O	Competitive impact	Impact on demand
The tourists perception on responsible consumption	Transport			Weak	Medium
	Sports equipment rental			Weak	Weak
	Pool			Weak	Weak
	Recreational games			Weak	Medium
	Sleigh rides or carriage rides			Medium	Weak
	Entertaining evenings			Weak	Weak
	The presence in the online environment (site, booking, trip advisor, social media)			Strong	Strong

Note: C – Conceptual level (known); S – Strategic level (medium and long term planning); O – Operational level (applied on short term)

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The fourth topic of the interview was related to the image of rural guesthouses owners about psychological expectations and the perceived risk of tourists in this respect (Table no. 5). The results reveal that tourists have a high level of involvement and show great vulnerability in relation to the quality of tourism services, therefore stimulating responsible consumption is from this standpoint, transitive. The guesthouses provide arguments in favor of responsible consumption, being regarded as social responsible by tourists, the information made available being “durable”, generating confidence on long term.

Often, the high price of the touristic service and, in the same time, its variations in time represents a vector of diminishing the perceived risk (Boier, 1993), being associated with high quality, the tourists appreciate the analyzed accommodation unit prices as medium. By a psychological point of view this behaviour represents – for the guesthouses owners – the result of a positive experience, by inducing the idea of durability and responsibility, idea associated by the guesthouses owners and, also, by the tourists with protection of their own interests and needs. As the level of involvement is higher, the psychological risk feels stronger, therefore the owners of guesthouses in rural areas focus on encouraging responsible consumption based on traditional products. So, they act through psychological component on

tourists, succeeding at the operational level to offer sustainable competitive advantages and at the same time, an effective solution for the protection of tourists (Table no. 5).

Table no. 5: The matrix of importance of psychological dimension according to responsible consumption

Social dimension of touristic service	Guesthouses management perspective				
	Levels of response / action			Perception of RC*	
	C	S	O	Competitive impact	Impact on demand
The tourists perception on responsible consumption	Implication			Strong	Strong
	Price levels			Strong	Strong

Note: C – Conceptual level (known); S – Strategic level (medium and long term planning); O – Operational level (applied on short term)

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The last topic of the interview discussed how the owners of guesthouses believe that tourists perceive sustainability of the provided services and at the same time, how they use the idea of responsible consumption as a strategic element in the competitive context, generating added-value for them and differentiating the offer. (Table no. 6). An important role in this case is owned by the promotional strategy and the ability of guesthouses manager to position on the market by using aspects regarding sustainability as a psychological pylon of communication. Even though the rural guesthouses owners focus on respecting the principles of sustainability to their own services and on including them in their activities and strategies, however their actions are practical, and they do not succeed always to define exactly this step. But, during the interviews, they highlighted concepts like “eternity”, life continuity for the local rural community and the traditional village, etc. From the perspective of sustainability, it is deemed that the stimulation of responsible consumption does not generate the idea of limits, of mental or physical restrictions to the tourists. They get the message that at the guesthouse they can find food produced at the local level, in a traditional way. As Table no. 6 shows, the tourists perceive that they do not consume resources that would be in danger of perishing, that their household and the local community have continuity over time, and can provide the necessary goods anytime.

Table no. 6: The matrix of importance of touristic services sustainability according to responsible consumption

Touristic services sustainability	Guesthouses management perspective				
	Levels of response / action			Perception of RC*	
	C	S	O	Competitive impact	Impact on demand
The tourists perception on responsible consumption	Eternity, continuity			Strong	Strong
	The idea of non-perishable resources (in the given conditions)			Strong	Strong

Note: C – Conceptual level (known); S – Strategic level (medium and long term planning); O – Operational level (applied on short term)

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As it can be observed, the analysis of responses and opinions formulated under the five topics of the interview, made it possible to group them according to the importance assigned to them by decision makers from the rural guesthouses, and according to the conceptual, strategic and operational aspects which are conferred in relation to two of the defining elements of the market: demand (in terms of protection need felt by tourists) and competition.

Conclusions

Based on the subjective appreciations of the representatives of the rural guesthouses regarding the five themes of researching, the authors created an original approach by conceiving a matrix of importance of the five investigated dimensions (risk and safety, cultural dimension, social dimension, psychological dimension, sustainability of services dimension), highlighting their connections with the responsible consumption at the analyzed accommodation units. The analysis also included an evaluation of the degree that the five dimensions are:

- known by the rural touristic guesthouses managers (the C component - conceptual)
- included in the general business strategy (the S component - strategic)
- transposed by concrete actions in the guesthouses activities (the O component - operational)

By synthesising the five matrix of importance (see Table no. 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) we notice (Table no. 7) that managers know effectively only the measures that target the tourist safety and determine the decreasing of the risks perceived by tourists when they choose the touristic service. At strategic level, where the planning on medium and long term is needed, the managers usually include aspects regarding tourists safety and the diminishing of risks perceived by them and, also, aspects regarding the cultural, social and psychological dimensions of touristic services. Finally, at the operational level the managers concrete actions are focused especially on the social and psychological dimensions of the touristic services, but, also, on the service sustainability. These aspects, analyzed in synergy make us appreciate that in the case the responsible consumption of resources and raw materials has an important impact both from the competition perspective and the protection of consumer rights and interests (Table no. 7). In fact, the most powerful influence on the general business strategy in the analyzed guesthouses belongs to the “safety and risk”, “touristic services sustainability” and “psychological” dimensions. A variable can be highlighted in the case of cultural dimension and the social one, because managers, even though they conceptualize them in a way, they consider that a part of their structural components have no sufficient power of differentiation to competition, including the accommodation unit from urban area, aspects received in the same way by the tourists. So, local fairs, festivals, religious holidays and carols can be founded both in the rural and urban areas, so, the competitive advantages being reduced, even though the impact on demand is high. In a similar way, all the components of the social dimension, excepting the presence in on-line, are perceived with a low impact, regarding both, competition and demand.

Table no. 7: A synthesis of the opinions regarding the responsible consumption

General interview theme	Number of themes	C	S	O	RC*/competition	CR*/demand
Safety and risk	7	1	2	0	Strong	Strong
Cultural dimension	9	0	3	0	Medium-Strong	Medium-Strong
Social dimension	7	0	3	3	Weak	Weak-Medium
Psychological dimension	2	0	1	1	Strong	Strong
Services sustainability	2	0	0	0	Strong	Strong
TOTAL	27	1	9	4		

Note: C – Conceptual level (known); S – Strategic level (medium and long term planning); O – Operational level (applied on short term)

**Responsible consumption (RC) is considered a solution for tourist safety*

By a conjunct analysis we may conclude the following:

- even though the importance of responsible consumption of resources and raw materials is well known by the guesthouses owners in most of the cases, the concept is almost not taken into consideration by them in the medium and long term strategies
- the meanings of responsible consumption of resources and raw materials perception is different in the considered dimensions, having low and strong intensities.

Considering these aspects, we appreciate that in the analyzed guesthouses it is necessary to develop coherent politics regarding the competition strategies not only for each accommodation unit, but, also at local and regional level. This kind of politic can assure the necessary framework to know and to apply the concept of *responsible consumer* and, also, the impact of responsible consumption on demand, offer and competition. Through this politics the guesthouses owners will be encouraged to implement medium and long term strategies regarding this kind of consumption.

From the conceptual perspective, the contribution of this research consists in finding a connection between responsible consumption, competitive advantage and tourist protection, making possible a re-defining of responsible consumption through the multiple needs of tourists. In this way, the responsible consumption of products and touristic service from rural area should be approached from the perspective of the ancient connection between human beings and nature, and, also, from the cultural, social, psychological and sustainability aspects. The authors contribution in this area consists in identifying these elements and describing the way that the responsible consumption, part of trinom touristic services-market-tourist can be analyzed.

From the managerial point of view the authors contribution consists in the identification of measure in which the variables of responsible consumption have strategic and operational valences, of the intensity of competition on relations, and, of the measure in which the responsible consumption may and must become a solution for the tourist protection.

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