CULTURAL DIMENSIONS AND IMAGE: AN ESSAY ON THE IMPACTS OF MASCULINITY AND INDIVIDUALISM ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SUSTAINABILITY OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of sustainability has been discussed systematically within academic settings since the 70's. Even though some debates have already expanded significantly the approaching possibilities on the subject, there still seems to be a lack of discussion on its relationship with the cultural characteristics of different societies. Hence, the purpose of this essay is to discuss how the image of the sustainability of tourism destinations can vary across different social groups, whose values show opposite levels with regard to cultural aspects such as masculinity and individualism as proposed by Hofstede (1980). As suggested by the literature, both image and sustainability constructs are directly associated with cultural values (Milbrath, 1984; Mooij, 2010). In this sense, there is an opportunity for in-depth discussions regarding the possible relationships among those constructs. After a theoretical review and critical analysis it was possible to present topics for future research, such as how the interpretation of the sustainability of a destination can be embedded in the cultural influence on sustainable behavior.

Keywords: Sustainability; Destination Image; Cultural Dimensions; Masculinity; Individualism.

Introduction

Sustainability began to be systematically discussed within the academic field in the 70's (Dasmann, Milton & Freeman, 1973; Meadows et al., 1974; Mesarovic & Pestel, 1974). The first studies appeared in order to address some issues related to the impact of human actions on the environment and, immediately after, it became the object of interest for different study fields such as economics and humanistic perspectives (Lumley & Armstrong, 2004; Jones et al., 2008).

Despite being considered somehow a recent matter of scientific debate (Swart, Raskin & Robinson, 2003), the concepts of preservation, conservation and protection have for long been part of the human desire to avoid the destruction of species' natural conditions (Cooper et al. 2001). It shows that even without great visibility within the social applied studies, the sustainability ideals have always been present in people's minds, representing their wishes for acceptable basic survival conditions in the long term.

In the meantime, recent studies on the subject have pointed out socio-demographic growth levels of contemporary societies as a factor responsible for detaching the sustainability issue from reality (Goldstone, 2010; Gupta, 2012; Buhaug & Urdal, 2012). According to Raskin

(2000), the increasing degree of complexity in social structures has hampered, among other things, the development of global sustainability programs. In this sense, cultural barriers have become real obstacles for planning and implementing sustainable practices which may surpass the geographical boundaries of certain communities.

As advocated by Milbrath (1984), being or becoming sustainable assumes singular connotations for different social groups. Although this concern has already come out into the scientific field (Liverman et al., 1988), it is clear that so far discussions involving the theme still require further considerations. For instance, Robinson (2004) points out that the definition of the elements comprising the sustainability concept itself has not been clearly established in a manner which may overcome cultural barriers, making it therefore universally interpretable.

Despite the broad literature on issues related to sustainability, there is still a lack of studies aiming at investigating it deeply in association with aspects such as the cultural values. This limitation has prevented the advance of important discussions in certain research fields (Hunter, 1997). Most of the studies in the tourism field, for example, have exclusively been concerned with describing some of the sector's main impacts on the economy, society and environment (Pearce, 1995; Archer & Fletcher, 1996; Bar-on, 1999; Deery, Jago & Fredline, 2012). However, those researches neglect the role of social culture as a basic element, or yet a starting point, to better understand the factors that result in (non)consonant behaviors according to the principles of sustainability (Milbrath, 1984).

Mooij (2010) draws attention to the importance of culture on how individuals deal with various social issues. Accordingly, evidences show that from the cultural background acquired through one's social experiences, members of a group come to attribute values towards daily aspects of life (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, it is believed that the way different societies interpret the

sustainability, for example, may be a result of a combination of factors amongst which cultural values play a distinctive role. Therefore, they have been considered as fundamental elements to gather conclusions on the possible consequences on the sustainability image of tourism destinations.

The literature itself indicates that image is composed by multiple, complex and relativistic elements that are far beyond the limits of simplistic individual's interpretation (Gallarza, Saura & Garcia, 2002). It is a human conceptualization that results from merging the information received from the external environment and the individual's 'mental programming[1]' (Ruão, 2003). The latter being acquired through the ongoing social interactive experiences according to Hofstede's perspective (2001).

Based on what has been stated so far, the purpose of this paper is to begin a debate about the relationship between the image of tourism destination qua sustainability and the cultural values observed in different cultures. Thus, it is of importance, both for the academic realm and for the practioneers, to clearly understand how the sustainability imagery of a destination can acquire particular meanings for different societies. By acknowledging this, it will be possible to strategize efficient communication approaches leading to a proper positioning of sustainable tourism destinations in different cultures.

The following literature review aims at illustrating how the sustainability phenomenon has been investigated by researchers involved with tourism over the past years. Besides, the concept of image and how the sustainability factor can be inserted as a distinctive element for a destination will be presented. After that, the importance of cultural values as components

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[1] Set of values acquired by the individuals which show that people who have passed through the same social learning process tend to behave according to the expectations of a society (Hofstede, 2001).

enabling the creation of meanings for the sustainability among some social groups will be discussed.

Sustainability and Tourism

The origin of academic studies on sustainability in the context of tourism was first based on some widely disseminated concepts regarding the importance of preserving the planet's natural resources (Saarinen, 2006). However, in line with Hunter (1997) whilst new research perspectives on environmental issues continued to be developed, the tourism field followed a different path: it kept distance from the general core discussions on the topic. As a result, isolated and not so malleable approaches have emerged leading the knowledge in the area to tangential insights about the importance of the sustainability phenomenon to specific segments of the own industry of tourism (Gossling, 2000; Mccool & Lime, 2001).

An example of this was the indiscriminate attempt to find a definition to definitely bring the sustainability into the tourism field. In this sense, the term *sustainable tourism* began to be adopted by the literature as a way to seal the linkage between both phenomena (Butler, 1991; Lele, 1991; Lane, 1994; Sharpley, 2000). Since then the concept has become recurrent and indispensable in related research on this topic. Meanwhile, despite the success of scholars and researchers in coming up with some new broad pragmatic knowledge, little progress was achieved regarding deep theoretical background (Wall, 1993; Wheeller, 1993; Clarke, 1997; Garrod & Fyall, 1998; Liu, 2003; Sharpley, 2000). As stated by Hunter (1995) the level of isolation in the discussions about the development of a sustainable tourism activity was such that they no longer reflected the ideals of sustainability itself.

Saarinen (2006) goes even further and argues that some of the core aspects related to the impacts of a destination's exploitation as a tourism product began to be addressed so strictly that could only be of interest to the own scholars involved with the subject. This said, it must be

recognized the importance of much of these contributions such as the formulas developed for determining the maximum number of visitors a certain tourism place could bear (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Getz, 1983; Butler, 1999). There were also the discussions addressing the influence of local communities' interaction with different cultures (Doğan, 1989, Ap & Crompton, 1993; Pearce, 1995; Deery, Jago & Fredline, 2012) and, of course, the literature on the effects of certain factors such as seasonality on the economy of a tourism destination (Archer & Fletcher, 1996; Bar-on, 1999).

On the other hand, Gossling and Hall (2005) stress that in spite of contributing to knowledge, this literature did not go deeper on theoretical development, apart from depicting consequences of tourism activities for a given destination. In other words, the purpose of those studies were exclusively to access the sustainability in order to ensure the maintenance of the tourism production chain. Thus, much of the knowledge and results obtained did not impact on other fields of science except those directly involved with the development of the sector. Thereby, both tourism and sustainability as study phenomena were left largely unexplored from an interdisciplinary perspective.

It is known though that tourism is characteristically an economic activity based on the use of natural, cultural and human resources (Ahn, Lee & Shafer, 2002). For this reason, it stands out as one of the areas in which sustainability has shown to be essentially indispensable (Sadler, 1988; Wall, 1993). Probably this was the main reason why most of the research in the area seemed to have shifted towards a kind of *tourism-centric* paradigm whose concerns looked exclusively forward to the benefits for its own industry (Hunter, 1997; Burns, 1999).

Hunter and Green (1995) concluded that sustainable tourism should, besides the general conservation of natural and social resources of a location, encompass aspects such as the quality

of life of the local communities, as well as attempting to ensure the wellbeing and satisfaction of visitors. Nevertheless, even though some scholars in the field, and even the World Tourism Organization - WTO, may agree with this idea (Borg, Costa & Gotti, 1996; UNWTO, 2004; Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011), the reality is that in practice its operationalization has proved to be quite complex since it depends on the initiative of diverse actors involved in the sector (Muller, 1997).

In general it is assumed that sustainability can only be fully attained once it is considered that the welfare of future society depends primarily on present decisions, applying this to the field of tourism as well (Ahn, Lee & Shafer, 2002). Therefore, this paper draws attention to the influence that cultural values may exert on the interpretation of sustainability of certain destinations. Especially because the main motive that drives the tourism industry is related to the commodification of attributes such as nature, culture, and the social environment (Lanfant & Graburn, 1992).

Hence, the principles of sustainability once applied to tourism practices should focus on more than just the subsistence of the sector itself (Spangenberg, 2005; Saarinen, 2006). In a social context in which being or becoming sustainable has been considered an increasingly relevant issue (Bramwell & Lane, 2013), distinct perspectives should be used to access such phenomenon so that a better understanding of many of its aspects can be reached. Thus, in this paper a cultural approach is proposed as the means to assess the influence of social values on the interpretation of sustainable components of a tourism destination.

The Image of Sustainable Destinations

Just like sustainability, the concept of image of tourism destinations was inserted into the academic studies in the early 70's and, since then, has proven to be one of the most explored constructs in tourism literature (Pike, 2002). Over the last four decades, scholars have sought to

clearly understand the real impact of the consumers' (tourists) perception toward destinations on the decision making process (Chon, 1990; Gartner, 1993; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Martin & Bosque, 2008; Moraga, Artigas & Irigoyen, 2013).

Macinnis and Price (1987) state that the image construct encompasses a set of information and impressions an individual possesses regarding a given object: essentially composed of ideas, feelings and memories which are obtained by a sensory (or perceptual) process. In the case of tourism those elements tend to be directed onto the identity of a destination to be visited and, therefore, leading the individual to a pre-conceptualized interpretation of the location itself.

The image creation process towards a tourism destination does not require any prior visit. It is fundamentally based on impressions and stereotypes whereas individual's attitudes can only arise by the means of one's personal experience (Mazanec & Schweiger, 1981). Consequently, Gartner (1993) emphasizes the distinction between: (1) the tourist's interpretation toward the elements of a destination, and (2) the concept of attitude found in consumer behavior literature. The former not depending on previous personal experience whereas the latter is related to individual's post-consumption evaluation. In this sense, the image aspect acquires a more significant position once it starts as soon as the consumer decides to go on a holiday trip (Goodall, 1991).

Actually, Gartner (1993) elaborates even further the explanation of image by stating that it is composed by three basic elements: (a) cognitive, (b) affective, and (c) conative, as exposed next. The cognitive definition was first addressed by Boulding (1956), who considered its origin in the beliefs an individual holds about a certain place. These, in turn, are said to be inevitably acquired by the personal exposition to some existing facts. Accordingly, Scott (1965) suggested

that potential tourists evaluate the attributes of a destination rationally, relying essentially on the available information. Typically much of those data are often related to issues such as natural attractions and tourism facilities (Baloglu, Mccleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004).

On the other hand, Lysonski and Woodside (1989) underline the importance of an individual's feelings while analyzing a certain destination. It is argued that the affective component of the image plays a determinant role in conducting the consumer's choice decision. Whereas the cognitive element is related to external factors which still demand further subjective analysis (Phelps, 1986), the affective one depends fundamentally on the individual's personal appraisal (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Hence, Sperandio (2007) remarks that the emotions can strongly influence the final interpretation of a tourism place since it is based on the own feelings a person has towards a location.

Meanwhile, the combination of the aforementioned elements results in consumer behavior, which may lead to a buying (or not) decision. As quoted by Gartner (1993), the individual tends to be more confident about the choice for a destination once he/she has taken into account its attributes, both functional and emotionally. It is usually at this exact point of the image formation process that most of the tourism decisions are made. This conative component of the mental interpretation expresses the final reaction of an individual towards a particular destination. Therefore, it reflects either the positive or negative intentions to visit a certain location (Dann, 1996; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Moraga, Artigas & Irigoyen, 2013).

In this paper it is assumed that both environmental and socio-economic aspects of a place are directly linked to the general imagery of the destination. Hence, the proposal herein is that those elements of the sustainability are of great importance to strategically distinguish one location from the others. Once the tourism product in essence is characterized by the offering of

local experience (Smith, 1994), most of a destination's positioning strategy aims at emphasizing its cultural, environmental and economic attributes (Leiper, 1979). Consequently, the authors argue that the constructs sustainability and image are essentially grounded on common basic elements.

Although the core aspects of the two phenomena are directly intertwined, as mentioned above, it does not mean that academically they have pursuit complementary pathways. On the contrary, it has been noticed that whereas sustainability literature in the tourism field seemed to focus on the protection of the locations' resources (Hunter, 1995), the image perspective has sought to exclusively improve the commercial appeal of destinations (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). However, it does not imply that the sustainability cannot be used as a strategic element for the tourism promotion. Even though some scholars have argued that the tourism activity can directly impact on certain places (Deery, Jago & Fredline, 2012; Andersson & Lundberg, 2013), this is not odd to assume that positioning a destination as a sustainable area may even encourage behaviors and practices in accordance with the concepts of sustainability.

Nevertheless, as stated by Pike (2002), over the past decades much of the research developed on tourism image literature has aimed at applying the acquired knowledge to specific aspects of travel context. The main approach employed though, has been the assessment of individual's impressions towards certain locations, without attempting to establish comparisons among the findings in different destinations. Thereby, some of these results might have neglected important insights about the possible variance in destinations' image due to factors such as cultural values.

Cultural Values

Values are fundamental elements that are part of any society. In values one can find the most important clues to understand human behavior in regard to various aspects of everyday life

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(Hofstede, 1980). Milbrath (1984) explains that, as mental representations, human thoughts consist of two basic types of feelings: belief/disbelief and valence. These, in turn, are the basic components of values. Individuals are more likely to feel attracted by what activates their positive feelings (in this case represented by the valences) and, in contrast, avoid situations which can bring certain negative emotions to them. On the other hand, it is argued that given the valence positivity and significance level for the members of a society, it is likely to assume the character of social value.

Kluckhohn (1967) quotes that once new values come up into a society, promptly they become part of the characteristics that distinguish the identity of the group. Furthermore, since they are directly related to social conduct norms, it can be said that they reflect clearly what is desirable for the members of a society. Rokeach (1972), for instance, suggests that these values represent the greatest expression that certain behavior is preferable over others. Thus, it is quite unlikely that in a state of social stability, the members of a community act in a way contrary to that expected by the group.

In this sense, as soon as a new value is established, it becomes accepted and legitimized by consensual practices within a community (Hofstede, 2001). This reinforces the assumption that individual's action is nothing but a reflection of what is expected for himself as a member of a particular group. According to Schwartz (1992), it is exactly this congruence of thoughts that keep the social identity stable since much of the behaviors tend to be based on the same set of values.

Traditionally, cultural phenomena such as values have been approached in the academic field through dual perspectives, which assume that the investigated object must be assessed on the basis of some parameters inherent to its own nature (Fang, 2012). Thereby, it is usual that

different societies are examined separately in order to guarantee a better understanding of the significance in their values and, consequently, enabling their distinction over others (Schwartz, 1994; Hofstede, 2001; Mooij, 2013).

This has been a broadly widespread method in the modern logic-formal scientific paradigm (Hong, Muderrisoglu & Zinkham, 1987; Trompenaars, 1994; Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Aaker & Williams, 1998; Aaker, 2000; Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002; House et al., 2004). Despite not denying the existence of contrary values within a society, this dual perspective opts for their segmentation according to their own core values. Harkness, Vijver and Mohler (2003) state that this approach simplifies, to some extent, the understanding of the impacts of certain values on the social behavior of different groups.

This assumption is supported somehow by the certain consensus in the literature that societies are composed by values (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004; Kasser, 2011; Minkov & Hofstede, 2012; Stedham & Beekun, 2013). However, Fang (2012) discusses that some researchers tend to assume that social differences lead to the emergence of new universal values, whilst others might claim that this should be the main reason for the cultural distinction among societies. Hence, the impacts of social values on individual's behavior have commonly been assessed by scholars based on these two antagonistic paradigms.

Hofstede's (1980) proposition of some dimensions to explain and predict social behavior follows the latter perspective, considered as being a static approach. Classifying cultures according to some discrepancies present in their own values reflects the attempt to turn cultural aspects into constant elements subject to objective assessment. For that, the unit of analysis chosen by Hosfede (1980) to understand social conduct has been the national cultures since it is argued that countries are the clearest representations of cultural unity.

Thereby, once it has been broadly recognized that individuals come together as communities through the acceptance of values which portray their social unity (Milbrath, 1984), the analysis and classification of societies into different sets in accordance with Hofstede's dimensions have been widely employed in the literature. The next subsections will present two of these dimensions, *masculinity/femininity* and *individualism/collectivism*, which as aforementioned depict the central object of interest for this study.

Masculinity/Femininity Dimension

In any society men and women tend to behave according a set of certain patterns. Eagly and Steffen (1984) mention that through the presence of standardized values some social roles for the different genders are designed and gain significance. That is, based on the group's culture those values represent the own society's expectations on the way individuals are meant to behave socially (Mennerick, 1975; Kanter, 1977; England, 1977; Brown, 1979).

Historically gender has been responsible for dictating much of the social configuration in various cultures. Cadden (1995) observes that since the ancient civilizations both men and women were responsible for different tasks which therefore used to be determined exclusively on the basis of individual's own birth sex. For instance, men used to be rewarded with obligations that required more strength and physical resistance whereas from women great dedication to the family and home care were expected.

This social vision of individual's role is grounded fundamentally on biological parameters of human being. However, it has already been a while since the concepts of sex and gender began to take separate pathways in social and academic debates (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Acker, 1992). Newsom et al. (1978) remark that during a long period of time the terms male and female expressed far more than just one's biological traits. They were also responsible for determining, among other things, relevant aspects of interpersonal relationships.

Nevertheless, it is currently well recognized that sex itself is no longer proper to determine social behavior patterns aside from a human's biological functions.

At the same time, gender issues have gained an even more prominent position in contemporary discussions. Through distinctive perspectives on social roles a miscellaneous of studies have sought to identify specific elements of masculinity and femininity by the means of psychological (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Feingold, 1994; Costa, Terracciano & McCrae, 2001), and social approaches (Maccoby, 1988; Beutel & Marini, 1995; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Thereby, debates concerning gender characteristics and its influence on behavior have surpassed the individual level and gained more attention into socio-cultural studies (Bakan, 1966; Broverman et al., 1972; Block, 1973).

It can be said that this metathesis focus from individual to social level on gender studies gained broader expressiveness with Hofstede's (1980) *culture's consequences: international differences in work related values* study publication. Through a nomothetic approach societies began to be analyzed according to their prevalence in attributes such as *masculinity/femininity* and therefore being compared to others (Hofstede, 2001; Harkness, Vijver & Mohler, 2003; Mooij, 2010). Since then, a wide number of studies have been carried out in the attempt to relate some aspects of *masculinity/femininity* dimension proposed by Hofstede to social behaviors (Hong, Muderrisoglu & Zinkham, 1987; Trompenaars, 1994; Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Aaker & Williams, 1998; Aaker, 2000; Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002; House et al., 2004).

Masculinity/femininity dimension is basically grounded on the assumption that the core question to access human behavior through a cultural perspective is by understanding the direction of an individual's goals. It is assumed that in predominantly masculine societies much

of the members' actions are usually oriented to personal interests over the social common sense itself. On the other hand, it is believed that in social groups where feminine values prevail, there seems to be a greater likelihood that individuals' behavior aims at the society welfare as a whole instead of personal gains (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; Mooij, 2010).

This might be related to the fact that socially speaking males have widely been described by literature as tending to behave in a rational functionalist way whereas in most cases female behaviors are depicted as being surrounded by feelings and emphasis on looking after others (Bem, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Williams & Best, 1990; Abele, 2003). Hofstede (2001) emphasizes that masculinity characteristics are mostly related to the male selfish nature. So, it is more likely that in predominantly masculine societies individuals engage in more aggressive and competitive behaviors, which demonstrates that they are more inclined to ensure their own interests.

Just like Hofstede (1980), Milbrath (1984) also assumes that high levels of masculinity might lead a society to admit traits of aggressiveness and competitiveness. Furthermore, it can be said that in this case social consequences are likely to become even more critical. Generally speaking, by the time societies decide to compete internally and with others to achieve their personal goals, they tend to damage not only their own harmony but the structural foundations of the whole social system. This extreme degree of assertiveness, according to Stern, Dietz and Kalof (1993), can possibly bring some irreversible effects for human existence.

Cultural values can still influence political decisions toward social matters. Gray (1973) points out that in masculine societies politicians tend to look after economic growth, even if natural resources are to be sacrificed to reach their goals. Meanwhile, the opposite can be said about feminine cultures. Hofstede (2001) observes that much of the policies developed in

predominantly feminine societies usually emphasize environmental concerns and consciously recognize that economic development should not result in damage to the environment at all.

Therefore, some authors come to the point that in societies where values such as empathy, compassion and sense of justice for all prevails, it becomes clear that the collective welfare turns out to be more important than individual interests (Schultz et al., 2005, Thogersen, 2006). These particular societies, regarded to as feminine ones, tend to adopt behaviors in accordance with common expectations. Thereby, individual's well-being can only be achieved as far as it does not compromise the society as a whole. Based on this assumption, Milbrath (1984) proposed that predominantly feminine social groups tend to pursue collectivist behaviors in the sense of consciously exploiting the existing resources on the planet.

Hofstede (2001) recognizes though that within a society individuals can either behave in a masculine and/or feminine manner. However, as a group, it is not possible that both characteristics prevail. In other words, societies can only be classified as predominantly masculine or feminine. Thus, their inherent traits may determine the nature of social relationships, whether among members within the group itself, neighbor communities and also their own linkage to the environment (Schultz et al., 2005). Milbrath (1984) brings to the fore the assumption that feminine societies are more likely to rationally sustain some type of relationships. Such relationships as aforementioned can also be related to sustainability. Nevertheless, other factors such as the degree of (in)dependence and responsibility of individuals in a given society must be considered regarding sustainable behavior.

Individualism/Collectivism Dimension

Studies addressing the issue of individualism *versus* collectivism within humanities and social sciences originated from the interest in understanding individuals' structural organization forms in different societies. Thus, various types of associations began to be made between this

dimension and behavioral characteristics of social groups. As a result, distinct disciplines started to make use of some concepts embedded by this cultural aspect which led to its interdisciplinary broad application (Hui & Triands, 1986; Oishi et al., 1998; Kemmelmeier et al., 2003).

In the field of consumer behavior, for instance, some investigations have sought to relate the individualist/collectivist structure of a society to individuals' impulse buying behavior propensity (Zhang & Shrum, 2009), to consumers' level of materialism (Ger & Belk, 1996; Kilbourne, Grünhagen & Foley, 2005), to the likelihood of complaints of dissatisfied consumers (Watkins & Liu, 1996; Liu & McClure, 2001), and to the types of advertising appeals that could better fit different social groups (Han & Shavitt, 1994).

Hofstede (2001) defines the individualism/collectivism dimension as the clearest representation of the individuals' dependence on certain social groups to which they belong. In other words it means that within individualistic societies people tend to be oriented to an independent life in which he usually must look after himself and, to some extent, his immediate relatives. On the contrary, collectivism is related to extended dependence ties demanding individual's behavior to be subject to approval by the other members of a group (Bochner, 1994).

In this sense, it may be argued that to some degree this state of subordination which is characteristic of collectivist societies affects the social dynamics as a whole. Thereby, it is believed that the excessive subjection linkages existing in this particular type of grouping lead to a high level of dependence between individuals in regard to several aspects of everyday life (Reis & Bond, 1989). Early (1989) states that probably the social collectivism might be connected to one's transferring of responsibilities to others, which could cause the individuals to become less proactive about certain social issues.

Although the term collectivism is usually associated with group dynamics, it is noteworthy that in the particular case of social studies it is employed to designate the existing dependence/independence ties that bind the members of a society (Hofstede, 1980). One could confuse the concept of collectivism by assuming that it is related to the pursuit of welfare for the members of a society as a whole. Instead, these social groups do not aim to achieve a well-being state for everybody but only for those belonging to some in-groups such as family (Brewer & Chen, 2007).

Meanwhile, when it comes to the individual's sense of responsibility towards social issues in general, some authors argue that it has been clear that individualism shows to be relatively associated with society's overall engagement (Diener, Diener & Diener, 1995). Perhaps the fact that individuals are ever since encouraged to have their own opinions about certain aspects of life (Hofstede, 2001) causes them to acquire a stronger sense of criticism regarding social welfare. On the other hand, members of collectivist societies tend to delegate to others the responsibility for some of their own social obligations (Early, 1989). Another aspect of individualistic societies that is highlighted by Bierbrauer (1992) and Hofstede (2001) is the fact that the individuals have to face the guilt for causing harm to others. What might be said that along with the sense of independence end up bringing a higher level of consciousness about their own social role as citizens.

Based on the aforementioned characteristics it is assumed that individualistic cultures tend to take different positions regarding social issues including sustainability. As quoted by Milbrath (1984), sustainable behaviors have their origins in cultural values of a society. Therefore, once individualistic societies imply an independent way of life in which daily

responsibilities shall be dealt with by the individual himself, it is supposed one feels more inclined to adopt behaviors consonant with sustainability ideals.

Furthermore, it can still be proposed that this dimension might influence not only a certain society's general behaviors, but it can also affect the image of one culture toward others. For instance, the interpretation of a tourism destination's sustainability can be directly related to this set of cultural values. As it will be demonstrated in the upcoming proposition (Figure 1), it is assumed that the image one creates regarding the sustainable aspect of a certain location results fundamentally from a mental process whose foundations lie in the inherent values of the society itself.

Cultural Dimensions, Sustainability and Tourism Image

The idea articulation presented through different authors' perspectives herein leads to the assumption that the interpretation of the sustainability of tourism destinations, by different social groups, is related to the propensity of a society to behave sustainably. This, in turn, can be a direct outcome of cultural factors such as the *masculinity/femininity* and *individualism/collectivism* dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1980). Thus, the following figure illustrates a simplified scheme of relationships suggested by the authors for the development of this study.

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS, SUSTAINABILITY AND TOURISM IMAGE

Cultural Values

MAS/FEM x IND/COL

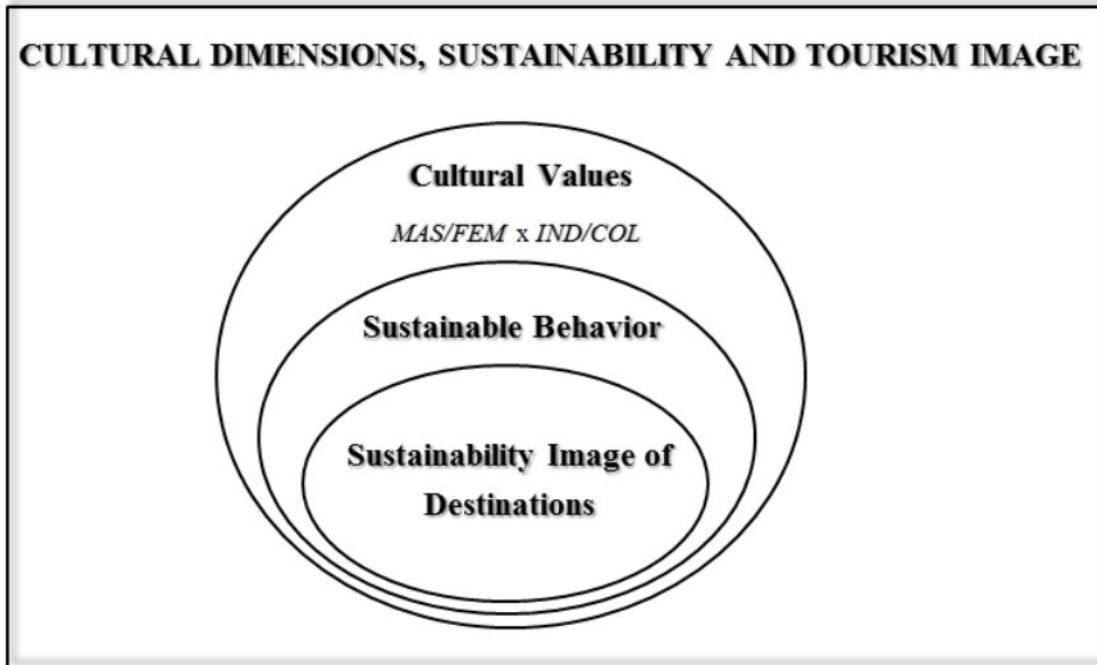Sustainable Behavior

Sustainability Image of Destinations

Figure1: Research constructs' relationship.
Source: Authors' proposal, 2013.

Accordingly, it is assumed that the consumer (tourist) is inside a broad environment which surrounds and foregoes the individual's experience with a tourism destination. In this sense, it is proposed that the aforementioned cultural dimensions are directly related to sustainable behavioral intentions on the part of consumers and, therefore, affecting the interpretation of the sustainability of a destination. The literature itself states that the predominance of characteristics such as femininity and individualism in a given society leads to a more sustainable life style. This might occur because in higher feminine/individualist societies people tend to take responsibility for maintaining social welfare.

Given the proposed schema for the tourism sector, it is recommended that future studies take into consideration cultural factors as the starting point for understanding sustainable aspects of tourism destinations. Hence, some propositions are presented hereafter:

P1 - Sustainable behaviors are positively related to the feminine and individualistic characteristics of social groups.

P2 - The image of the sustainability of a tourism destination is directly influenced by the cultural values of different societies.

Therefore, considering that much of the effort of professionals involved in the strategic management of tourism destinations are regarding the creation and management of a distinctive brand identity (Tasci & Kozak, 2006), it is suggested the relevance for recognition that different societies interpret the concepts of a location based on their own cultural background. Hence, since it is believed that this image formation process is greatly influenced by socio-cultural elements, this paper warns tourism practitioners that the set of strategies developed for a certain destination should carefully take into account the consumer's cultural values. This, in turn, may lead to tailor-made communication approaches.

Conclusions

The concept of destination image began to be part of the academic discussions in the early 70's and, likewise sustainability, has shown to be of relative importance to the tourism field. Thereby, several researches have been developed in the area in order to assess the phenomenon of image from different perspectives, particularly with reference to the impact of the interpretation of tourism destinations' attributes on the consumer decision making process.

Although debates have already broadened the knowledge about the image construct, the literature review has shown that there is still a lack of understanding on how cultural values impact the image consumers create regarding tourism destinations. As acknowledged by Ruão (2003), the image is a phenomenon that results either from external stimuli as for internal concepts of the individual's mind. This assumption leads to the comprehension that one's 'mental

programming' (Hofstede, 2001) might also be responsible for directing the impressions regarding a tourism location.

Another element to which has been also given prominence within tourism discussions in both academic and professional sector is sustainability. However, it is observed that much of the efforts employed by scholars so far have been oriented to the comprehension of the impacts of tourism industry for its own structural dynamics (Hunter, 1997). Moreover, the sustainable aspects of a destination have not been exhaustively investigated. For instance, the role of cultural dimensions as a starting point to assess how the attributes of a tourism location is interpreted by consumers has been neglected.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to discuss how the image of the sustainability of tourism destinations can vary across different social groups. Thus, it is suggested that predominating cultural aspects such as *masculinity/femininity* and *individualism/collectivism* of different societies may influence the image created by the consumer. This assumption is supported by the literature hence femininity is related to characteristics such as empathy, solicitude and concern with the common welfare. On the other hand, masculinity behavior is associated with the pursuit of one's own satisfaction even if it comes at the expense of future consequences (Hofstede, 1980).

Furthermore, high levels of collectivism may lead the members of a given society to a state of extreme (inter)dependence. To some extent this might also affect the way people deal with sustainability since some of the individual's social responsibilities can easily be delegated to others. Contrary to what occurs in more individualistic groups, where subjects are led to pursue an independent way of life, hence being more likely to assume social responsibilities including in aspects such as sustainability. It is expected then that, in the case of tourism,

behavioral intentions toward sustainable matters can be more prominent in societies with certain cultural characteristics, such as the ones previously discussed.

In conclusion, this paper emphasizes that the interpretation (image) of a tourism destination depends on cultural values inherent to societies. Besides, since sustainability has frequently figured as a strategic tool in the identity construction of certain destinations, it is claimed the urge to understand the extent to which social values, such as *masculinity/femininity* and *individualism/collectivism*, may affect the outcomes of sustainability's interpretation of a tourism destination.

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