

ICEMC 2021
International Conference on Emerging Media & Communication

**SUSTAINABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FOR
GENERATION Z: PERSPECTIVES OF COMMUNICATION
STUDENTS**

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Abstract

In this study, the Generation Z undergraduate communication students' understanding of sustainability and sustainable tourism was analyzed. Five focus groups were conducted with students from a university in Turkey (3) and the United Arab Emirates (2). This study reflected on these students' personal travel experiences and their observations of sustainable tourism from their domestic and international experiences. Issues in sustainable tourism and opportunities for achieving both sustainability and sustainable tourism were also discussed in these focus groups. The findings offer implications for teaching and learning about sustainability. The participating students were generally aware of sustainability, but in a limited scope. In sum, Generation Z students, as future travellers, are sensitive to the concepts of sustainability and sustainable tourism. These students are not entrepreneurs in this respect, that is, they do not waste the water and do not pollute the sea or the environment but are neither involved in any sustainability campaign nor initiate anything that will influence others.

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Keywords: Sustainability, sustainable tourism, Generation Z, sustainability education



1. Introduction

The research examines the undergraduate communication students' understanding of sustainability and sustainable tourism. Given that sustainable development is considered an important goal for many countries, higher educational systems around the world should play a role in increasing the number of graduates with a thorough knowledge and understanding of sustainability. The Brundtland Report of United Nations in 1987 defined sustainable development as "...the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The main goal of sustainability is to ensure an equal distribution of resources among people and the next generations (as cited in Deniz, 2017, p. 1400).

As stated by Norton (2003), "Sustainability is a relationship between dynamic human economic systems and larger, dynamic, but normally slower-changing ecological systems such that (a) human life can continue indefinitely; (b) human individuals can flourish; (c) human cultures can develop; but in which (d) effects of human activities remain within bounds so as not to destroy the health/integrity of the environmental context of human activities" (p. 177). Sustainability is not about environmentalism. As defined by Deniz (2017), its focus is broader than environmentalism. Sustainability is a participatory process that involves creating and sustaining a societal vision that ensures the prudent use of resources, including natural, human, cultural, and scientific resources (Gladwin et al., 1995). Sustainability requires a continuous evaluation of resources, the preservation of protected areas, and the promotion of resource protection awareness.

Like other fields, sustainability has gained importance in tourism due to the unplanned consumption of natural sources (Kurgun & Aktaş, 2019). The interest of tourists in the environment has recently increased, thereby underscoring the necessity of preserving, maintaining, and transferring natural and cultural areas to future generations (Nayim, 2017). The societies are facing now with global issues that need to be addressed and this holds true for the tourism sector as well.

Rapid economic, political, and technological developments have expanded the dimensions of tourism and has promoted its important role in various economies (Akyol & Uygun, 2017). Although economies have initially reaped economic benefits from their tourism sectors, the negative social, cultural, and environmental effects of these sectors have emerged over time. For instance, local communities have been displaced and their lifestyles have changed because of the hotels, roads, and social facilities built for future guests, and the increasing number of tourists threatens animals and their natural habitats (Ahmadova & Akova, 2016). Lim and McAleer (2003) argued that tourism has inevitable effects on the economic activity of certain destinations and identified the environment as the main attraction in tourism movements given its contributions to the appeal and attractiveness of a destination.

Deng et al. (2002) stated that millions of people travel each year to see and experience the natural environment, but such movement inevitably causes confusion and damage in the regions they visit. Although tourism offers opportunities for local development, employment, and income generation in many countries, intensive tourism has a serious negative impact on nature, especially in fragile coastal, freshwater, and mountain ecosystems (Lim & McAleer, 2003). Sustainability is linked with several concerns such as

environmental, social, and economic and these should be addressed in the tourism education so that the tourism students develop a wholistic view of sustainability and a critical perspective of their industry.

The World Tourism Organization (2019) defines sustainable tourism as “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.” Another definition of this concept is “to ensure continuity without losing the quality and quantity of the factors and assets that make up the tourism activity” (Akyol & Uygun, 2017). Marangoz and Karadağ (2017) argued that the rapid depletion of natural, cultural, and economic resources will lead to the depletion of products that rely on these resources and may lead to a dead end for any economic sector. However, sustainable tourism ensures the optimum use of environmental resources, helps preserve natural heritage and biodiversity, respects the culture of host communities, contributes to intercultural understanding and tolerance, provides socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders, and contributes to poverty reduction (Haddouche & Salomon, 2018). According to Nayin (2017), sustainable tourism aims to protect habitats, develop the tourism potential of a region, and aid in national development.

Given that the environment is an important asset in the tourism sector, the conservation of environmental resources (including natural, cultural, and historical resources) is among the main targets of this sector (Lim & McAleer, 2003). As an economic activity, tourism has both positive and negative effects. Sustainable tourism strives to preserve the balance between economic benefits and social and environmental hazards (McKercher, 2003). In this sense, sustainable tourism reduces the negative effects of tourism on the natural environment, socio-cultural structure, and inequality in income distribution (Ayazlar, 2017). As stated earlier, tourism destinations are generally dependent on the natural and cultural resources and rituals in local communities. Sustainable tourism is crucial to the preservation of nature and the local culture (Pekerşen et al., 2019).

Canpolat and Öztürk (2019) cited two reasons to support the need to establish a link between the environmental and social parameters in the functioning of tourism institutions. The first reason is that compared with other sectors, the tourism sector reaps more benefits from environmental factors given that the environment affects the tourist demand. The second reason is that mass tourism adversely affects the environment. Tourism activities consume all types of resources, regardless of size, of the host regions (Briassoulis, 2002). Given that the resources of regions, including the sea, sand, and sun, are scarce and exhaustible, maintaining the diversity of tourism products is necessary by influencing the travel objectives and desires of tourists (Marangoz & Karadağ, 2017).

Future opportunities must also be developed within the scope of sustainable tourism to fulfill the needs of both the tourists and host regions, to ensure the continuity of cultural integrity, ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems, and to create tourism products that meet the economic requirements (Akıncı & Kasalak, 2016). Although what needs to be done in sustainable tourism is easy to articulate and spell out as items, there are some challenges to accomplish these. For example, Çalışkan (2017) attributed the challenges being faced by sustainable tourism to the following aspects:

- Given the lack of equality in income and life quality, one cannot expect all people to show similar levels of sensitivity or assign a similar degree of importance to environmental sustainability.

- Preserving resources while simultaneously consuming and renewing them is a costly initiative.
- Environmental awareness is hindered by the increasing priority of other societal problems, including the global population boom and the rising crime rates, housing demand, and prevalence of diseases.

The motivations behind sustainability are diverse and complex. The commitment to sustainability is an individual effort, as well as an organizational and industry effort. It is a value which should be reflected in the policies of an organization and also turned into actions. The need for sustainability is felt more than ever now, but accurate conceptualizations of sustainability and sustainable tourism are needed. Progress in sustainability education is therefore an important cornerstone.

A generation includes those people who are born in the same period and have been influenced by the same social, economic, cultural, and political events and the dominant values of their time and communities (Altuntuğ, 2012). Kırık and Köyüstü (2018) argued that a generation represents a common structure in many aspects, including year of birth, economic, political, legal, and social movements and insights, value judgements, behavior, and attitudes relevant to the society where they are born. People of every generation affect and change their societies through their thoughts and actions and are also, in turn, affected by their societies. This change highlights the differences across generations, and some effects of these changes can be passed on to future generations (Altuntuğ, 2012).

The generation of people born in 2000 and beyond, collectively known as Generation Z, has formed an intimate bond with technology. In the literature, people of this generation have been described as part of the “digital generation.” Generation Z greatly differs from previous generations as people of this generation have been born in the advent of the digital age (Kırık & Köyüstü, 2018). They have opened their eyes to the world of technology and can easily adapt to new and existing technologies. Moreover, they cannot dream of a world without technology, which has dominated almost every aspect of their lives (Altunbay & Bıçak, 2018). Sarıoğlu and Özgen (2018) argued that people of Generation Z were born into technology and had no memories of a world without mobile phones or the Internet. Social media plays an important role in the daily lives of these people. Ekici and Sütütemiz (2018) characterized Generation Z people as having high self-confidence, independence, freedom, dependence on technology, and willingness to communicate through social media and ascribing much importance to individuality. Altuntuğ (2012) argued that the most important factor that distinguishes Generation Z from other generations is that “they witness a period in which they change is very rapid and breaks and they are the first generation whose characteristics can be defined long before they were born” (p. 206). Therefore, dealing with Generation Z students in classroom settings require a different kind of approach. The pedagogical approaches used should facilitate the learning process of Generation Z students who have unique characteristics. Sustainability education to be effective needs to take into consideration the profile of the Generation Z students.

Not any type of tourism can be sustainable without proper planning, supervision, evaluation, and management; sustainable tourism can only be achieved by destination managers, stakeholders, and tourists who behave ecologically, economically, and ethically (Deng et al., 2002). Sustainable tourism raises hopes and desires for a better future and attempts to overcome the fears from traditional mass tourism being experienced in many world destinations (Sırakaya–Türk et al., 2008). “Sustainable tourism planning should be integrated, dynamic, flexible, and adaptable to national, regional, and local strategies” (p. 414).

Therefore, the Generation Z students as important stakeholders, when they join the workforce, should be well instructed on sustainability concept and sustainability issues through education.

“Sustainability is a renamed narrative to define the relationship among environment, then human being and the responsibilities of the current generation for the future generations” (Özmehmet, 2012, p. 1855). Meeting the needs of future generations depends on the behavior of today’s generation; therefore, sustainable development should be implemented globally (Binboğa & Ünal, 2018). The attitudes and behaviors of Generation Z individuals must also be explored to launch the necessary precautions that can prepare a new generation who is aware of and active in sustainability. Brundiars et al. (2020) report that there is an increase in the number of sustainability programs over the past decade in the higher education institutions. With the increase of sustainability focused courses and programs offered in higher education, there will also be an increase in the number of students who are conscious of sustainability. The society will benefit from it.

There are several studies conducted on Generation Z and sustainability. A systematic literature review on sustainability in retail market and Generation Z conclude that they exhibit totally different behavior such as being greener, sustainability-oriented and tech savvy, interested in companies and brands who can connect with them, enhancing their experiences and feelings (Dabija et al., 2019). Another study which explored the sustainable food consumption behavior of the Generation Z in Greek universities and living away from home found that the focus of sustainable food consumption behavior is limited to eating seasonal fruits and vegetables and purchasing regional food (Kamenidou et al., 2019). The study conducted to determine the impact of ‘sustainable tendencies’ on stimulating the purchase of luxury goods by the Italian Generation Z and Generation Y consumers demonstrated the importance of adopting differentiated CSR strategies which are attentive to sustainability based on the demographic characteristics of young consumers who use luxury brands (Pencarelli et al., 2020). There is a gap in the literature on Generation Z and sustainable tourism. Generation Z in the future is the generation who will be engaged in various tourism activities, so it is important to explore their awareness on this important issue. After this exploration, if necessary, awareness campaigns and integration of the sustainability to the curriculum could be encouraged. A multi-level approach to a social issue can help to increase the effectiveness of any social marketing interventions from Levy and Zaltman, (1975) (as cited in Binney & Brennan, 2007). Table 1 which illustrates the type of social changes at micro, group and macro levels has provided the researchers with a sustainability framework.

Table 1. Types of social change by time and level (Adapted from Levy & Zaltman, 1975 by Binney & Brennan, 2007, p. 3)

	Micro level (Individual consumer)	Group level (Group or organization)	Macro level (Overall community)
Short term change	Behavior change	Change in norms	Policy change
Example	Attend a ‘Stop Smoking’ seminar (e.g. Quit)	Administrative change: removal of tobacco advertising from TV	Banning of all tobacco marketing
Long term change	Lifestyle change	Organizational change	Socio-cultural evolution
Example	Smoking cessation	Deter retailers selling tobacco to minors	Eradication of all tobacco related disease

2. Problem Statement

Sustainability is an important issue and is associated with the tourism sector both as a challenge and/or an opportunity. Generation Z students is the generation who would be the decision makers in travelling in the future, and thus who should take responsibility in sustainability. Today sustainability seems like our generation issue, but it is of concern to Generation Z since they will be the ones who will take the lead. Therefore, it is important to study how informed they are on this concept, so that curriculum revisions, modifications can be made to prepare them in the higher education system.

3. Research Questions

The study had three research questions:

RQ1: From the perspective of Generation Z, what is sustainability?

RQ2: From the perspective of Generation Z, what is sustainable tourism?

RQ3: What could be done achieve an informed Generation Z on sustainability and sustainable tourism?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the awareness and understanding of Generation (communication students) on sustainability and sustainable tourism. Another objective of the study was to learn their suggestions on how to promote sustainability.

5. Research Methods

The study used qualitative method and focus groups are conducted. As stated by Nyumba et al. (2018) focus group discussions are helpful to “understand people’s construction, notions, and interpretation of nature” (p. 26). Focus groups aim to create an environment in which the participants feel comfortable in sharing their opinions and thus it is possible to obtain a wide range of views on the research topic (Hennink et al., 2011). In focus groups, the researcher is a facilitator of group discussion among the participants. In this respect, the discussion does not happen between the researcher and participants, but among the participants (Nyumba et al., 2018). The focus groups can be used alone as a qualitative research method or in conjunction with quantitative research methods (Wilkinson, 2004). The objective of the research is to explore the perception and understanding of sustainability and sustainable tourism of communication students. Focus group discussions provide rich narratives when they are run properly. They were conducted at a Turkish government university and an Emirati semi-government university. The former is located in Izmir, whereas the latter is located in Sharjah. A total of five focus groups were conducted. The number of participants for each focus group is listed in Table 2. In both countries where the researchers work, there are macro level initiatives and organizational level (universities/higher education) initiatives of sustainability with different focuses.

Table 2. Focus groups and size

Focus Group	Number of Participants	Country
Focus Group 1	7	Turkey
Focus Group 2	7	Turkey
Focus Group 3	7	Turkey
Focus Group 4	6	UAE
Focus Group 5	6	UAE

The focus groups were performed between January 15 and March 6, 2019 and lasted for an hour on average, with the longest focus groups lasting for an hour and a half. The participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. The researchers initially contacted students in the courses they teach. These students were informed about the research topic, but none of them had formal education on sustainability (i.e., they did not take any courses related to the subject, but some of them declared that they had been exposed to presentation and workshop on sustainability).

The instrument created for moderating these focus groups involved two main themes, with each theme having a specific set of questions. One of these themes was related to sustainability in general, whereas the other theme was related to tourism sustainability. Before discussing tourism sustainability, the researchers asked questions on sustainability. Later the researchers defined the concept of sustainability for the participants and focus groups discussion moved to tourism sustainability. The participants from the Emirati university were identified as A-M-D-J-An-S- Is-Y-Sa- Ma- Ay- P whereas those from the Turkish university were identified as B-Be-Mc-N-O-D-H-I-K-E-V-Ef-Ay-Er-C-T-G-Z-Y-F-L. Descriptive analysis is used for data analysis.

6. Findings

From the focus groups discussions, themes appeared, and the following findings are organized around several themes such as sustainability, tourism sustainability, examples of sustainability and suggestions for awareness of sustainability.

6.1. Sustainability as a concept

All students in the Emirati university focus group mainly associated sustainability with the environment. Their replies generally described sustainability as something long-term and future oriented. For instance, these students defined sustainability as “[being] environment friendly and avoiding resource wastage as much as you can” (Respondent M), “thinking about the future” (Respondent A), “[having] goals that are applicable to the future and can be environmental regardless of the objective” (Respondent D), “[being] able to enjoy keeping up with the times and making long-term plans” (Respondent J), “using products that will stay with you for a long time instead of those products that you only use one time before you throw them away” (Respondent A), “something you keep improving, not finished” (Respondent Ma) and “improve the things to benefit and protect the environment.” (Respondent Sa)

Meanwhile, the students in the Turkish focus group associated sustainability with continuity, ecological balance, future generations, ecology, vital resources, energy, education, continuity, and lasting.

They argued that people should be conscious of the concept of sustainability and see the errors in trying to change others before changing themselves. Some striking comments from these students include “Unsustainability comes to mind instead of sustainability. We use non-biodegradable products and those products that hinder sustainability” (Respondent B), “The future allocation of resources should be planned, otherwise they will disappear in the end” (Respondent Ef), “Stopping air pollution is one of the important topics” (Respondent Ay), “None of us are aware of [sustainability]. For example, we do not know the threats of perfumes to the environment, yet we all use [perfumes]” (Respondent Be), and “We continue using things even though we know that they are harmful to our society” (Respondent B).

6.2. Examples of sustainability, and suggestions for awareness on sustainability

The students from the Emirati university focus group agreed that sustainability is an individual responsibility that they must fulfill by doing simple things. However, they described large-scale sustainability as the responsibility of the government and added that each person in his/her own sphere (e.g., communities) can contribute to sustainability. One student highlighted the importance of individual initiatives by mentioning the visit of Al Gore to the UAE to discuss about global warming. Even though they all agreed that large-scale sustainability is a task of the government, these students mentioned that the government cannot promote sustainability awareness by itself. Corporations and individuals should also cooperate with the government in promoting sustainability awareness.

When asked for examples of sustainability in their surroundings, the students mentioned the solar energy project of Masdar City in Abu Dhabi and the recycling system of the American University of Sharjah. Some students mentioned that some of their professors ride their bicycles on campus, and some mentioned about the University of Sharjah’s innovative solutions for sustainability. Dubai is also given as an example for sustainability indicating the need for “improvement” (Respondent P).

Some students shared their ideas on how to practice sustainability on campus. For instance, “Sustainability can be achieved in other ways, such as by giving books to the library and charity” (Respondent D). One student who was living in the dorms suggested that “The authorities should make fertilizers by taking leftover food from dorms. However, they should only take clean food” (Respondent M). All students also shared the slogan, “Recycle, reduce, and reuse.”

In terms of promoting sustainability awareness, some students argued that companies should communicate their sustainability efforts to the public. They saw this as a good opportunity not only for creating awareness, but also for boosting the reputation of these companies. Other students suggested promoting sustainability initiatives in their surrounding areas. For example, installing recycling bins in prominent and convenient locations would encourage people to use them.

However, these students admitted that their individual contributions to sustainability were “small” and they provided the researchers with some examples. “If I have something that I want to throw away, I throw it to the recycling bin. If there is no recycling bin around, I keep my trash with me” (Respondent D), “I always use the back side of the paper when writing” (Respondent An), “When I have some leftover drinking water, I pour it on the soil” (Respondent A), “My grandmother uses my old clothes to make pillows and many other things” (Respondent M), “My mother notices the clothes that I do not wear for some time and she puts them in a bag and give them to charity” (Respondent An), and “Sometimes I try to keep

something with me for a long time” (Respondent D). The respondents discussed “trash cans” and agreed that trash cans provided by the governments and infrastructures created can make sustainability convenient to people. “People only do things that are convenient to them” (Respondent A). One student added that the lack of recycling stations in his area motivated him to recycle. However, he commented that he was sometimes unable to recycle, thereby underscoring the importance of increasing the accessibility of recycling stations.

The students in the Turkish focus group talked about sustainability education, the importance of reaching out to children as an important stakeholder group, and the impact of laws and sanctions beyond the voluntary sustainable efforts of people. In the words of one participant, “We have to change our point of view completely. We have to absorb sustainability. We should be aware of the dangers. We must start with ourselves. We can talk about sustainability outside, but if we do not implement sustainability ourselves, we cannot move on” (Respondent D). They underlined the role of the education, but for them education implied something else. In the words of one participant: “Sustainability is linked to education, and when I say education, I do not mean formal school education.” (Respondent Mc). Another participant highlighted the importance of education starting from home. “If everyone starts from home, the learned behavior can be spread outside” (Respondent O), “Families must educate their children on sustainability before they form their habits” (Respondent I), and “We have to leave behind a world where the next generations can live in. This is possible through education. We need to explain to the future generations why they should take care of the environment” (Respondent T).

The participants all highlighted the need for sustainability campaigns that specifically target children. For instance, “We can execute social responsibility projects” (Respondent Er) and “We can work on projects that can promote awareness on sustainability and coordinate these projects through social media” (Respondent C). Another participant explained the importance of peer-to-peer influence and stated that by conducting individual awareness campaigns, people can motivate and influence one another. These students were generally pessimistic about the sustainability awareness of their generation and highlighted the importance of educating children on sustainability. “The generation after us will do very well in terms of achieving sustainability” (Respondent N), “We can target children. It is very important that we explain this concept to children. We have to organize events for children and explain sustainability to them” (Respondent G), and “It is highly possible that the things that have been communicated to you during your childhood and the things you learned at your current stage of life will continue affecting you until you die” (Respondent Er).

The Turkish students mentioned the role of the society and the government to audit the sustainability efforts. They claimed that some of the things are done habitually and that it is difficult to change the habits. “We can only communicate to the future generations whatever we are aware of by now. In this way, we can create consciousness about sustainability. For instance, if a father is smoking, he can tell his child not to smoke, but he himself will continue with this habit. It is over for our generation; we cannot achieve sustainability” (Respondent N). They shared some ideas related to the changing consumption habits of the people and the role of the government. For instance, “We need to have applications/executions that inspire us...if environmental shopping bags are provided for free, people would be motivated to use them” (Respondent H) and “In addition to education, some obligatory measures also need to be implemented”

(Respondent B). One student highlighted the importance of intervention from the government in these words: “Government sanctions must be enforced regardless of our current awareness of sustainability. We are all conscious of this concept, yet we use as many shopping bags beyond what we actually need” (Respondent K). Shopping bags were given frequently as an example. This could be because they are visible to the public as a measure and since 2019 January, handing out free plastic bags have been banned in Turkey. In the words of one participant: “I never enjoyed using shopping bags before. After the implementation [of sustainability activities], I started carrying a string bag with me” (Respondent B).

6.3. Sustainable tourism as a concept and what can be done for sustainable tourism

The Emirati university students associated sustainable tourism with the terms UNESCO, heritage, trees, rainforest, and marine life. They agreed that their behaviour was changed after they travelled abroad. “When we travel outside of our country, we forget about sustainability and start consuming resources” (Respondent A). They attributed this behaviour to the fact that “People have their own culture. You do the things you have been taught to do. No one knows you. You can do whatever you want” (Respondent M).

They shared some ideas for promoting sustainable tourism. For example, instead of creating new buildings, they suggested focusing on cultural heritage sites and “improving them and keeping them intact” (Respondent S). Another suggestion was to avoid organizing generous events where everything is provided for free. For example, they suggested getting rid of plastic bottles that are being given for free, especially in hotels. One respondent argued that the number of complimentary items should be limited. However, he later added that people in the UAE have gotten used to these acts of generosity. As good practice, they stated that some hotels have started handing out towels instead of tissues.

The Emirati university students did not associate their travelling behaviour to their sustainable tourism efforts. One student stated that “It is not on the list. It is the least of my concerns. When you are traveling abroad, you have hundreds of things on your mind aside from sustainability.” Another student explained the traveling habits of GCC people, and the rest of the students all agreed with him. “In general, the West is different from the East. GCC people, such as the Arabs, look for the best affordable hotels and rent apartments with very large rooms. People in the West live in small apartments, but GCC people live in apartments with big rooms” (Respondent M). One respondent shared another explanation for the lack of attention he pays to sustainable tourism whenever he is traveling. “The older generations are our gatekeepers. I am not one of them. My mother decides where we travel.” (Respondent An). The Emirati university students all agreed that sustainable tourism is not internalized. However, they stated that each person is facing personal issues that blind him/her from sustainability issues.

These students suggested further ideas for promoting sustainable tourism and sustainability. For instance, celebrities, social media, and movies can help spread messages highlighting the importance of these concepts. Providing individuals with personalized experiences can also help them understand the importance of sustainability. One student talked about the 2016 Oscar speech of Leonardo DiCaprio, which was well-received by the international audience due to its environmental tones. They argued that lectures and conferences are not appealing to the public. Some students suggested creating taxes to encourage people to think about sustainability. For example, similar to the resident fees they are paying every month, people should pay some fees that will be used exclusively for sustainability initiatives. Some portion of fines, such

as parking fines, can also be allocated to sustainability initiatives. Authorities may also promote sustainability by recognizing those people who heavily rely on public transport, collect discarded bottles, and explore the city on foot instead of using private cars. One student stated that sustainability is barely mentioned in their formal education. “They only allocate one short chapter to sustainability. They do not give much weight to this topic.” In line with this, they shared that courses on sustainability should be made mandatory in schools. The government’s initiative to create a task force for sustainability was also mentioned in the focus group. Promoting sustainability awareness through education was highlighted as a priority. The benefits of a minimalist life to sustainability were also mentioned.

The Turkish students associated sustainable tourism with ecotourism, restoration of historical artifacts, educating tourists on sustainability, and discouraging tourists from harming the environment and polluting the seas. These students thought that they are fulfilling their responsibility in making others aware of these issues, but they do not see themselves as “entrepreneurs” that influence others in these matters. To support this claim, one student stated that when travelling, he never throws his garbage on the floor and that he collects plastic bottles scattered along beaches. However, he never dared to talk to those people who are throwing their garbage.

The students also believed that sustainable tourism would prevent places from changing along with time. For instance, “Whatever people saw in Salda Lake [known as the Maldives of Turkey] 50 years ago, they should also see 50 years later” (Respondent N) and “The structures and natural resources should be seen the way they were before” (Respondent Be).

The Turkish students noted that they showed concern for the environment even when they are travelling. For instance, “I do not harm my natural environment just because I want to enjoy myself when travelling” (Respondent E) and “I behave in such a way that my behaviour is aligned with the nature of the place I travel to” (Respondent O). One student highlighted some parallelism between the way a person behaves in his/her country and anywhere else. “Our usual behaviours should not differ from our behaviours as tourists. If we can prevent doing harm to our natural environment in our usual routine, then we should do the same when we are traveling” (Respondent B) and “I do not use much water when staying in hotels. I do not want my towels to be washed everyday” (Respondent E). Others mentioned that their behaviour during their international travels reflects their behaviour at home. For example, “Whenever I am traveling as a tourist, I do not harm the environment. I pay attention to the rules, such as not taking photos. Sustainability is not something that we have to apply only in our home countries, but a concept that we must observe wherever we go in the world” (Respondent Be), “I never throw any garbage wherever I travel or whenever I go swimming, visit a museum, or do other things. I do not waste one drop of water” (Respondent F), and “I do not leave a trace when I am traveling” (Respondent N).

The students unanimously agreed that tourist areas should be protected. “Those places that are visited by tourists should be protected” (Respondent Z) and “I think that those touristic places that are open to potential harm should be protected by implementing strict rules” (Respondent Y). One student mentioned, “I saw old photos of some tourist areas. They have changed a lot in time. I believe that these places should be protected from tourist activities.” (Respondent V).

7. Conclusion

Some general comments about the sustainability approach of all participating students and specific comments on the sustainability practices of these two groups can be made based on the results of the focus group discussions. Both student groups understood sustainability, but they mainly associated this concept with the environment, thereby indicating their limited understanding of this concept. These students also admitted that in general, they do not have enough knowledge on sustainability. Both groups acknowledged the importance of government-initiated education on sustainability. They also acknowledged the role of nonprofit groups, corporations, and individuals in this regard. The Turkish students indicated that sustainability efforts should target children. Meanwhile, the Emirati university students came up with some ideas on how to promote sustainability through campaigns and celebrities. Both groups highlighted the important role of sanctions as a driving force of sustainability. The Emirati university students proposed that some taxes or a portion of fines should be used to fund sustainable initiatives. Both groups were very sensitive to sustainability issues but admitted that they tend to forget or ignore these issues from time to time. It is also deduced from the focus groups discussions that the students do not encourage or motivate others for exhibiting sustainable behaviour. The Emirati university students highlighted the visibility and easiness of sustainable initiatives for encouraging the public. The Turkish students, probably due to the higher number of focus groups conducted among these students, presented a broader view of sustainability, and provided more examples of sustainable practices, including sustainable tourism. The Emirati university students' examples were specific to their nearby contexts, such as their university campuses or Sharjah. Nevertheless, they presented some unique ideas on how to promote sustainability on campus and extend this concept to other areas. Encouraging minimalism, limiting the number of items being given away for free, and organizing events in a modest scale were some of their suggestions for promoting sustainability. The Turkish students also mentioned that changing one's consumption habits can help in this regard.

The Turkish students mentioned that they sometimes lose hope and fail to see their impact on sustainability. As mentioned in the Emirati focus group discussions, sustainability and sustainable tourism need to be personalized. The benefits of taking action even at the individual level and the impact of individual actions should be communicated to encourage individuals to press on with their sustainability efforts.

One major contrast between these two groups was related to their travel behaviour. For instance, the tourism behaviour of Emirati university students was not in alignment with sustainability. The characteristics shared by these students were aligned with their travelling habits, but their parents play a dominant role in how they approach sustainability. However, these students will soon become decision makers and show their sensitivity to sustainable tourism through their rational choices. Both Turkey and the UAE are popular tourist destinations. Therefore, these countries can define the concept of sustainable tourism well. The future is promising for these countries, and the strategic communication of sustainability and sustainable tourism to future generations can help materialize such promise. Since 2019 in both countries and in the universities where this study has been conducted, several initiatives and advancements have been made on sustainability. Therefore, the students' awareness, knowledge and responsible actions on sustainability and sustainable tourism may have changed. While we expect Generation Z not to pollute

the environment when they travel, we are visualizing an individual, micro level behaviour change. At the group or organization level, running social media campaigns promoting sustainable tourism can be given as an example. At the macro level, the behaviour of tourists such as their harming nature and the environment are expected to be banned. In the long run, change in tourism preferences of Generation Z, restructuring of the travel agencies/sector in the light of sustainable practices and finally sustainable tourism behaviour evolution to a great extent is expected.

In both countries where the study has been conducted, we can conclude that the students have awareness of sustainability, and although they express sustainability with different terms, and concepts, they are aware of the role regarding sustainable behaviour. At the individual level, they are practicing and engaged in sustainable behaviour, but they need support to be entrepreneurs of sustainability, and one way to do this could happen through education!

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