Normative influences: how socio-cultural and industrial norms influence the adoption of sustainability practices. A Grounded Theory of small, Cretan tourism firms.

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Abstract

Previous research explains the various factors that motivate or discourage the owner-managers of small firms to behave sustainably. However, it has failed to develop a meaningful understanding of how these factors inter-relate or combine to influence their decisions. This research identifies and explains how socio-cultural and industrial norms influence the intentions and behaviours towards sustainability of owner-managers of small tourism firms. This grounded theory study shows how selective peer association allows the use of norms that match one's values to predict the difficulties, benefits and therefore justification for pro-sustainability (in)action. Locally-held socio-cultural norms determine what is commonly (dis)approved of through reflective and comparative processes. Connectedness to the locality triggers empathy for nature and the local society, but not a corresponding sense of responsibility. This dissonance is managed by allocating responsibility to industry actors perceived as more powerful, particularly tour operators and consumers, and to the widespread greed and short term culture dominating the sector.

Keywords: socio-cultural norms, industrial norms, sustainability, small tourism firms, conforming, normative influences

1. Introduction

Concerns over the negative effects of tourism development have led to calls for tourism businesses to hold themselves accountable for the environmental and social

impact they have on the tourist destinations they rely on (Camilleri, 2014; Cooper et al., 2008; del Mar Alonso-Almeida et al., 2018; Sharpley, 2003). Tourism industry impacts have been under-estimated due to the multiplicity of service sector suppliers it involves, making it harder to measure impacts and attribute responsibilities (Gonzalez-Benito and Gonzalez-Benito, 2006; El Dief and Font, 2010), when in fact it accounts for 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Lanzen et al., 2018). The tourism industry consists mainly of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), who underplay their responsibility towards being sustainable due to their size (Coles et al. 2014; Thomas et al., 2011). However, their collective impact on the environment of accommodation SMEs is more significant than that of larger firms (Williams and Schaefer, 2013).

Previous studies have explored the internal reasons to adopt sustainability practices such as owner-managers' positive environmental attitudes, personal values and knowledge of environmental issues; business reputation, and cost-savings. The relationships between a positive attitude and actual environmental behaviour are complex (Tilley, 1999), as SMEs face numerous constrains that explain their attitude-behaviour gap, in relation to their world-views, ability to learn, knowledge, mastery, self-efficacy, lack of finance, time and resources (Dewhurst and Tomas, 2003; Garay et al, 2017; Sampaio et al, 2012; Prud'homme and Raymond, 2016). However these studies tend to be framed in stakeholder and institutional theories, that are more appropriate to examine larger firms than SMEs (Font et al., 2016b; Neubaum et al., 2012; Russo and Tencati, 2009).

We propose to study the pressure to follow social obligations and duties that are associated with the local community and shared/common norms, and the effect these social norms have on SMEs taking responsibility to be more sustainable. SMEs are embedded in their local societies, as shown by the fact that their owner-managers are more likely to a) come from the same geographic location in which they have established their businesses, b) employ local residents, and c) work with local suppliers (Darnall et al., 2010). Due to this embeddedness, SME owner-managers tend to mimic behaviour that is perceived appropriate to the local community and to conform to shared norms (Lepoutre and Heene, 2006). Studies so far, have highlighted the important role of different factors on driving SMEs to be more environmentally active, and have also suggested that they will perceive the same pressures differently, resulting in various degrees of engagement. We know that while most firms will conform to mimetic pressure and adopt sustainability practices based

on social expectations, the most proactive owner-managers go against societal normative pressures by redefining what SMEs can contribute towards sustainability (Andrews, 1998; Bansal, 2005; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Font et al., 2016a).

There are two potential explanations as to why SME owner-managers have different perceptions of their responsibilities to be sustainable, which the existing literature has neglected and which are addressed in this article. Firstly, even in current times, in which sustainability is rising in the public agenda, a tourism SME may not experience any noticeable pressure to invest in sustainability practices (Coles et al., 2016). Secondly, pressures for more proactive engagement with sustainability may be in conflict with more salient health and safety, quality and price pressures (Baddeley and Font, 2011). Empirical studies examining sustainable behaviour amongst tourism SMEs are scarce (see Sampaio et al. 2012; Sardianou et al. 2016; Tzschentke et al. 2008). Some scholars call for further research as to what contextual characteristics specific to the tourism industry influence SMEs to behave more sustainably (Garay et al., 2018; Papagiannakis and Lioukas, 2012; Bansal and Gao, 2006), including social norms (Sardianou et al. 2016).

Hence this research aims to understand the complex factors that motivate owner-managers in tourism SMEs to take responsibility, or not, to be more sustainable. This article focuses on one part of the findings of a larger study and focuses on only one factor, that of norms. This factor was identified from the in depth interviews with the participating SME owner-managers as an influential element in their decisions to adopt or reject sustainability behaviour. In order to better understand what, how and why various factors interplay and influence these owner-managers, the study adopted a grounded theory approach.

As a theory-building study, a priori literature was consulted primarily as a means of creating theoretical sensitivity within the areas of business sustainability, tourism SMEs and factors that motivate or hinder business owner-managers to adopt sustainability practices (briefly presented in this introduction). The important role of the concept of subjective norms on business decision making emerged from the interpretations of field data and was not imposed on the data from the beginning of the research. In other words, and in line with the Grounded Theory Method (GTM), the researchers engaged with relevant theories e.g. normative theories, during the theoretical and constant comparison stages, in order to enhance their theoretical sensitivity and to compare the emerging theory with other work in the field.

An inherent difficulty of the GTM is how the conceptual explanation is presented. One belief is to write and present as it happens i.e. data drives theory. However, this is not easily followed by the reader, because GTM studies use an iterative process of data collection and analysis (Goulding, 2009). As a result of these difficulties, the analysis represents the final theoretical interpretation of the category of socio-cultural and industrial norms, which is the product of the iterative process of data and theoretical integration (Suddaby, 2006). The article will continue with the explanation of the research method followed in this study. This is followed by a section on key theories of norms before presenting our analysis of what, how and why norms are used by SME owner-managers in their justifications of their chosen (un)sustainable business behaviour.

2. Grounded Theory Methodology

GTM was considered an appropriate methodology to investigate the sustainable behaviour of tourism SMEs and explore how different factors contribute, interrelate and eventually influence their sustainability decisions. This is because GTM facilitates the development of a theory by means of continuous data collection and analysis, and allows theoretical concepts to emerge from the data without being influenced by predefined frames of previously existing theories (Glazer, 2004). By adopting GTM this study answers the call made by Stumpf et al., (2016: 1692) for more GTM research in sustainable tourism that can "elucidate novel theoretical perspectives on sustainability", which the current tourism research lacks. A qualitative method was used to keep the approach flexible and open-ended in order to learn the meanings and views held by the participants in the study (Miller and Salkind, 2002).

The spatial boundary of the study area was the island of Crete. Crete is the largest island in Greece and one of the most popular tourist destinations for European and other international travellers. The firms included in this research were micro firms typically employing less than 10 people each, and were personally managed by their owner-managers. In addition to business size, ownership also acted as a control variable; only small firms owned and managed by one or two people were included in this study. It is worth noting that this study selected a cross-section of owner-managers, unlike previous studies of sustainable behaviour that have singled out individuals from businesses with sustainability credentials, or that self-selected themselves to participate in a sustainability survey (for example Coles et al., 2016;

Font et al., 2016a; 2016b; Garay et al., 2018; Sampaio et al. 2012; Sardianou et al. 2016; Tzschentke et al. 2008).

GMT typically uses in-depth face-to-face interviews to collect data. In this study the interviews were conducted in two stages, on an individual basis, and took place at the participants' business addresses for their convenience. During the first stage of the research, interviews were conducted with each of the owner-managers from the 23 participating SMEs. These interviews were unstructured, using open-ended questions, and aimed to construct a better understanding of the main issues considered important in tourism SMEs and which influence their daily operations. During the second stage, the focus was on elaborating upon key issues identified during analysis of the first round interviews. Consequently and in line with GTM, the researchers used theoretical sampling in order to select appropriate participants. 14 individuals from the first stage were re-interviewed, while two owner-managers from additional businesses were approached due to their fit with the emerging theory. For the second stage 16 interviews were conducted, bringing the total to 39 in-depth interviews for the whole study, with 25 participants. The average interview duration was 60 minutes.

All of the interviews were voice recorded and conducted in Greek, the native language of both the leading researcher and the participants. This was advantageous as it was easier to build rapport with the interviewees and to obtain rich data. The interviews were verbatim transcribed while only a few were professionally translated into English for verification purposes during the analysis. The second researcher verified the coding to maximise cross-coder reliability. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Leeds Beckett University.

The researchers chose to use a multi-step data analysis technique that synthesised both Strauss and Corbin's (1998) and Charmaz's (2006) versions of GTM. This combination made the most of the guidelines that could be adapted to this particular study (Strauss and Corbin's version), whilst also acknowledging that both researchers and participants embark together on the process of constructing reality (Charmaz' s version). Strauss and Corbin's basic principles of open coding, axial coding, theoretical emergence, theoretical sampling, and the process of abstraction remained fundamental throughout this research.

The interview transcripts were read carefully and key words or sentences were highlighted. Codes were developed to capture the main ideas of the participant's

words, and these were written in the margins of the transcript. Through this deeper insight, the researchers became familiar with the participants' implicit and explicit concerns and how these were used to explain their (in)action towards sustainability. The codes were grouped into categories according to the events and issues discussed by the participants. Through this more abstract level of analysis, the initial categories were restructured into more meaningful categories (Charmaz, 2006) and their relationships formed the theoretical hypotheses that helped to explain the phenomenon under study.

Through constant comparisons of the data and of incidents, the researchers were able to see variations in the owner-managers' behaviour depending on their circumstances, the environment, their different prioritisation of actions and strategic responses to events and problems, and the different consequences of those actions. Depending on the participants' engagement with sustainability practices, the participants were categorised into three groups: 'activists' who were very engaged, 'eco-savers' who were involved in some actions depending their ease, and 'apathetics' who were not engaged in any activities.

Through the different analytical steps, it was possible to identify some very important psychosocial processes that explained the way the participants were influenced by different normative stimuli. The processes that relate to socio-cultural and industrial norms are: **Fitting-in** with salient social networks through accepting common norms, **identifying** with other relevant groups and their norms, **matching** personal norms with social norms, **modelling** behaviour, **comparing** self/one's own business with others'/other businesses. The findings contribute to the existing literature on how owner-managers of small tourism firms use the different influential elements of values, self-efficacy, and socio-cultural and industrial norms to evaluate the desirability and worthiness of the sustainability practices under discussion, and to decide whether or not to adopt those sustainability practices.

This study applied the coding steps of Strauss and Corbin and Charmaz (open, axial, theoretical and abstraction) and examined carefully what the participants said (words/sentences). It is important to note here that this study did not apply a linguistic method such as the Institutional Grammar Tool (IGT) developed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995) in order to identify the norms, instead adopted the definition of norms proposed by Cialdini et al. (1990: 1015). More specifically when participants described what is 'typical' or 'normal' in their society and/or tourism industry the researcher

classed these descriptions as descriptive norms. While referrals of what is morally approved or disapproved by their social and business groups were classed as injunctive norms. We now present various theories of norms before moving to the theoretical category of socio-cultural and industrial norms and discuss its merit and contribution, by contextualising it within the literature.

3. A conceptual framework of social norms

The term social norm refers to what is commonly stated by a group of people when they explain what is acceptable or unacceptable in society, behaviour that is policed by a fear of disapproval by society and/or social sanctions (Culiberg and Elgaaied-Gambier, 2015; Klockner, 2014). Social norms are actions or beliefs that are commonly accepted as normal behaviours by a social group or society. These norms are shaped by, and shared through, interactions between and among different social groups (family members, friends, business partners etc.) and become the unwritten rules for the conduct of that group. Hence, social norms are fundamental to social life as they inform human actions, beliefs and feelings. Furthermore, they contribute directly to the formation of personal norms through the internalisation of whichever of these social norms an individual decides to follow (Bamberg and Moser, 2007). Norms can be categorised as rationality and moral norms, prudential norms, conventional social norms, and legal norms (Keller, 2006). Social norms can help us understand how group-values impact an individual's decision making.

Research to date has examined pro-socio-environmental behaviour as either motivated by self-interest (e.g. to protect oneself) or by pro-social motives (e.g. concern for other people and species, now or in the future) (Bamberg et al., 2007; Papagiannakis and Lioukas, 2012). Researchers have used different theoretical frameworks to guide their empirical research depending on whether they view pro-environmental behaviour as motivated by self-interest or by pro-social motivations. Those who see it as self-interested behaviour often employ the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), while those who view it as pro-social behaviour often embark on their studies using the Norm Activation Model (NAM) (Schwartz, 1977) or the Value Belief Norm theory (VBN) (Stern, 2000; Stern and Dietz, 1994). Other theories have been used to examine pro-environmental behaviour as pro-social behaviour such as Norm Focus Theory (NFT) (Cialdini et al., 1991) and Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; 1979; Terry and Hogg, 1996). Although all of the

aforementioned theories have examined social norms and their influences on behaviour, they differ in the types of norms they examine and in the degree of importance they assign to those norms as factors that influence behaviour.

There are some shortcomings in the norm categories used in the Norm Activation Model (NAM) (Schwartz, 1977) and the Values-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory (Stern e al., 1995). Both NAM and VBN recognise the social aspect of norms, but they focus on certain values (e.g. altruism, egoism), personal beliefs and internalised norms that focus on the norms and values at a personal level; hence, they are more in line with the personal values category. The argument put forward here is that individuals are simultaneously members of different groups in society and in their industry, and each group shares norms that influence decision making. Consequently, individual decision making is influenced by personal attributes (values and attitudes/beliefs) and by social norms. This is somewhat compatible with the category of subjective norms in Ajzen's TPB (1991), although that category is too narrow to reflect all of the social factors that can influence intentions towards a behaviour because it only reflects upon the influence of perceived social pressures (Bamberg and Schmidt, 2003). A further argument put forward here is that individuals are influenced not only by social pressure to behave in a particular way, but also by what they consider to be common practice in the locality; these are not pressures per se but are, rather, a shared belief/wish to behave in a way that is shared and approved of by the rest of the local society.

This line of argument borrows from the propositions of the Focus Theory of Normative Conduct (FTNC) (Cialdini et al., 1990) and the Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Both support the view that social influences and social norms affect human behaviour and therefore should not be ignored when examining human behaviour, as other studies have done (e.g. Sparks et al., 1995). FTNC distinguishes between descriptive norms (what most people do) and injunctive norms (what is commonly approved and disapproved of) (Cialdini et al., 1990). This distinction is very important as each type of norm refers to separate sources of human motivation and therefore leads to significantly different behaviour patterns in the same setting (Kallgren et al., 2000). Descriptive (is) and injunctive (ought) social norms influence one's intentions to adopt or reject sustainable behaviours by influencing their personal values, self-efficacy beliefs and the ways in which habits are developed (Cialdini et al., 1990). The analysis of the data collected in this study shed light on different factors

that influence owner-managers business behavioural decisions and therefore adopts this separation.

The remaining of the paper develops a GTM of the normative factors that influence the decisions of owner-managers of Cretan tourism SME to adopt or reject sustainable behaviours in their business practices.

4. Results and discussion

Our findings confirm that the role of social norms as a determinant of behaviour is poorly conceptualised (Barth et al., 2016; Cialdini et al., 1991; Schultz et al., 2007; Terry and Hogg, 1996). The findings of this study provide a nuanced account of how social influence and social norms affect human behaviour in relation to sustainability actions, and confirm their importance in determining human behaviour, as explained by Cialdini et al. (1991), Goldstein and Cialdini (2007), Papagiannakis and Lioukas (2012), Schultz et al. (2007), and Terry and Hogg (1996). Participants referred to what was acceptable to them (in relation to sustainable behaviours) within the different types of groups in which they lived and worked, such as the local society, their families and the tourism industry. These findings support the notion that social norms can be examined at different levels: individual, group or socio-cultural, and are consistent with the findings of others (e.g. Rohan, 2000) who have argued that when studying human behaviour, such as pro-environmental behaviour, one should examine the effects of relevant norms stemming from different levels (e.g. sociocultural, family or business groups) and identify how these norms in turn influence individuals to behave in particular ways. The participants referred to norms that were shared within their local communities, labelled 'socio-cultural norms', and those shared between industry players (Tour Operators (TOs), competitors and customers), grouped as 'industrial norms', although the literature does not usually differentiate between them. Table 1 summarises the most frequently stated norms, either implicitly or explicitly, to justify their attitudes and behaviours.

Table 1: The perceived prevailing socio-cultural and industrial norms towards sustainability behaviour

Socio-cultural norms	Industrial norms
Caring for family members	Quality of services and products is imperative
Prioritise the family's security and economic prosperity	Quality of tourists has declined

Conforming to socio-cultural values	Authenticity is more important than sustainability
Safeguard culture, tradition and authenticity	Compliance with Health and Safety (H&S) regulations is imperative
Having equal economic and development opportunities	Profitability is a priority for TOs
Placing responsibility on others for the protection of the environment.	Survival of small tourism firm is a priority
Value and offer of Philoxenia (hospitality)	Fierce competition / Illicit gain prevailing in the tourism industry
Being helpful to local people	Loyalty to customers
Supporting local suppliers	Honesty among business stakeholders
Sharing good (honest, trustworthy) relationships with suppliers	Large TOs are not interested in sustainability
	Greek tourism businesses are not interested in sustainability

Source: authors

The participants spoke of the norms in normative and informational ways when discussing the given behaviour under examination; they compared themselves with others in order to justify their attitudes and intentions to behave (un)sustainably. Socio-cultural and industrial norms provided justifiable reasons for actions, or inaction, reflecting social conditions and industrial or cultural practices when deciding whether or not to accept social-cultural or industrial norms and whether or not to adjust their behaviour accordingly. This is exemplified by the following interview excerpts:

> 'But Cretan businessmen will look around and they will see what their peers, their friends are doing, what is okay in Hersonissos and they will do the same' (Interviewee 14)

> 'There could have been a different type of development (referring to sustainability tourism) but it is very hard to be started by only one, without help . . .. but you see the market is not asking us that . . .can you imagine the society here? Considering who is our local society here, I don't believe that we are ready for such development.' (Interviewee 4)

Participants used the norms to model behaviours when they wanted to identify themselves with the norms and behaviours of a particular group and fit-in with that group. Participants labelled as 'apathetics' and 'eco-savers' used norms matching their

own values to justify inaction; Bandura calls it 'selective peer association' and states that it promotes 'self-efficacy in directions of mutual interest, leaving other potentialities underdeveloped' (Bandura, 1997:173). Participants also used social norms to predict the level of difficulty and anticipated benefits of any potential sustainability actions, as seen previously (Bamberg and Moser, 2007; Papagiannakis and Lioukas, 2012).

4.1 Perceived socio-cultural norms

Perceptions of what was commonly approved, or disapproved, of and what was usually done locally had a strong influence on their behaviour; a finding consistent with FTNC (Cialdini et al., 1990) and SIT (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Through these reflective and comparative processes, they evaluated themselves and their business practices against others in their locality and used these evaluations and comparisons as justifications to explain their decisions. The first column in Table 1 shows the socio-cultural norms used to justify specific practices (e.g. employing locals) that ordinarily fall under the principles of social sustainability; however, they did not adopt these behaviours because of their awareness and acceptance of social sustainability principles per se, but because these behaviours were dictated by their shared socio-cultural values that were well embedded in their society. The descriptive and injunctive socio-cultural norms had been internalised over many years to the point where they formed the core personal values of the participants, as can be seen by the following excerpts. This finding confirms the argument that in cultures that value collectivism and social cohesion (such as Crete), individuals are highly concerned with the welfare of any groups with whom they interrelate and/or identify (Font et al., 2016a; Hofstede, 2001; Schultz et al., 2007; Thomas and Lamm, 2012).

> 'With regards to social support, I consider myself very supportive because of my emotional attachment, my social norms and values. The biggest proportion of my goods is supplied by local businesses… I know I will pay 5% more in the total cost but I am doing it consciously. We were schoolmates. We grew up together. I see it as a chain reaction. I believe it is our responsibility to support each other.' (Interviewee 25)

> 'I always try to help local businesses and to employ locals. Because I believe that we should give employment as they will in turn send me customers. We have known each other for so many years…we help each other and we became friends.' (Interviewee 3)

Although the cultural and natural environments were important to the participants, who openly shared their admiration and affection for Cretan nature, they unanimously agreed that the current socio-cultural norms were not in favour of adopting environmental behaviours either in the personal (home) or business environments. This finding contradicts that of other researchers (Dewhurst and Thomas, 2003; Meek et al., 2010; Neubaum et al., 2012; Scannell and Gifford, 2013) who argue that close connections to a region and to family and friends will generate a desire to create businesses that place a high emphasis on maintaining the quality and pristine conditions of the local environment alongside remaining profitable. This contradiction can be explained by contextual variables, as cross-national studies examining the moral judgements of managers reveal the existence of differences among national, regional and organisational cultures. Cultures that emphasise environmental concerns are more proactive in encouraging the principles of sustainability in business spheres (Thomas and Lamm, 2012).

Participants seemed oblivious to any threats to their immediate environment; hence they did not consider it necessary to change their habits. The perceived prevailing socio-cultural norms were used to explain the gap between, on the one hand, their personal beliefs and feelings e.g. their love for the local environment and its importance for the existence of their own businesses, and, on the other hand, their limited adoption of environmental practices and intentions towards such practices. Some participants decided to resolve this dissonance by altering their personal beliefs in order to comply with the prevailing social norms, as seen previously (Cialdini et al., 1990; Deutsch and Gerard, 1955; Goldstein and Cialdini, 2007; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Schultz et al., 2007; Terry and Hogg, 1996). This is because people internalise the norms and values of the groups that they want to identify themselves with, which results in individual behavioural change.

4.2 Perceived industrial norms

Participants also modelled their behaviour according to their perceptions of what other industry partners did and what they expected from them. According to the owner-managers in Hersonissos, the most developed tourist resort in Crete, unethical businesses that operate in their destination have contributed to the development of a fiercely competitive environment for tourism SMEs, which has pushed many owner-

managers to mimic similar unethical behaviours even when they felt that it would conflict with their personal values.

> 'Those business owners want to gain using an unorthodox way, by dropping prices, downgrading the quality of services and by using illicit competitive strategies . . . in the end, ethical businesses will adopt the same strategies in order to survive. Even if you want to sell good products, offer excellent quality of services and be good in general, you can't, because you wouldn't be able to compete with the rest.' (Interviewee 11)

> 'So, what exactly is the market doing? What is the businessman across from you doing and whose business is a mess […] and who is not even a professional, he is just a bad businessman? What is he doing that I should do too?' (Interviewee 14)

They believed that neither large TOs nor customers or local competitors placed a high value on the protection of the natural and cultural environments. They reported that TOs never requested that they change their practices to those that are more environmentally, or socio-culturally, friendly, with the exception of a few niche, 'green' TOs, who then selected tourism SMEs that were sustainable. Participants viewed the prevailing industry norms as short term financial opportunism, and said that international TOs and all-inclusive hotels were 'milking the cow'. This created a fiercely competitive environment and an unfair playing field for small tourism firms. A fear of sanctions (termination of contracts, lowering prices) being imposed by TOs was used to explain the owner-managers' poor sustainability behaviour and poor intentions to focus on concepts beyond Health and Safety and cost savings.

Descriptive consumption norms that demonstrated a lack of demand for, and interest in, buying, consuming or endorsing services and products from businesses that operated in environmentally responsible ways, were another set of influential industrial norms reported in this study. According to the owner-managers, tourists that visited their localities tended to favour safety, value for money and offers of cheap food and drink (all of which were provided by the all-inclusive enterprises), rather than the small enterprises' core offerings of high quality, organic or locally sourced products. As a consequence, mass, cheap travel packages, determined mainly by the price, were

offered by the large TOs and this led to the owner-managers feeling unmotivated to create or invest in environmentally or socio-culturally responsible tourism and hospitality initiatives. This finding is consistent with other studies that support the impact of consumption norms on the desirability of the creation of new environmentally responsible ventures, products or services, and the current lack of customer demand for environmental and social improvements (Bohdanowicz, 2005; Coles et al., 2017; Hillary, 2004; Meek et al., 2010).

Sustainability decisions were subject to cost/benefit assessments. Purely monetary assessments were negative, requiring a high, certain and immediate investment for a long term, and only potential, return (see Bansal and Roth, 2000; Coles et al., 2014 & 2017; Williamson et al., 2006; Wu, 2009). These small firms were often the only source of income for the families of these owner-managers, and any investment was seen as a trade-off against the family's quality of life. The instability of the Greek economy fuelled that reticence to invest.

> 'Our first responsibility is to survive. Firstly, you aim to survive and then invest in environmental practices . . . We live in an era of survival, just to survive and keep afloat.' (Interviewee 14)

> 'There is such a financial crisis that everyone cares about cheap things, how they can do what they want and save money for their business and their family.' (Interviewee 14)

Hence the respondents prioritised low-cost, low risk or low effort environmental practices; for some this meant installing solar panels to heat water, while others fitted light sensors or bought energy efficient appliances.

> 'I have installed expensive solar panels so I can take advantage of solar energy. We live in such a sunny place.' (Interviewee 12)

4.3 Motivations to conform to normative influences

Widely practiced (un)sustainable behaviours were attributed to complex and dynamic operating environments, as well as shared habits and traditions drawing upon historical normative beliefs. The individuals acted in accordance with their own and

other people's or group's perceived expectations of them, and through self and social identification, they decided to conform to or reject the values, beliefs and behaviours of the group(s) to which they belonged. In cultures that endorse collective values such as belongingness, conformity is highly desirable. Yet the degree of conformity was influenced by different motives and goals. The findings suggest that these owner-managers either wanted to fit in and affiliate with a particular social group by conforming to the standards acceptable to the group, or they wanted to stand out from the social group by being unique and different from the commonly-accepted standards (see Font et al., 2016a; Goldstein and Cialdini, 2007; Griskevicious et al., 2006).

Conformity was also influenced by worldviews and perceived mastery (Sampaio et al., 2012). Uncertainty negatively impacted perceived mastery and made the owner-managers seek advice from their peers and business environment. Attracting less attention to oneself through affiliation to and mimicking of group norms was perceived as a good strategy in order to avoid insecure situations such as missing out on opportunities to sign contracts with TOs, being punished for being different or being rejected by other group members. Uncertainty and a lack of knowledge, advice and infrastructure to act sustainably particularly affected the 'apathetics' and 'eco-savers', who already held weak personal environmental-altruistic values. They were the most likely to conform to prevalent unsustainable social and industrial norms. These results provide empirical support for previous studies (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004; Griskevicius et al., 2006; Thomas and Lamm, 2012) that argued that individuals depend upon social norms, rules and routine procedures in order to reduce the unpredictability, and scepticism from others, that they may experience when faced with unknown situations. In companies where creativity and innovation is not valued, and conformity to standards is highly desired, the difficulty of introducing sustainability initiatives is perceived to be overwhelming and pushes individuals to remain within the boundaries of well-known and comfortable zones. Consistently, the 'apathetics' and 'eco-savers' were less creative and innovative than the 'activists'.

> 'It's the market itself that is taking us there... But due to this terrible disaster that has taken place [referring to the economic crisis and tour operators' stand to downgrade the contracts] businesses say: 'No, that's enough; I have neither time nor energy to waste'. So, they will offer only what is necessary. We will not invest in anything more.' (Interviewee 14)

The 'activists' relished their non-conformity regardless of the threat of being ridiculed and rejected by other members of their society and industry networks. They scrutinised those norms and imposed their own set of values on their businesses' identities and behaviours; this is well exemplified by the following quotes:

> 'We were treated like we were the idiots of the village because we did not follow what was popular in our industry at that time ….We went against the current and created this responsible business because of our beliefs.' (Interviewee 1)

> 'It was our core value and goal to create this business in such a way that will support and benefit the local community.' (Interviewee 2)

They were more innovative and open to new ideas, and did not experience uncertainty when considering sustainability practices (see Garay et al., 2017). This pattern of behaviour is consistent with SIT, which proposes that, for group norms to guide behaviour, individuals need to define themselves in terms of the social category and identify strongly with the group, otherwise personal determinants of behaviour such as personal attitudes, beliefs and control will have a greater impact on behavioural choice (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

5 Conclusions

Tourism contributes significantly to the degradation of the natural and socio-cultural environment that it relies on. In recent years, there has been an increase in demand for tourism businesses to take responsibility of the negative consequences of their operations and to become more environmentally and socially responsible. However, research shows a gap between the owner-managers' intentions and their actual behaviour, resulting in the call for further research on this topic. The role of social norms, as a determinant of business behaviour, remains undetermined. By adopting a GTM, this study provides an in depth analysis and explanation of how social norms influence the (un)sustainable behaviour of small tourism firms, thereby filling this research gap.

This article recognises the importance of different types of norms and their various influences on attitudes, intentions and behaviours. This grounded theory divides norms

into socio-cultural and industrial norms as well as into descriptive and injunctive norms, and in so doing, differentiates itself from Ajzen's proposition. That is because the normative factors go beyond the narrow view of Ajzen's theory that norms are external prescriptions that influence the intentions of behaviour, to the extent that people believe that their behaviour is observable by others who are important to them. This article shows the benefits of taking a wider view of norms as intention-behaviour determinants, by arguing that norms influence intentions and behaviours, for example when people feel that they are being observed by others and are expected to behave in a particular way, as put forward by Ajzen's theory. This is extended through the use of norms in various processes of comparison, social-identification, and conformity, through the internalisation of norms, and by modelling behaviours.

We find that individuals do not simply comply with assumed or actual surveillance because of their desire to be approved of, or accepted by, relevant and important others. They also made choices that reflected descriptive norms that had existed in their local society for many years in order to identify themselves with the groups that were important to them and which held those norms. They looked at the behaviours adopted and considered acceptable by significant others and modelled them in order to bring their own behaviour in line with them, thus enabling them to 'fit-in' with those groups. The findings of this study are consistent with SIT, and demonstrate that socio-cultural and industrial norms are used to shape the contextual basis within which owner-managers identify themselves with important groups, and evaluate and decide which behaviours are important in order to satisfy themselves (personal values) and others (fit-in). Furthermore, perceptions and reflections of what others did, or believed in, were used to decide on the efficacy of adopting similar behaviours.

Descriptive and injunctive norms differ in the way they motivate behaviour. Descriptive norms, shared between industry and social groups, create motivation by indicating which behaviour is the most adaptive and effective in the local environment. Armed with this knowledge, governmental bodies and international TOs can create positive descriptive messages that promote the notion that sustainable behaviours are, in fact, desirable and can encourage more local businesses to adopt them. By contrast, injunctive norms create motivation by holding out the prospect of social/business rewards or sanctions. Therefore, positive messages created with knowledge of injunctive norms can communicate social or business rewards or sanctions in order to directly influence the motivation of local businesses to engage in sustainability

practices. It is important to understand that both types of norms will affect behaviour as long as they are salient to the individual in question, are relevant to the particular behaviour, and are not in conflict.

There are two key limitations to this study. First, findings from a grounded theory study in a single location do not lend themselves to be generalised, and the validity of the emerging theory will be tested through the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study. Second, this is a relatively static study, and the data collected provides a snapshot of the normative influences that affect tourism SMEs regarding sustainability practices.

These limitations provide opportunities for future research. The study of a greater variety and number of tourism SMEs, in different situational contexts, can test the normative concepts presented here and how they influence business behaviour. Furthermore, a longitudinal study could examine how changes in the operating environment and societal values may affect behaviours. A more detailed comparison between overall business values, mastery and self-efficacy may also provide deeper insights into conformity to social norms in relation to sustainability actions.

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