

Environmental Attitudes of Generation Y Students: Foundations for Sustainability Education in Tourism

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Abstract

Sustainability has long been a theme in the tourism research and planning literature and is a growing concern in the wider area of business and corporate management. Consequent to these trends in practice and research there has been a growth in discussions of the need for sustainability education in programs for business and tourism students. The development of such programs needs to be based on a sound understanding of the existing values and attitudes of current students. This paper reports on a study that explored the environmental attitudes of a sample of Generation Y students in a business and tourism program using the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) scale. Numerous and often contradictory claims have been made about this generational cohort including some suggestions that they are more environmentally aware and concerned than previous generations. The analyses only partially supported this claim with the data showing a relatively high level of pro-environmental attitudes but not a significant increase over previous generations. Additionally the analyses revealed some important patterns in the responses within the sample particularly around gender and parental influences. The paper concludes with recommendations for sustainability education in tourism programs.

Keywords: Generation Y, sustainability education, environmental attitudes, new environmental paradigm, business education, tourism

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