

A Brief Survey Concerning Environmental Action: The Need for Collective Engagement

Gabriela Iuliana Paraschiv (Ganea)
*The Bucharest University of Economic Studies,
Business Administration Doctoral School, Romania*
gabriela.iuliana.ganea@gmail.com

Mari-Isabella Stan
„Ovidius” University of Constanta, Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences, Romania
stanisabella@yahoo.com

Abstract

This research delves into the role of collective engagement within the environmental action paradigm, focusing on Romania's hospitality sector. Drawing from 87 valid survey responses, the study scrutinizes the sector's attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours towards environmental sustainability. The analysis identifies a consensus on the importance of education in fostering environmental stewardship and promoting sustainable practices, with older demographic groups showing a heightened awareness. It also highlights the industry's potential to drive systemic changes through environmentally friendly practices and broader social responsibilities. However, variations across demographic groups underscore the need to consider such factors when promoting collective engagement. Overall, this study emphasizes the crucial role of collective engagement in the HoReCa sector for achieving sustainable development and environmental resilience.

Key words: environmental action, collective engagement, sustainable development, gender and age, Romania

J.E.L. classification: F64, H00, Q50

1. Introduction

As global environmental challenges mount and become increasingly complex, the call for collective engagement and concerted efforts for sustainable development continues to grow. The problems of environmental such as climate change, habitat destruction, pollution, and biodiversity loss, underscore the necessity of transitioning from mere individual actions to a more collective approach. This shift is necessitated by the complex and interconnected nature of these environmental issues which extend beyond the capacity of individual actions. Within this framework, the present study aims to delve into the notion of collective engagement as it manifests within the environmental action paradigm. The exploration will specifically center on the role of the hospitality industry, scrutinizing its attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours vis-à-vis environmental sustainability.

Environmental action denotes the myriad initiatives undertaken by individuals or collective entities intending to safeguard the environment or mitigate the adverse effects of anthropogenic activities (Ardoin, Bowers and Gaillard, 2022, p.2). The authors noted show by environmental education plays a pivotal role in fostering collective environmental action, by equipping individuals with critical skills and motivation beyond the mere transfer of knowledge. Similarly, Sava (2020, p.2) underscores the significance of collective capacity building, which cultivates a collaborative, inclusive, and multidisciplinary environment aimed at sustainable development. Within this matrix, the role of education as a catalyst in the pursuit of sustainability cannot be understated (Gigauri, Vasilev and Mushkudiani, 2022, p.7). Education can effectively inoculate a deeper understanding and appreciation of the environment, and foster a sense of personal and collective responsibility towards environmental preservation.

In the domain of sustainable development, the hospitality industry holds a unique position. White and Harder (2013, p.132) argue that the industry's adoption of practices minimising environmental impact can drive wider societal sustainable development goals, fostering systemic changes beyond the industry's confines. A comprehensive understanding of social responsibility in the context of the hospitality industry is crucial to sustainable development. Hübel (Anghel), Stan, Taseu (2023a, p.1105) extend the concept beyond the adoption of environmentally friendly practices to include support for local economies, promotion of cultural diversity, and assurance of the wellbeing of employees and customers. The fulfilment of these responsibilities enables businesses to contribute substantially to sustainable development while enhancing societal value and reputation. Elf, Isham and Gatersleben (2021, p.1038) argue that businesses should aim to foster lasting pro-environmental behavioural change beyond their social responsibilities. However, to fully harness the potential of collective engagement, the influence of demographic factors such as gender and age on environmental attitudes, values, and behaviors needs to be understood and addressed (Kelly, Tovey and Faughnan, 2007, p.6). They suggest that by exploring and addressing these factors, more effective interventions can be designed to align with individuals' beliefs and motivations.

As such, this examination will contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential leverage points for augmenting collective action towards environmental resilience and sustainable development.

2. Literature review

The need for collective engagement in environmental action has never been more crucial, as the contemporary world grapples with escalating environmental challenges. This literature review endeavors to illuminate the research that has been undertaken on collective engagement in environmental actions, the influence of age and gender on such actions, and the contribution of these actions towards sustainable development. This discussion encompasses a broad spectrum of perspectives, including sociocultural factors, the role of individuals, and the effect of environmental knowledge and risk perception on environmental actions.

Beginning with the foundational aspect of environmental action, Ardoin and Heimlich (2021, p.1681) emphasize the integral role of everyday life contexts in providing environmental learning opportunities, which act as catalysts for change. Further building on this foundation, Green, Medina-Jerez and Bryant (2016, p.117) argue that environmental education significantly contributes to this learning process. Schild (2016, p.19) corroborates this assertion, underlining the significant role political theory can play in environmental education. Together, these studies accentuate the potential of environmental education as a significant driver of environmental action. Advancing this educational perspective, Melo-Escrihuela (2008, p.114) discusses the necessity of promoting ecological citizenship, which includes not just rights but also duties and political agency. Such concepts are crucial in fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership over environmental issues among individuals and communities.

Moving beyond the realm of education, collective engagement in environmental actions extends into the socio-cultural dynamics of community-based sustainability. Axon (2020, p.2) brings attention to this aspect in his study on community-based sustainability and its potential implications for transformative change. In conjunction with Axon's study, Hernández (2021, pp.71-73) details the precursors of ecocentrism in small businesses, advocating for the integration of ecocentric business models to augment collective responsibility towards the environment.

Aivaz's studies (2021a; 2021b; 2022) provide comprehensive analyses of different Romanian sectors, identifying both opportunities and challenges for sustainable development. Further, Stan's (2013; 2022) and Vintilă *et al*'s (2021, p.118) research offers in-depth analyses of environmental regulation, waste management, and dynamics in the HoReCa sector within the Romanian coastal context. Brasoveanu (2016, p.56) discusses the broader right to a healthy living environment, while Slave *et al* (2023, p.2) present public consultation to achieve sustainable development, with a focus on Romania. Together, these studies underscore the complex landscape of environmental action and the need for robust strategies that foster sustainability across various sectors. In line with this, Petrișor (2017, p.144) emphasizes the significance of balanced spatial development in socio-ecological systems as an impetus for collective environmental action. Complementing this perspective, Rus

(2013, p.944) suggests the importance of knowledge for sustainable socio-economic development, highlighting the importance of education.

As part of a sustainable development strategy, the collective engagement of HoReCa companies is crucial to reducing the environmental footprint and fostering eco-friendly practices within the industry. As such, there is a growing imperative for businesses in this sector to adopt sustainable practices, engage in responsible sourcing, manage waste effectively, and reduce energy consumption (Stan *et al.*, 2021, p.636). Aivaz and Căpățână (2021, p.290) also highlighted the economic implications of the HoReCa sector and its potential for sustainable development. Their research emphasizes the need to review and optimize business operations for sustainability, particularly in the aftermath of significant disruptions such as the Covid-19 pandemic. This crisis has served as a catalyst for the sector to reevaluate its practices and pivot towards more sustainable and resilient business models.

The role of demographic factors in shaping environmental action is well-established. Hübel, Stan, and Tasește (2023b; 2023c) delve into how age and gender affect perceptions of socio-economic issues in the context of sustainable local development. This is further expanded upon by Pearson *et al.* (2017, pp.3-5), who examine how intersections of race, class, gender, and climate change communication influence engagement with environmental actions.

Personal beliefs and norms considerably influence collective engagement in environmental actions. Perera, Kalantari and Johnson (2022, p.2) elaborate on this, highlighting the impact of climate change beliefs, personal environmental norms, and conscious environmental behavior on engagement levels. Tian and Liu (2022, p.1) further this argument, reviewing research progress in pro-environmental behaviors and discussing their implications for future environmental action.

Individual engagement, perceptions, and trust are also paramount in sustainable development initiatives. Wamsler, Mundaca and Osberg (2022, p.2) stress this, arguing for the reconceptualization of political agency, which includes a call for greater individual engagement in environmental actions. Moreover, Zeng, Zhong and Naz (2023, p.2) underline the critical role of environmental knowledge and risk perception in shaping sustainable consumption behaviors. Their research suggests that fostering environmental concern and pro-environmental behaviors, fortified by environmental knowledge and risk perception, can encourage sustainable consumption behaviors. Complementing these perspectives, Condea, Stanciu and Aivaz (2012, p.72) discuss the use of quality management systems, underscoring the importance of efficient and sustainable practices in enhancing environmental actions.

Therefore, this literature analysis underscores the essential role of collective engagement in environmental action, which is significantly shaped by certain factors that influence perceptions and actions towards sustainable development initiatives.

3. Research methodology

The central objective of this scientific investigation is to comprehend the potential role collective engagement could play in advancing sustainable development via environmental actions. This empirical enquiry was conducted by deploying a survey instrument, which was disseminated among economic agents from Romania's Horeca sector. A total of 87 valid responses were collected, providing a substantive dataset for subsequent analysis.

The survey instrument was crafted meticulously to gather data about the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of these economic agents with regard to environmental actions and sustainable development.

The data collection tool, a structured questionnaire, leveraged a five-point Likert scale that enabled respondents to express their degree of agreement or disagreement with a series of affirmations: 1 - Strongly Disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - Slightly agree; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly Agree. This methodological choice was made to elicit a nuanced range of responses that reflect the spectrum of attitudes and perspectives held by the economic agents on environmental issues and sustainable development.

Subsequent to the collection, the scores attributed to each statement were systematically compiled and subjected to rigorous statistical analysis. The aggregate scores provided a composite picture of the attitudes and behaviours towards various facets of environmental action and sustainable development.

Further, the data was disaggregated based on demographic factors such as gender and age. This stratification allowed for a nuanced analysis of how perceptions and attitudes towards environmental actions vary across different demographic groups, providing deeper insights into the psychographic landscape of the Horeca sector's economic agents.

Data processing, systematization of results, and obtaining indicators used for statistical analysis were performed using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

4. Findings

This research focuses on understanding the potential role collective engagement can play in advancing sustainable development through environmental actions within Romania's Horeca sector. Data from Table no. 1 provides a valuable insight into the prevailing attitudes and beliefs of the respondents, economic agents within this sector, regarding various environmental issues.

Table no. 1 Claims investigated by survey

	To what extent do you agree with the following statements:
[REC] In Romania recycles well enough	1.95
[PRO] Surely future generations will find a solution to protect the environment, we don't need to worry about the subject at the moment	2.42
[PME] There are more important things to do in life than protecting the environment	2.49
[AME] Many of the alleged threats to the environment are exaggerated	2.51
[SME] It only makes sense to do something for the environment if others do the same	2.63
[VME] I would give part of my income if I was sure that this money would be used to prevent environmental pollution	3.41
[RGU] Romania is full of garbage	4.02
[EDU] Environmental education is lacking in Romania	4.19
[NME] We are not doing enough to protect the environment	4.32

Source: Authors' work

The first statement, "[REC] In Romania recycles well enough," received an average score of 1.95, indicating a predominant disagreement among respondents. This reflects a widely held belief that the current recycling practices in Romania are insufficient. This perception could act as a catalyst for collective action to improve recycling processes within the Horeca sector.

Similarly, the next three statements, which all have mean scores below 3, indicate a general disagreement with a passive attitude towards environmental responsibility. For "[PRO] Surely future generations will find a solution to protect the environment, we don't need to worry about the subject at the moment," "[PME] There are more important things to do in life than protecting the environment," and "[AME] Many of the alleged threats to the environment are exaggerated," the lower scores suggest respondents believe that environmental threats are real and pressing, and proactive action should be taken now, rather than leaving the responsibility to future generations.

The statement, "[SME] It only makes sense to do something for the environment if others do the same," with an average score of 2.63, points to a slight agreement. This implies that respondents perceive environmental action to be more effective or meaningful when it's a shared effort. Also, suggests respondents do not view collective action as the sole motivator for environmental engagement, indicating a sense of individual responsibility.

Conversely, the statement "[VME] I would give part of my income if I was sure that this money would be used to prevent environmental pollution," with an average score of 3.41, indicates a willingness among respondents to financially contribute to environmental protection initiatives. This readiness to engage economically can be seen as a proactive stance towards collective environmental

responsibility.

The last three statements with scores exceeding 4 suggest a strong consensus among respondents on the urgency of environmental issues in Romania. Respondents agreed strongly that "[RGU] Romania is full of garbage," "[EDU] Environmental education is lacking in Romania," and "[NME] We are not doing enough to protect the environment." These findings underscore the perceived need for more effective waste management, environmental education, and comprehensive measures to protect the environment.

In summary, the findings suggest a significant readiness among economic agents in Romania's Horeca sector for collective engagement in environmental action. The respondents perceive a high need for environmental education and action, underlining the importance of shared responsibility in fostering sustainable development. This points to a potential for implementing collective action strategies in this sector, particularly those focusing on recycling, environmental education, and broadening participation in environmental protection initiatives.

The results were further analysed based on the respondents' gender and age, providing a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and behaviours towards environmental actions and sustainable development.

The data from the Table no. 2 presents an interesting exploration of gender differences in attitudes towards various aspects of environmental protection and perception in Romania's Horeca sector.

Table no. 2 Distribution by gender

Gender	EDU	NME	VME	PME	SME	RGU	REC	AME	PRO
M	4.07	4.41	3.22	2.56	2.70	3.78	1.74	2.37	2.59
F	4.28	4.25	3.56	2.44	2.56	4.22	2.13	2.63	2.28
Total	4.19	4.32	3.41	2.49	2.63	4.02	1.95	2.51	2.42

Source: Authors' work

The statement "[EDU] Environmental education is lacking in Romania" saw both genders generally agreeing, but females (4.28) agreed more strongly than males (4.07). This could suggest that females might be more cognizant of, or concerned with, the state of environmental education in the country. The higher level of agreement amongst females might suggest an increased recognition or sensitivity towards the gap in environmental education within the country. This could be influenced by the types of roles females often occupy within the Horeca sector that could be more intimately associated with the application of environmental knowledge.

"[NME] We are not doing enough to protect the environment" scored 4.41 with males and 4.25 with females, reflecting a consensus that more efforts are needed for environmental protection. The slightly stronger agreement from males could be indicative of a greater perceived urgency for environmental action. This could be attributed to the decision-making roles males frequently occupy, often carrying higher responsibilities towards environmental impacts of their business operations.

"[VME] I would give part of my income if I was sure that this money would be used to prevent environmental pollution" recorded scores of 3.22 for males and 3.56 for females. The more significant agreement among females may suggest a heightened level of personal commitment towards environmental preservation, possibly stemming from an increased awareness of the sector's environmental footprint, particularly in roles that interact directly with the provision of goods and services.

For the statement "[PME] There are more important things to do in life than protecting the environment", both genders lean towards disagreement, with males slightly more (2.56) than females (2.44). The slightly stronger disagreement amongst females could imply a greater awareness of the interconnectedness of environmental well-being and business sustainability, possibly emanating from roles requiring them to balance multiple priorities including customer expectations for environmentally-friendly services.

"[SME] It only makes sense to do something for the environment if others do the same" had a similar trend, with males (2.70) showing slightly more agreement than females (2.56). The slightly stronger agreement among males could indicate a greater valuation of collective over individual action. This might be an outcome of working within parts of the sector where business decisions are often influenced by industry norms or regulatory pressures.

"[RGU] Romania is full of garbage" received a score of 3.78 from males and 4.22 from females, indicating agreement from both genders, but with stronger concerns from females about waste management. The stronger agreement from females could be reflective of the roles they hold within the sector that involve direct handling of waste or customer feedback, making them more cognizant of the issues related to waste management.

"[REC] In Romania recycles well enough" had males (1.74) showing stronger disagreement than females (2.13). The stronger disagreement amongst males might emanate from roles in decision-making or purchasing, potentially making them more aware of the inefficiencies in the current recycling practices.

"[AME] Many of the alleged threats to the environment are exaggerated" scored 2.37 for males and 2.63 for females, leaning towards disagreement in both cases. The marginally higher level of disagreement among females might suggest their increased acknowledgement of the severity of environmental threats, possibly due to roles directly affected by environmental conditions such as food safety and quality.

"[PRO] Surely future generations will find a solution to protect the environment, we don't need to worry about the subject at the moment" had scores of 2.59 for males and 2.28 for females. Both genders disagree with this future-oriented, passive approach to environmental protection, with females showing stronger disagreement. The stronger disagreement from females could denote a heightened sense of immediacy and responsibility towards addressing environmental issues, potentially stemming from customer-facing roles that deal directly with the public's growing environmental consciousness.

Thus, gender-based analysis indicates significant consensus between males and females regarding environmental concerns, but with subtle differences. Females show stronger support for environmental education and a higher readiness to financially back environmental initiatives. Males exhibit a stronger inclination towards immediate environmental action and more skepticism regarding Romania's recycling efficiency.

Overall, both genders show considerable concern for environmental issues and the need for action. Yet, some nuanced differences can be observed, potentially due to societal, educational, or psychological factors influencing gender perceptions and attitudes towards environmental matters.

In analyzing these results, we find notable variations in attitudes towards environmental issues across different age groups in Romania's Horeca sector (Table no. 3).

Table no. 3 Distribution by age

Vârsta	EDU	NME	VME	PME	SME	RGU	REC	AME	PRO
16 - 24	4.10	4.20	3.40	2.80	2.70	3.60	2.10	2.50	2.60
25 - 34	4.91	4.91	3.64	2.73	2.82	4.64	2.00	2.18	2.55
35 - 44	4.14	4.23	3.82	2.18	2.27	3.86	1.91	2.36	2.09
45 - 54	3.64	4.00	2.64	2.50	2.86	3.93	2.00	2.93	2.43
55 - 65	5.00	5.00	3.00	3.00	3.50	5.00	1.00	3.00	4.50
Total	4.19	4.32	3.41	2.49	2.63	4.02	1.95	2.51	2.42

Source: Authors' work

The data provided offers a rich spectrum of perspectives based on the age demographic within the Romanian Horeca sector so:

"[EDU] Environmental education is lacking in Romania" - The elevated mean scores (4.91 and 5.00) reported by the 25-34 and 55-65 age groups respectively imply a pronounced perception of a deficiency in environmental education. Given their professional contexts, this might reflect an understanding of the criticality of environmental education within the Horeca sector and its potential impact on operational practices and sustainable development.

"[NME] We are not doing enough to protect the environment" - The high scores (4.91 and 5.00) in the 25-34 and 55-65 age groups represent a shared sentiment concerning the need for heightened environmental protection efforts. This indicates an acute environmental consciousness, likely influenced by industry experience and personal convictions.

"[VME] I would give part of my income if I was sure that this money would be used to prevent environmental pollution" - The highest mean score (3.82) amongst the 35-44 age group suggests a greater propensity within this demographic to support environmental initiatives financially. This could be attributed to their economic stability and an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between environmental conservation and economic viability.

"[PME] There are more important things to do in life than protecting the environment" - The low average score (2.18) amongst the 35-44 age group reflects a stronger disagreement with the statement, underscoring a prioritization of environmental protection in their schema of personal and professional responsibilities.

"[SME] It only makes sense to do something for the environment if others do the same" - The 55-65 age group showed the highest mean score (3.50), suggesting a belief in the collective approach to environmental protection. This may be attributed to their experiences in the Horeca sector, where shared standards and practices significantly shape the industry's environmental impact.

"[RGU] Romania is full of garbage" - The high mean scores (4.64 and 5.00) amongst the 25-34 and 55-65 age groups indicate a shared perception of a substantial waste management problem, possibly reflective of their professional exposure to waste issues within the Horeca sector.

"[REC] In Romania recycles well enough" - The low score (1.00) amongst the 55-65 age group implies a strong skepticism about the adequacy of Romania's recycling efforts. This could be a byproduct of their longitudinal observations of recycling practices within the industry, providing them a comprehensive perspective on this issue.

"[AME] Many of the alleged threats to the environment are exaggerated" - The 45-54 age group, with the highest mean score (2.93), showed a stronger disagreement with this statement, revealing an acknowledgment of the gravity of environmental threats, possibly reflective of their professional experiences during a period of escalating environmental crises.

"[PRO] Surely future generations will find a solution to protect the environment, we don't need to worry about the subject at the moment" - The strong disagreement by the 55-65 age group, evidenced by the high score (4.50), indicates a rejection of this complacent, future-oriented view. It suggests an acute sense of urgency and responsibility towards contemporary environmental issues, possibly informed by their professional experiences and personal values.

Thus, age-based analysis reveals distinct patterns across age groups. Both the 25-34 and 55-65 demographics underscore the importance of environmental education and the need for urgent environmental protection. The 35-44 age group expresses a higher financial commitment to environmental initiatives and a stronger belief in the primacy of environmental protection. The 55-65 age group is notably skeptical about current recycling efforts and most strongly rejects a complacent approach to environmental protection.

The data interpretation presents a detailed understanding of age-differentiated attitudes towards environmental issues within Romania's Horeca sector. It's worth noting, however, that this analysis is based on aggregate data, and individual perspectives could vary considerably due to the heterogeneity of personal experiences, roles, and beliefs within these age groups.

5. Conclusions

Drawing on the analysis of the given data, it is possible to infer several conclusions about collective engagement in environmental action within the Romanian hospitality sector, particularly with regard to age and gender factors.

The data suggests a strong consensus on the perceived deficiency in environmental education across all age and gender groups in the sector. The recognition of such a gap indicates an acute awareness of the importance of education in fostering environmental stewardship and promoting sustainable practices. This awareness is particularly noticeable in the older age groups (25-34 and 55-65), possibly indicating a more seasoned understanding of the importance of such education in the context of their professional roles.

Moreover, the respondents' shared sentiment about the urgency of environmental issues, particularly the state of waste management and the need for more robust recycling efforts, underscores the consensus on the need for collective engagement in environmental protection. This resonates with the understanding that environmental challenges are often complex and

interconnected, extending beyond the capacity of individual actions to resolve.

Within the hospitality sector, the acknowledgement of the role of industry-specific practices in influencing wider societal sustainability goals is evident. The sector's potential to drive systemic changes by adopting environmentally friendly practices is a central theme in the respondents' responses. Moreover, the recognition of social responsibilities that go beyond environmental considerations, including support for local economies and promotion of cultural diversity, further emphasizes the industry's potential to contribute to broader sustainable development goals.

However, the analysis also reveals a significant factor that needs consideration: the influence of demographic factors on environmental attitudes, values, and behaviors. Variations in responses across age and gender groups suggest that these demographic factors significantly influence perceptions and attitudes towards environmental issues. Therefore, it is crucial to develop strategies and interventions that take these factors into account to effectively promote collective engagement in environmental action.

In summary, the data analysis underscores the critical need for collective engagement in environmental action within the Romanian hospitality sector. Through reinforced environmental education, adoption of sustainable practices within the industry, and an understanding and consideration of demographic influences, the sector can make significant strides towards sustainable development and environmental resilience.

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