

# Chapter 31

## Sustainability Attitudes of Tourism Family Firms in Alpine Tourism Regions

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### ABSTRACT

*Recognising opportunities and risks are central for every business to stay successful in the long-run and a mandatory capability to create realistic management strategies. Recent papers argue strategic planning is sustainable in the long run. However, little is known about the owner-managers' attitudes and perceptions of challenges and opportunities of family businesses. This research shows the results of a qualitative inquiry identifying attitudes on sustainability of owner-managers in tourism family firms. Furthermore, attitudes towards the three dimensions of sustainability are analysed. The results reveal an awareness of economic and social sustainability attitudes while the environmental dimension seems to be less prominent.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has emerged as an integrated concept consisting of environmental, social, and economic dimensions using resources in a sustainable way. The question arises, how to develop sustainable strategies based on the applicability of the fundamental principles and objectives and how the requirements for sustainable development can be managed (Sharpley, 2000). The goal of sustainable development is “to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987, p. 15). The focus, from an economic viewpoint, is to provide employment and wealth to human beings (Garvare & Johansson, 2010). This evolved towards the concentration on values and goals, e.g., equal education and job opportunity, security, and well-being (Robert, Parris, & Leiserowitz, 2005). Sustainability addresses, for instance, biodiversity, preservation of nature, life support systems, cultural diversity, distinctive and threatened communities, education, or resource allocation (Robert et al., 2005).

Recognizing opportunities and challenges is key to business success. Recent research shows that successful family firms differentiate from non-family firms in terms of governance (Neubauer & Lank, 2016), planning and executing strategies (Chrisman, Chua, Massis, Minola, & Vismara, 2016) and the ownership structure (Chua, Chrisman, & Sharma, 2003). Especially in small and medium-sized family firms (SME) participating multiple generations from the business (Gallucci, Santulli, & Calabrò, 2015). Furthermore, family members tend to stay longer in top management positions of the family firm, compared to managers in non-family firms (Kellermanns, Eddleston, Barnett, & Pearson, 2008). Besides factors such as strategic priorities, community demographics, manager characteristics, firm size, education, or ties to institutional authorities, family-firm specific factors play a role. Thus, family values and moral standards, such as ownership structure, influence owner-managers decisions in implementing sustainable practices in family firms, as the aim is to run a business that satisfies market and family objectives at the same time (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2016).

Recent research revealed moderating factors such as the family background, firm governance, the environment, and nature that influence the sustainability behavior of family firms (Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2016). However, Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2016) conclude that there is not a simple answer on the sustainability behavior of family firms and call for further research considering the relationships between family firm ownership, management, and the organizational context. Authors suggest that future research needs to focus on the definition of strategic problems and opportunities supporting owner-managers to improve the sustainability behavior of the family firm (Saiz-Álvarez, Leitão, & Palma-Ruiz, 2019; Saiz-Álvarez & Palma-Ruiz, 2019). The authors follow this call and ask the following research question: *How are sustainable attitudes shaping the perceptions of family firm owners towards opportunities and challenges faced by tourism family firms?*

Based on qualitative interviews, this research assesses owner-managers' perception of opportunities challenges and risks. The authors identify whether the recognition of opportunities and risks include any considerations about sustainable attitudes, such as claiming the importance for future generations and implications on the environment or any consideration related to the local community. This indirect approach is relevant to avoid owner-managers attempts in paying lip services to sustainability. The following literature review shows the latest research related to sustainability, family firms, and sustainable attitudes. The methodology section presents the data collection procedure, followed by the results and discussion section and the recommendations to practitioners and scholars. The authors contribute to the

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