

UNDISCOVERED SPACE IN TOURISM – FREE TIME PREFERENCES OF SPANISH VEGANS

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Abstract:

Introduction: free time preferences and holiday choices of Spanish vegans are a topic missing in scientific papers, despite the increase of public interest in veganism. The issue is, however, presented in mass media but in the ethical and dietary aspect, not touristic. Results of the research might be used by institutions and companies of the holiday sector to tailor the holiday offer to vegans' needs

Aim: diagnosis of tourism preferences among Spanish vegans and their assessment of tourist offer

Material and Method: the research was carried out between November 2014 and January 2015 with the use of diagnostic survey method and questionnaire technique. The research group (n=59) consists of 44 women and 15 men and was chosen by purposive sampling.

Results: Vegan board and cosmetics are the most important factors influencing resort choice. Respondents would agree to pay more for a stay in case it contained vegan board. Study group assesses the knowledge of hotel, catering and tourism industry staff about vegans' needs as insufficient, as well as the number of resorts providing vegan board.

Conclusions: The current findings underline the role of a varied offer and good training of tourism professionals in the overall assessment of holiday service by vegans. This social group cares not only about a proper plant-based diet but also cosmetics, service and other features of a hotel facility. As a demanding group of tourists, their presence on tourism market should be noticed and a specialized offer meeting their needs should be created in order to attract them.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary nutritional sciences three main diet types are distinguished: omnivorous (consumption of all product groups), vegetarian (exclusion of meat and fish) and vegan [1] (exclusion of all animal-derived products - meat, fish, fowl, dairy and eggs, honey, gelatin etc.) [2]. In a wider context, veganism is a lifestyle which eliminates the use of products derived from animals in all areas of life: nutrition, cosmetics, clothing and others [3].

Currently, there is a lack of information on the estimated number of vegans worldwide. Only piecemeal data has been retrieved: a survey carried out in the United States estimated that 6,8% of adults (18 years or older) do not consume meat while 1,4% declare to follow vegan diet [4]. A plant-based diet is implemented by ca. 1,6% Polish citizens [5]. According to research, factors determining the switch to a lifestyle free from animal-derived products have the following character: religious/spiritual (2%), health (16%) and most often

moral/ethical (82%) [6]. Among the aspects correlating with vegan diet a higher socio-economic status, lower intake of alcohol and nicotine, as well as higher level of education, can be distinguished [7].

Vegan tourism is a topic missing in the scientific literature, although the interest in veganism rises constantly [8]. The idea of this lifestyle is, however, present in mainstream media but only in a narrow context – dietary and health. The touristic aspect of veganism has not been researched so far, although the connection between dietary preferences and free time choices was proven in research [9]. Food is one of the crucial elements which influence destination choice, representing its added value [10] and the number of tourists who prize it is constantly rising [11]. Holiday activity based on discovering new cuisine is called culinary tourism [12]. Vegan culinary tourism is one of its newest branches.

AIM

The aim of the paper is to present the diagnosed profile of Spanish vegans: their holiday preferences, prioritization of needs and opinions on available tourist services.

Research described in the paper was carried out in order to answer the following research questions:

1. Are Spanish vegans likely to pay more for a holiday offer that contains vegan board (in comparison to an offer with standard board and no board)?
2. Which lifestyle elements are crucial in the choice of hotel services for Spanish vegans?
3. Is the knowledge about vegans' needs among tourism industry employees enough in their customers' opinion?

This research has a diagnostic character and is a pilot study which will be carried out on bigger and more varied groups of vegans in the future.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

In this diagnostic study the research group was chosen by purposive sampling (declared veganism). Subjects were recruited on numerous internet vegan fora (as in the CAWI method). Out of 74 respondents who filled in the questionnaire, 15 men and 44 women answered all the questions and they form the study group (n=59).

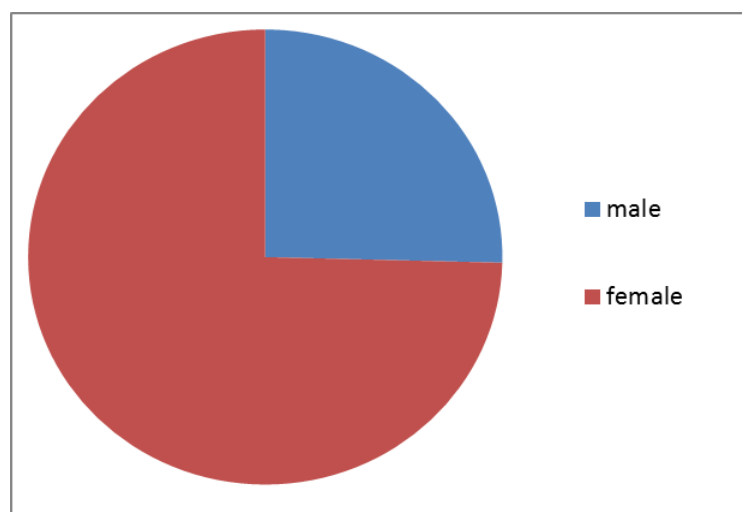


Fig.1. Subjects' sex
Source: own research

The biggest subgroup in the research group consists of subjects in the age of 18 to 25 years. Altogether 38 respondents are under 30 and 21 are over. None of the subjects is younger than 18.

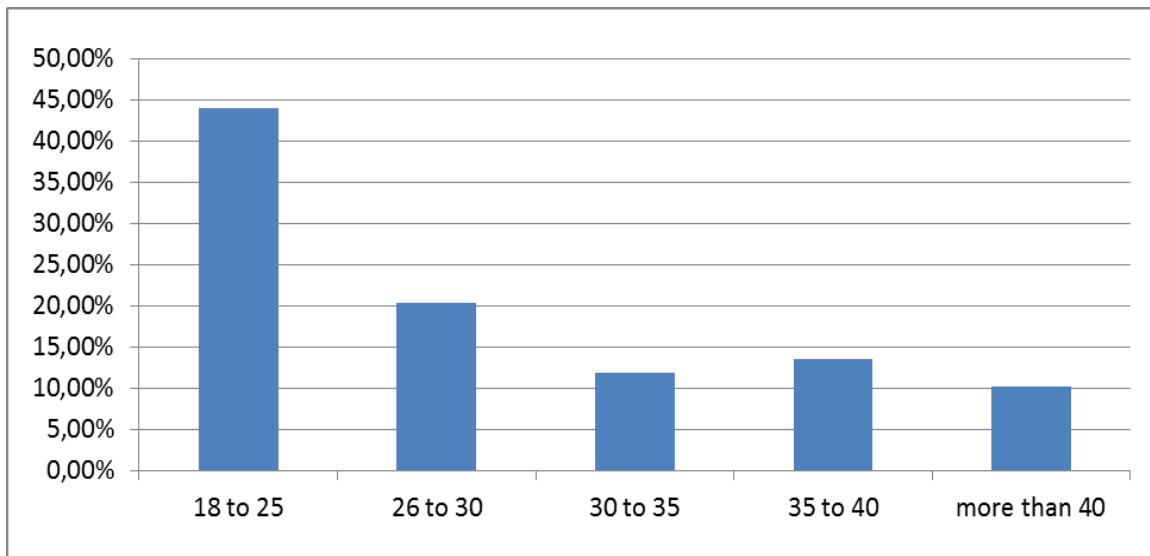


Fig.2. Subjects' age [years]
Source: own research

Interviewees were also asked about the size of their city of origin. The majority (32 subjects) come from cities having over 100 thousands inhabitants. 50% of them represent the biggest cities with over 500 thousand citizens. The least often indicated answer is "10 to 20 thousands" – only 3 interviewees declared they come from towns/villages of this population.

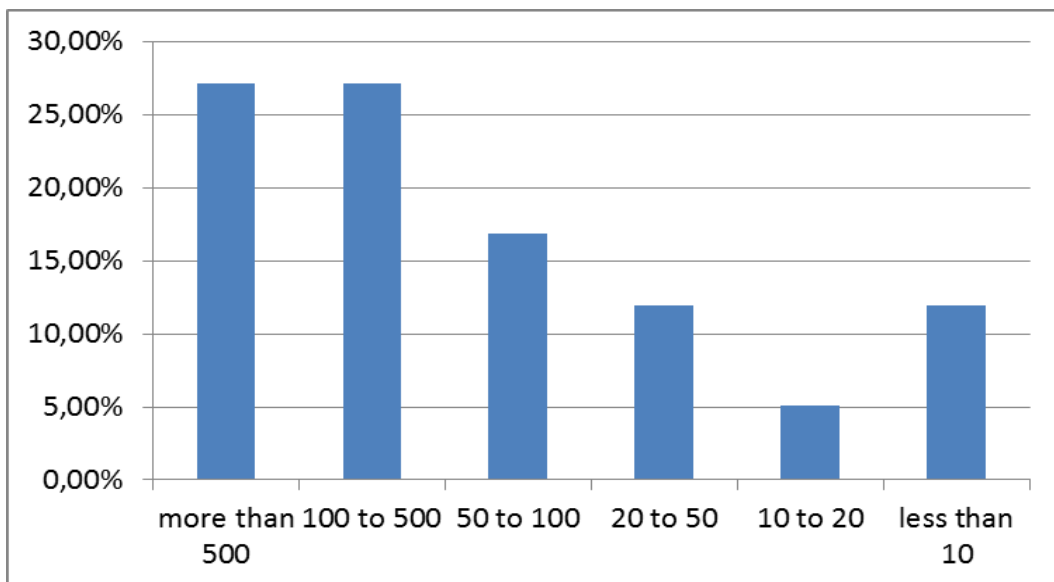


Fig.3. Subjects' city of origin [thousands of inhabitants]
Source: own research

The demographic part of research contains the question of completed level of education. Among the research group the most often indicated answers are: „Bachelor” (29 indications) and “secondary”- high school (17). None of the respondents obtained a PhD or higher titles (there was a possibility to tick this answer as well).

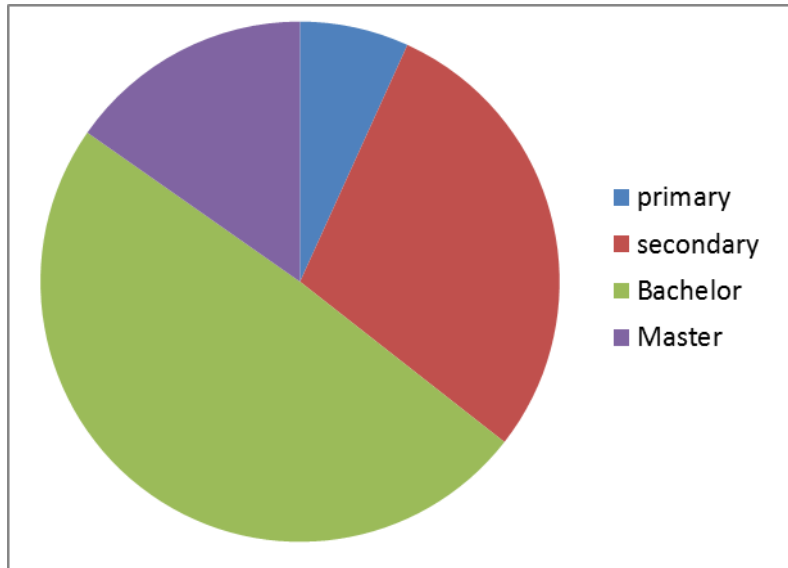


Fig.4. Subjects' completed level of education
Source: own research

Subjects were also asked to declare the period of vegan diet implementation. Out of 59 respondents, 23 have been vegan for less than 12 months, 17 from 1 to 2 years and 15 from 3 to 5 years. Four subjects went vegan over 6 years ago.

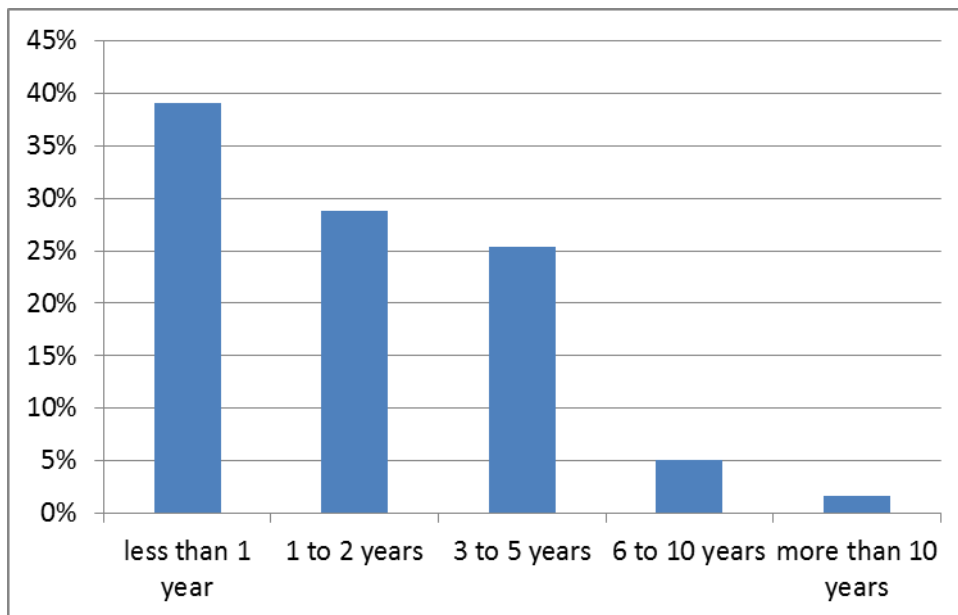


Fig.5. Subjects' period of implementation of the vegan diet
Source: own research

MATERIAL

The survey created for this diagnostic research contains 15 questions in Spanish. Six of them relate to demographics. The survey consists of multiple-choice, hypothetical and open type questions.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The research was carried out between November 2014 and January 2015. In accordance to the CAWI (Computer-Aided Web Interview) method the questionnaire was

uploaded to a password-secured website. Respondents obtained the password enabling them to fill in the questionnaire.

RESULTS

In the main part of the survey, 59 respondents were asked questions about their opinions and views on the available tourist offer, as well as the factors determining their holiday choices.

Firstly, the research group were asked about a hypothetical choice, they would make between a more expensive holiday offer containing vegan meals and a cheaper one without board. 40 subjects expressed their will to pay more for a stay with vegan board.

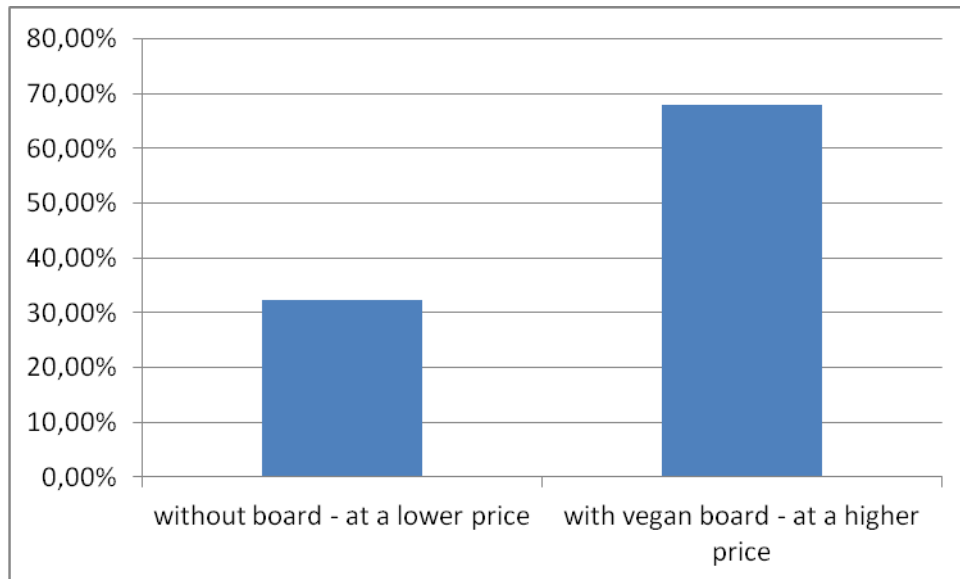


Fig.6. Preferred holiday offer

Source: own research

Subjects indicated one or two of the three proposed statements which describe their experiences. The analysis of questionnaires proved that over 90% respondents have never stayed at a specialized vegan resort. Two subjects spent their holiday in a resort offering vegan board in Spain and two others abroad (in Dominican Republic Hotel Riu and in Riviera Maya Gran Paladium Hotel).

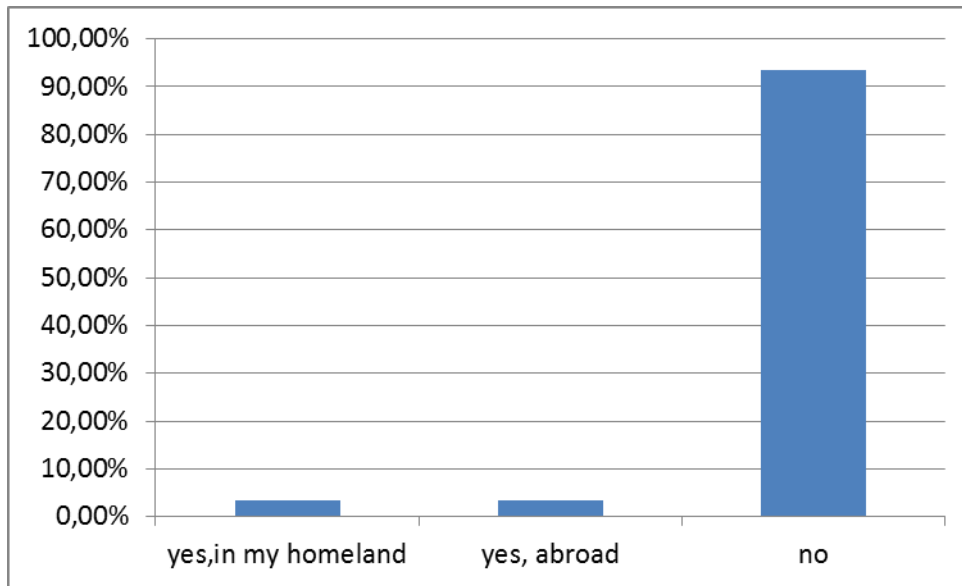


Fig.7. Previous stay in a specialized resort offering vegan board
Source: own research

59 interviewees were asked about any previous rejection of a holiday offer because of its' lack of vegan board. 13,6% answers indicated such experience. The other 13,6% respondents claim that in such a case they chose accommodation with standard board bargaining for finding vegan products in the variety of available dishes. Vast majority of the research group (43 out of 59 subjects) being offered holidays without vegan meals option decided to buy only accommodation without board.

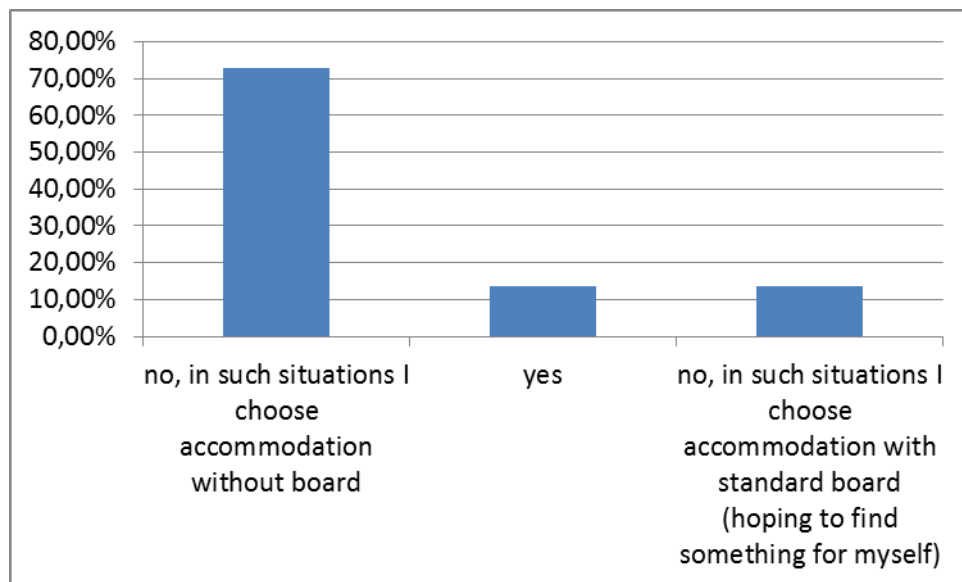


Fig.8. Previous rejection of holiday offers containing no vegan meals
Source: own research

Another question regards the subjects' willingness to stay in a hotel offering vegan board. 41 out of 59 interviewees indicated that they would choose holiday with board in such a resort only if the price would not be higher than with standard dishes. 17 subjects would agree to pay more for having vegan meals and one respondent would not like to stay in a hotel which provides plant-based board at all.

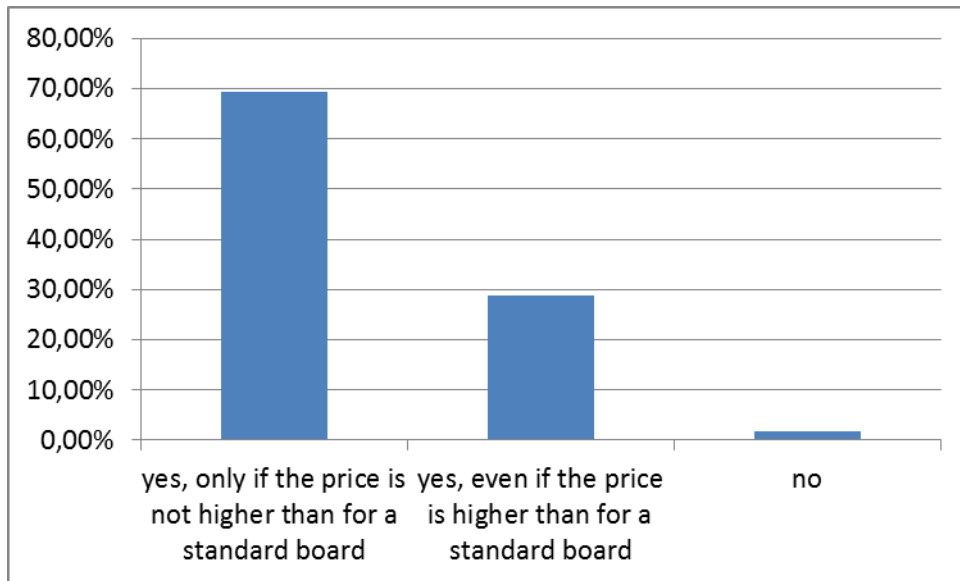


Fig.9. Willingness to stay at a resort providing vegan meals
Source: own research

Another researched issue is the respondents' opinion about the number of resorts offering meals tailored to vegans' needs worldwide. Only 3 subjects state that there are enough resorts where vegans are offered proper food.

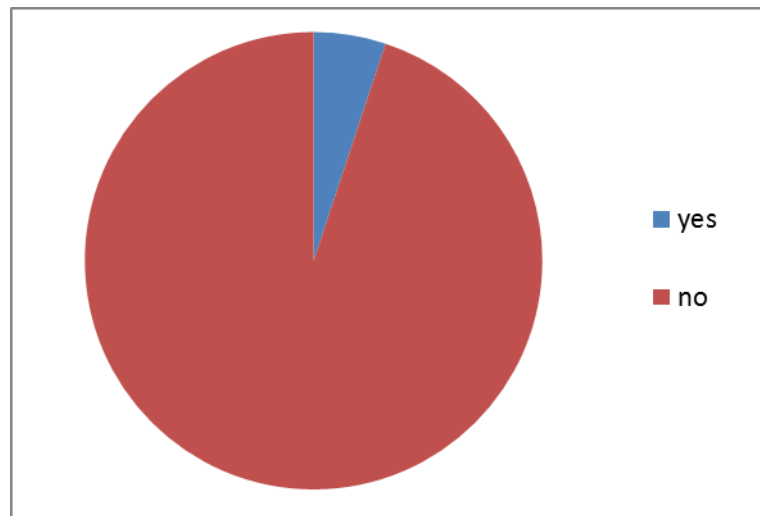


Fig.10. Sufficiency of the number of hotels providing vegan meals
Source: own research

The research group also expressed their opinion about the knowledge of vegans' needs among tourism industry employees. All of the respondents assess it negatively.

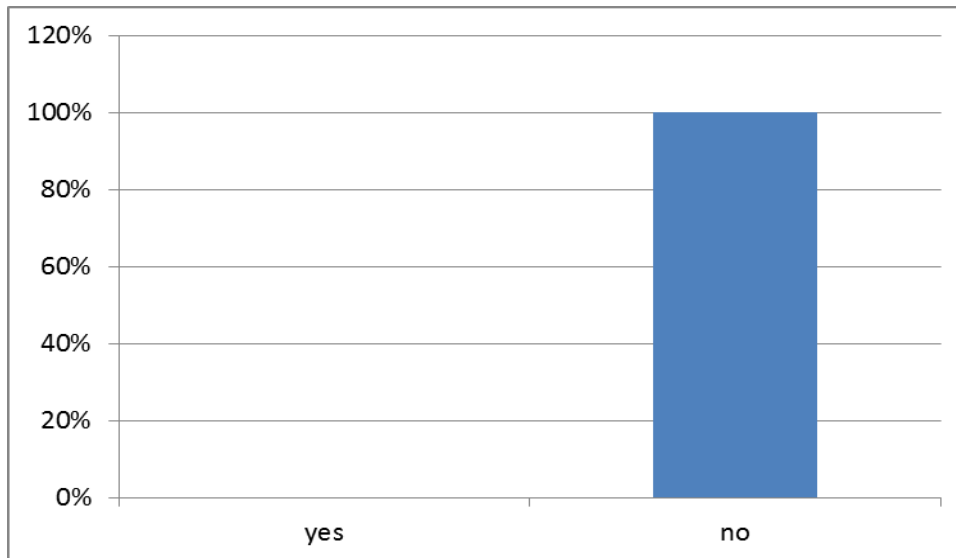


Fig.11. Sufficiency of the knowledge about vegans needs among tourism industry workers
Source: own research

Respondents put seven given elements of a holiday resort in order from the least to the most essential. The majority of interviewees indicated vegan meals and cosmetics (e.g. soap, shampoo) as the most desired ones. Room equipment such as tapestry, pillow fillings and decorations is the third most often indicated element while the least important one, according to given answers, is the presents of other vegans (if the resort informs about it on its website or leaflets).

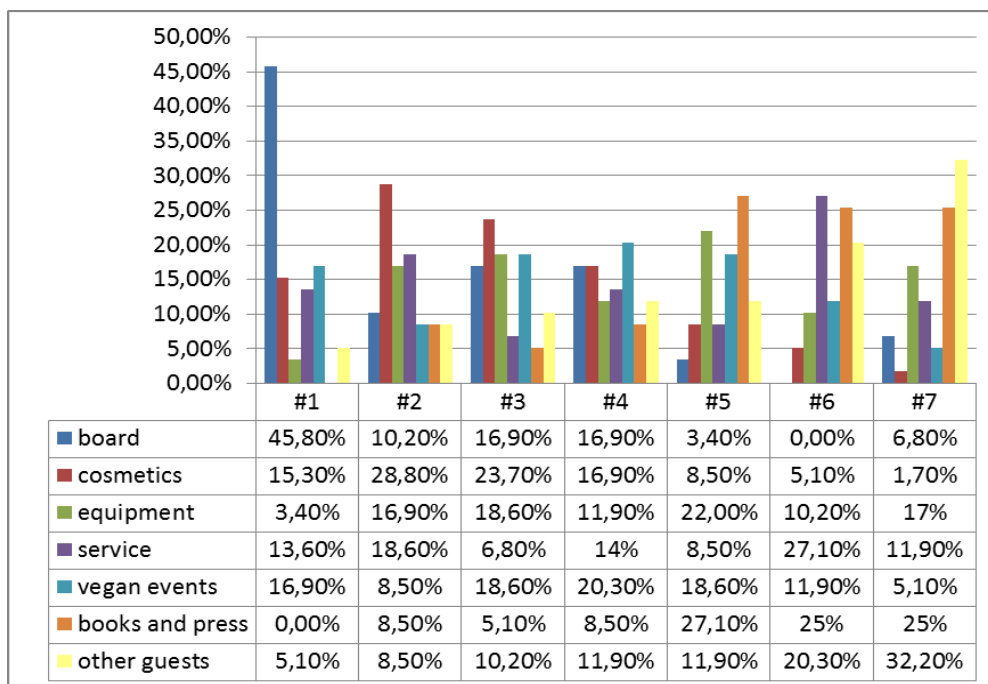


Fig.12. Prioritization of vegan lifestyle elements in regard to resorts' facilities¹²
Source: own research

¹ „service” means employment of vegans, „events”– events promoting veganism and „literature” – presence of books and newspapers

² # and number show the ranking e.g.#1 is the first place

The research group also answered the following question: „do you think that the increase number of resorts offering vegan meals can contribute to the rise of veganism popularity?” Over 85% respondents gave a positive answer.

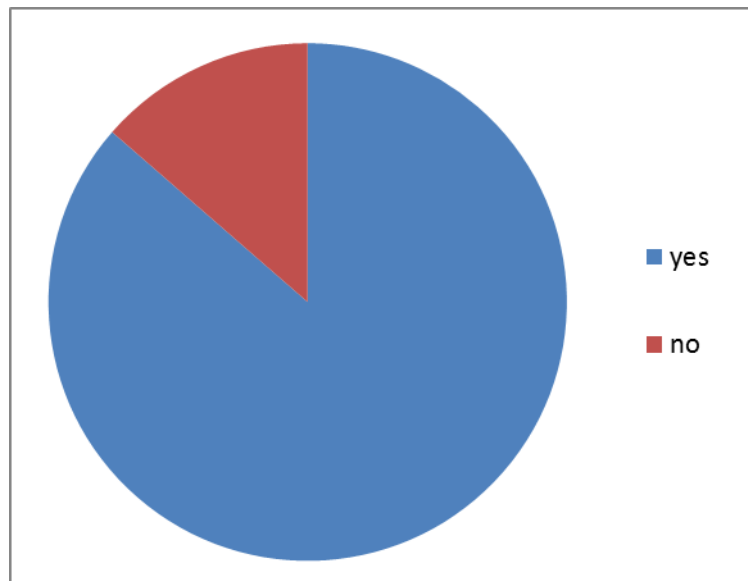


Fig.13.Influence of the increase in number of hotels offering vegan board on number of vegans
Source: own research

CONCLUSIONS

Study results presented in this paper are an attempt to determine a profile of a Spanish vegan tourist. Needs, expectations and opinions about foregoing tourist experiences were researched.

The analysis of respondents' statements enabled to answer the research questions.

1. Are Spanish vegans likely to pay more for a holiday offer that contains vegan board (in comparison to an offer with standard board and no board)?
2. Which lifestyle elements are crucial in the choice of hotel services for Spanish vegans?
3. Is the knowledge about vegans' needs among tourism industry employees enough in their customers' opinion?

Subjects express their dissatisfaction with provided services. They assess the professionals' knowledge about veganism as insufficient, as well as the number of resorts providing vegan board.

Considering the fact that diet is the most important lifestyle element for the vast majority of interviewees, being one of the factors determining holiday destination choice, it seems crucial to diversify the hotels' offer with at least a few alternative meals for this customers group.

Although most of the respondents have never stayed at a specialized vegan resort, they would not like to pay more for such holiday than for one with standard board. Moreover, more interviewees prefer offers without board to the ones with full standard board. In author's opinion it might indicate the lack of vegan tourist trust for service providers.

Results of the study also underline the importance of a rich offer and good staff training in the general assessment of tourism services among Spanish vegans. To the research group not only proper meals are crucial but also cosmetics, hotel room equipment and other features of a resort.

Presence of vegans on the international tourism market has to be noticed and the offer should be tailored to their specific needs - especially taking into consideration that they are

willing to choose an offer containing vegan board even if it costs more than holiday without meals.

The above mentioned conclusions correspond with theses embodied in other scientific works in accordance to which, the most important issue for hoteliers is the provision of good quality services which meet or overstep customers' expectations. Quality has become a discriminant which determines the market position. Having the customer opinion diagnosis tools, the resort management staff should enrich marketing and organisational activities in order to guarantee the best quality of services. Otherwise, the enterprise will not last on the market [13].

Accordingly to the research results there is a need of raising awareness about this social group's needs among tourism industry workers. Basic information about veganism and other types of nutrition should be taught in frames of vocational training. Tourism policymakers ought to count vegans' needs in the process of planning new investments such as equipping hotel rooms and meet vegans' expectations creating a holiday offer.

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