

Int. J. Tourism Res. 14, 153–164 (2012)
 Published online 25 May 2011 in Wiley Online Library
 (wileyonlinelibrary.com) DOI: 10.1002/jtr.843

The European Timeshare Consumer in the Twenty-First Century

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the results of the most recent pan-European survey of timeshare and its owners. The paper begins by placing timeshare in context of the European leisure sector and outlining previous research on timeshare. It then goes on to examine the results of a major survey of timeshare owners and the industry. The results unveil the profile of timeshare owners in Europe, their purchasing behaviour and their future intentions; it also looks into the satisfaction of the timeshare experience. The survey demonstrates that timeshare represents a significant sector of the European accommodation market and that in general, consumers have a high satisfaction rate with their use of timeshare. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Received 25 March 2010; Revised 30 December 2010; Accepted 24 February 2011

Keywords: timeshare resort; European tourism; vacation ownership; fractional ownership.

INTRODUCTION

The leisure sector in Europe has constantly grown in volume and size since the second half of the 20th century. The success of the

tourism industry and the transport revolution has generated the creation of an amalgam of other activities that are able to generate high business volumes and contribute to local and national economies. In this context, the timeshare industry, as Haylock (1994) pointed out, began as an innovative way of increasing and diversifying the tourism offer. The timeshare industry has developed significantly since then, and nowadays, the timeshare business model is applied worldwide, representing an integral part of the tourism industry.

Timeshare is defined by Resort Development Organisation (RDO, former Organisation for Timeshare in Europe) as ‘a form of ownership interest that may include an estate interest in immovable property and which allows use of the property on a recurring annual basis for a fixed or variable time period’. The idea of timeshare is that the consumer can have a holiday property, e.g. an apartment in a beach resort, for a fixed number of weeks per year. Some timeshare companies also offer the possibility of exchange so that the timeshare consumer can own an apartment for two weeks per year but in a different location every year. Interestingly, the timeshare product proves to deliver the highest consumer satisfaction rates when compared with most other forms of holiday product (Ragatz Associates Inc., 2003).

The timeshare industry generated \$US9.4 billion worth of worldwide sales in 2002, with 6.7 million households owning the rights to about 10.7 million timeshare weeks (Ragatz Associates Inc., 2003). By 2007, in USA, almost five million households owned a timeshare, and sales in this market totalled \$US10.6 billion (Sparks *et al.*, 2010). In 2007, 1.5 million European

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households owned timeshare, and there were a total of 1312 resorts in Europe (RDO, 2008). While in Australia, for the 2004–2005 period, there are just more than 125 000 timeshare owners (Sparks *et al.*, 2010).

According to the UNWTO (2010), Europe is the most important generator of tourism with a share of more than 50% of total world international arrivals. The European market is also one of the most important markets for the timeshare industry. Therefore, there is a strong case for updating the knowledge of the key features of the European timeshare industry, as the last independent and comprehensive study was published in 2001 by Ragatz Associates (published in 2003).

Investigation of the timeshare industry is limited in comparison with other leisure activities (e.g. tourism, travel, hospitality). Even more, most of the existing research is based on consumer satisfaction to assist marketing strategies and business development. To better understand this industry and to ensure its future viability and expansion, it is important to understand the particularities of the timeshare consumer.

In this context, the present investigation undertakes an exhaustive analysis of the timeshare industry in Europe. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the most comprehensive investigation of the European timeshare industry. This study provides insights on timeshare owners from 12 European countries, namely the UK, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, Finland, Belgium and the Netherlands, Portugal, Greece, Hungary, Czech Republic and Russia. Methodologically, an on-line survey was designed and implemented for European timeshare owners (consumers) with the successful collection of more than 33 000 completed surveys. The richness of the data allows three research objectives to be fulfilled: first, to provide an accurate picture of the timeshare ownership characteristics; second, to discover the owners' satisfaction towards their timeshare product and also towards other self-catering services; and third, to provide accurate details of the timeshare owner profile. A fourth piece of analysis compares European timeshare consumers and European tourists.

The paper draws recommendations and conclusions for both the industry and policy

makers based upon the results and examines the future of the timeshare sector based upon the future intentions of owners. The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 presents the literature review, Section 3 explains the methodology, Section 4 presents the empirical analysis, Section 5 compares timeshare and tourism consumers and Section 6 draws the main conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on timeshare and vacation ownership covers a diverse range of areas. These topics can be categorized under the following broad subheadings.

General growth and economic impact

Much of the early literature on timeshare described the timeshare industry in terms of the growth of owners, resorts, intervals sold and sales volumes globally (Terry, 1994a, 1994b), in Europe (Haylock, 1994), in USA (Ragatz and Crotts, 2000; Woods, 2001; Crotts and Ragatz, 2002; Upchurch and Gruber, 2002) and Australia (Hopper, 1984). In an early study, Hawkins (1985) assessed whether the timeshare product can compete with traditional holiday accommodation. Statistics cited in many of these reviews conclude that despite timeshare's initially poor reputation, due in part to unethical sales and marketing and poor quality products, the timeshare industry witnessed annual double digit growth rates (Woods, 2001; Upchurch and Gruber, 2002). Coupled with high occupancy rate, several authors noted the significant economic impact that the timeshare industry contributes to host economies (Haylock, 1994; Terry, 1994a, 1994b; Ragatz and Crotts, 2000; Upchurch, 2000). Pryce (2002) profiled the industry at the end of 1999 and noted the growing consolidation and concentration in timeshare and the importance it plays for the major hotel brands.

Timeshare owners' characteristics

Several studies, using data collected in the 1990s, examine timeshare owners in terms of their socio-demographic composition, products purchased, motivation for purchasing timeshare and satisfaction with the product

(Haylock, 1994; Ragatz and Crotts, 2000; Crotts and Ragatz, 2002; Rezak, 2002). Another selection of studies attempt to understand non-timeshare owners' perception of the product (Upchurch, 2000; Chiang, 2001). Huang *et al.* (2010) explored the extent to which timeshare owners are willing to participate in the tourism planning process given that they are more connected to the destination than ordinary tourists. The results include that timeshare owners' perception of the tourism planning process is related to their history of civic participation and their sense of place and less related to their past political participation.

Timeshare owners' satisfaction and value

The academic literature on the timeshare industry, although relatively scarce, has progressed. Noting the high-pressured sales techniques and tarnished reputation that the timeshare industry acquired (Chiang, 2001), another branch of literature regarding the timeshare industry has focused on customer satisfaction and determinants of customer value among present owners. In general, these studies cite high customer satisfaction figures (Lawton *et al.*, 1998; Chiang, 2001; Sparks *et al.*, 2010), although somewhat lower advocacy and re-purchase propensities. At an attribute level, satisfaction is highest for features regarding the timeshare unit, decreasing for resort features and further decreasing at a destination level. Sparks *et al.* (2007, 2008) moved beyond simple satisfaction percentages in attempting to understand customer-derived value in the timeshare industry. These authors uncovered both specific timeshare dimensions and non-specific holiday dimensions to better understand the sources of value for timeshare owners. Sparks *et al.* (2010) compared the way non-owners of timeshare, recent purchasers of timeshare and longer term owners of timeshare differ in their perception of value.

Human resources and timeshare sales

Besides the research into the size and growth of the timeshare industry in various parts of the world, human resources have been a focus of study for the industry. The heavily reliance on sales and marketing through sales representatives, via personal selling, is the main marketing

channel; hence, several studies have focused on the performance, training and job satisfaction of these sales and marketing professionals in the timeshare industry. Woods and Hu (2002) profiled current practices in sales and marketing, reporting on income ranges, marketing strategies used and effectiveness of training programs. Hu *et al.* (2004) examined timeshare sales representatives' perceptions of job satisfaction and job performance and correlated these indicators with demographic variables. McCain *et al.* (2005) proposed a conceptual model of the relationship between sales representatives' perceptions of sales training, job satisfaction, adaptive selling and sales performance. The authors then go on to test the model's validity among sales representatives in US timeshare industry, while Ricci and Kaufman (2008) focused on accommodation managers and found that there are very little differences between traditional accommodation managers and timeshare resort managers in terms of their knowledge, ability and attitudes to their job responsibilities.

The introduction of the large hotel chains in the timeshare industry has resulted in an improvement in the reputation. The entrance of major hotel chains, such as Marriott, Four Seasons, Hilton, Hyatt and Starwood helped build credibility in the timeshare industry among owners and potential owners. Marriott International was the first to enter this market beginning timeshare development and sales in 1984, whereas the Hilton Hotel Corporation entered this market in 1992. As a result of these entrants, Nabawanuka and Lee (2009) examined the financial health of the publically traded hotel chains in terms of the firm value, risk and accounting performance.

New markets and new products

Originating as a concept in Europe followed by USA, the spread of timeshare to new markets for timeshare has been assessed in the literature. With the significant growth in timeshare on a global basis, various researchers have assessed the potential for timeshare outside of Europe and USA. Ladki *et al.* (2002) commented on the attractiveness of timeshare vacation homes over traditional hotel accommodation in Lebanon. They cited several cultural characteristics as to

why Arab tourists might favour a timeshare vacation over a hotel-based holiday. These characteristics include Arab tourists' longer length of stays, larger travel party sizes, need for more space and preference for home cooked food. Timeshare in China is in its infancy, and Liu *et al.* (2001) reviewed the social, economic and institutional frameworks in affecting the further development of this industry in China. They concluded that the environmental framework and economic conditions are favourable for further growth in China, but the legal and technological conditions that exist may prove problematic for increased growth.

Along with the attraction of new markets, the timeshare industry has also witnessed the evolution of new products. Warnken and Guilding (2009) and Warnken *et al.* (2008) provided a thorough overview of the different types of multi-ownership tourism accommodation complexes now available. These types of accommodation, broadly categorized three ways – contractual timeshare, deeded title timeshare and undivided title interested – extend from vacation clubs and short-term contractual timeshare accommodation to fractional timeshare, 'condotels', 'aparthotels' and second-home apartments. The authors outlined the legal and organizational differences of the different types of tourism accommodation and the benefits and challenges posed by each of these with increasing levels of property ownership. Hobson (2002) detailed the luxury fractional second homes, also called private residence clubs. He highlighted this product's appeal to the affluent buyer and distinguished private residence clubs' from the traditional timeshare product in terms of increased exclusivity and a larger fractional interval, implying the possibility of increased use.

Given that the timeshare product differs from traditional accommodation, because it is a more complicated product, Cook and Wolverton (2003) provided a pedagogical case study of the dilemma that the potential owners have in weighing up the benefits and costs in relation to purchasing accommodation on a conventional holiday. One of the potential benefits of timeshare ownership is the possibility of using the exchange system. Wang and Krishna (2006) reviewed the exchange mechanism, demonstrating theoretically that the two major timeshare

exchange mechanisms used currently (deposit-first mechanism and request-first mechanism) may not be the most efficient mechanism. Wang and Krishna proposed an alternate exchange mechanism, the 'top trading cycles chains and spacebank' mechanism.

METHODOLOGY

Given the need to collect data from a wide range of markets in several languages, an internet survey was implemented. There are several advantages of using this method: it is the most effective approach given the large sample size – which consisted of timeshare owners from twelve European countries – and this was facilitated by the widespread use of the internet in Europe. An internet-based survey provides a low-cost method of implementation and data collection. The methodology developed in this study consists of three stages, namely survey design, data collection, data analysis and evaluation. A brief sketch of each of these stages is provided below.

Survey design

The data for the analysis of the European timeshare market have been gathered by a demand-side (i.e. consumers/owners) approach of the timeshare industry. The questionnaires used to produce the report 'The European Timeshare Industry in 2001' (RDO, 2001) were reviewed and modified with the main purpose of keeping the survey short and concise to ensure both a high response rate and a high number of questions completed. The survey was presented in a form of five sections, a first section containing a short introduction where the recipient was informed of the objectives of the project and the promise of confidentiality of the individual data collected. The body of the survey was divided into four further sections tackling key aspects of their timeshare. In particular, the survey began by asking about the characteristics of their timeshare, followed by asking about their timeshare vacation, level of satisfaction with their timeshare holiday and finished the survey by asking basic household information.

To encourage a higher response rate by timeshare owners, the questionnaire was

translated into the timeshare owners' native language. In total, there were 12 different language versions of the survey. Having finalized the English language questionnaire, the non-English language questionnaires were translated and then back-translated for accuracy. To further improve the response rate an incentive was offered, namely the respondents were asked at the end of the survey if they would like enter a draw to win a prize by providing their email address.

Data collection

To assure timeshare owners of anonymity and privacy, the authors agreed the timeshare exchange companies would send an email to their client list a web link to the survey. This ensured that the timeshare exchange companies had sole use of the contact lists, asking them to participate in the survey. Furthermore, this also guaranteed that the timeshare owners' list would be as up-to-date as possible. The timeshare exchange companies agreed to a one-shot email to their customer lists asking their clients to participate in the survey. As such, no reminder emails were sent to the timeshare owners. The email requesting participation in the survey was sent in July 2008. The survey site was kept open for over 7 weeks, until the responses tailed off. The data collection period was closed in September 2008. Only one response was allowed per computer, but respondents were permitted to

go back to previous pages in the survey and update existing responses until the survey was finished or until they exited the survey. After completing the survey, the respondent was unable to re-enter the survey.

A total of 33 098 surveys were completed by the cut-off date across the 12 different countries. This gave an overall response rate of 8.3%. The survey was sent out by the timeshare exchange companies, i.e. Interval International and Resort Condominiums International (RCI), to a total of 396 419 timeshare members for the 12 European countries under analysis (figure provided by RDO). This figure corresponded to active timeshare owners (affiliates with an email address). The response rates by market are shown in Table 1. The Dutch and Belgium timeshare owners had the highest response rate at 15.3%, whereas the Russian timeshare owners had the lowest response rate with 6.0%. The share of timeshare owners by market in the timeshare population approximately matches the share of timeshare owners by market in the sample.

Data analysis and interpretation

The data have been analysed using cross-tabulations by country of the owners' residence and length of ownership. Where there are differences between the segments, these differences have been noted. This will assist the timeshare industry in their future marketing, market targeting and developing decisions.

Table 1. Sampling statistics

Market	Owners	Share of total owners (%)	Respondents	Share of total respondents (%)	Response rate (%)
UK	230 178	58.1	16 363	49.4	7.1
Spain	26 012	6.6	2928	8.8	11.3
Italy	34 698	8.8	3209	9.7	9.2
Germany	20 982	5.3	1822	5.5	8.7
France	23 353	5.9	2477	7.5	10.6
Finland	19 868	5.0	1954	5.9	9.8
Belgium/Netherlands	6943	1.8	1064	3.2	15.3
Portugal	8057	2.0	766	2.3	9.5
Greece	2680	0.7	407	1.2	15.2
Hungary	16 635	4.2	1571	4.7	9.4
Czech Republic	2844	0.7	287	0.9	10.1
Russia	4169	1.1	250	0.8	6.0
Total	396 419	100.0	33 098	100.0	8.3

The analysis of the data is presented in Section 4 of this paper.

The following abbreviations are used in the rest of this paper: UK, United Kingdom; ES, Spain; IT, Italy; DE, Germany; FR, France; FI, Finland; BE/NL, Belgium and the Netherlands; PR, Portugal; GR, Greece; HU, Hungary; CZ, Czech Republic; and RU, Russia.

ANALYSIS

Profile of timeshare owners

Timeshare owners who responded to the survey were 60% male and 40% female; the average age of owners was almost 55 years. With respect to the occupation of respondents, 26.4% were retired and 24.8% were employed in professional or technical occupations; other timeshare owners belonged to upper/middle management positions (17%), and others are self-employers/business owners (15%). The average level of pre-tax household income for the year 2007 was €60 475. Most respondents (75.4%) reported to have at least one child (adult or younger than 18 years); 23.8% of respondents have a child younger than 18 years. When asked whether their children were aware of their timeshare, almost all owners thought they were, but only 24.3% of owners declared that their children had already used their timeshare independently.

Ownership characteristics

Most timeshare properties is located in Europe (85.7%), followed by North America and Caribbean (12.7%) (Table 2).

European properties were mainly concentrated in Spain (47.7% of the total of timeshare owned in Europe), other countries reported lower rates (e.g. the UK has 11.9% of the total of European properties, Italy has 3.8% and Finland has 3.6%). Differences at a national level emerged. The Spanish were most likely to own timeshare in their own country; 94.3% of Spanish respondents declared to own their timeshare in Spain (Figure 1); UK residents, French and Germans had relatively low rates of timeshare ownership in their country of residence, but they reported high rates of timeshare ownership in Spain (UK residents, 47.2%; French, 60.3%; Germans, 53.6%).

The average length of ownership was 11.2 years, and most respondents had owned their timeshare for at least 9 years. Among all respondents, 22.3% of them had owned their timeshare for 11–15 years, whereas 18.3% for 16–20 years. Disaggregated data by country of residence showed that the French have owned timeshare for the longest time (13.4 years on average), whereas those markets where timeshare was a relatively new type of accommodation option exhibited shorter lengths of ownership (Czech Republic – 7.2 years; Hungary – 8.0 years and Russia – 9.0 years) (Figure 2).

Most owners surveyed purchased their timeshare at the resorts (59.8%), whereas under a quarter (22.1%) of European timeshare owners purchased it at a sales centre or office, which was more common by Greek, Spanish and Hungarian owners; among all respondents, a high percentage (10.6%) of Italian owners purchased their timeshare at their own home.

Table 2. Continents where timeshare is owned

Continents where timeshare is owned	Total	Owners' country of residence (%)										
		UK	ES	IT	DE	FR	FI	BE/NL	PT	GR	HU	RU
Europe	85.7	81.6	95.8	86.0	91.4	85.8	98.1	80.5	97.3	99.0	98.8	94.4
North America/Caribbean	12.7	17.5	2.8	6.8	8.7	12.0	1.7	14.7	1.8	1.3	0.5	
Africa	1.6	1.3		7.6	0.3	2.8	0.1	1.2		0.5	0.0	0.8
Asia	1.5	2.0	0.2	0.3	2.8	0.4	1.1	2.9			0.1	3.6
South America	0.4	0.2	1.7	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.1	4.5	0.4			0.4
Oceania	0.1	0.2			0.1	0.1		0.1			0.1	
Middle East	0.1	0.1				0.6					0.1	
Points/flexible/worldwide	2.5	4.1	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.0	0.5	1.0		0.7	0.8

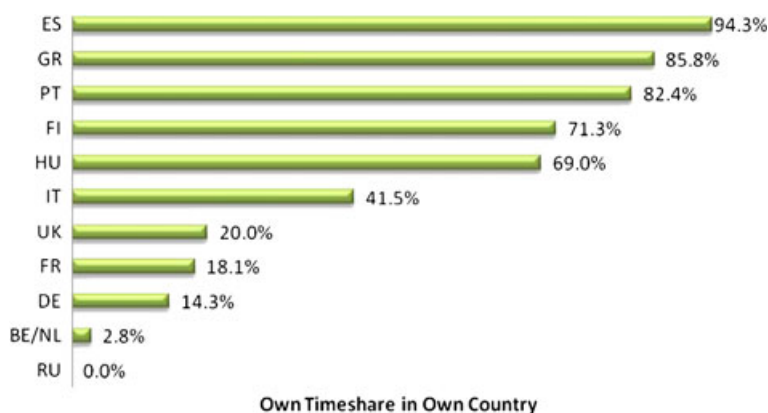


Figure 1. Timeshare ownership in resident country by resident country.

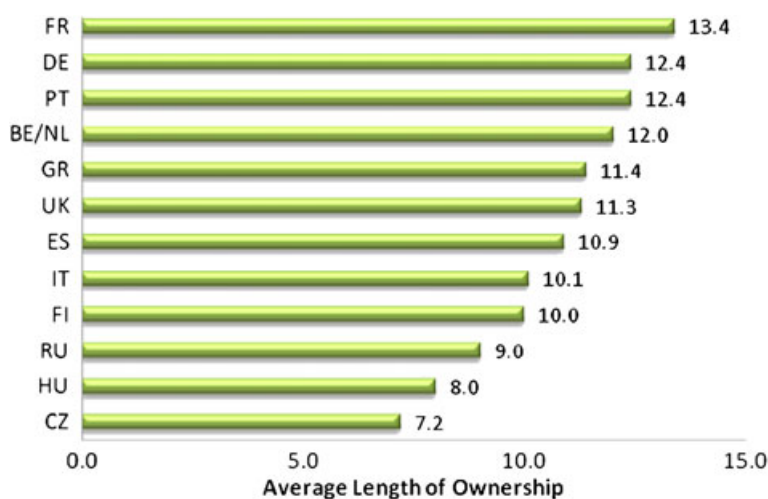


Figure 2. Average length of ownership by resident country (years).

With regard to the purchase motivation, quality of accommodation, exchange opportunities and the credibility of the company were the three most important attributes and features in the owner's purchase decision. The resort features, affordable on-going costs and affordable purchase price, followed, respectively, in the owners ranking of importance when purchasing their timeshare. The quality of the sales presentation was considered the lowest in terms of importance (Figure 3).

Timeshare owners' holiday experience

One of the most important facets in evaluating the performance of any leisure industry is to have a strong knowledge of the level of satisfaction of their consumers. This applies

to the timeshare industry in Europe. The survey included a series of key questions to find out how content they were with timeshare, how satisfied they were in comparison with other self-catering holidays and whether they recommended timeshare to others. Complementary aspects are also tackled covering their plans for buying or selling more timeshare and also their eventual plan for their timeshare.

Of the owners, 86.6% reported that they were satisfied with their timeshare holiday in 2007, of which 55.6% stated that they were very satisfied. On the contrary, only 3.8% of respondents were dissatisfied and 3% reported that they were very dissatisfied. While taking into account respondents' nationality, it emerged that owners from the UK, Hungary

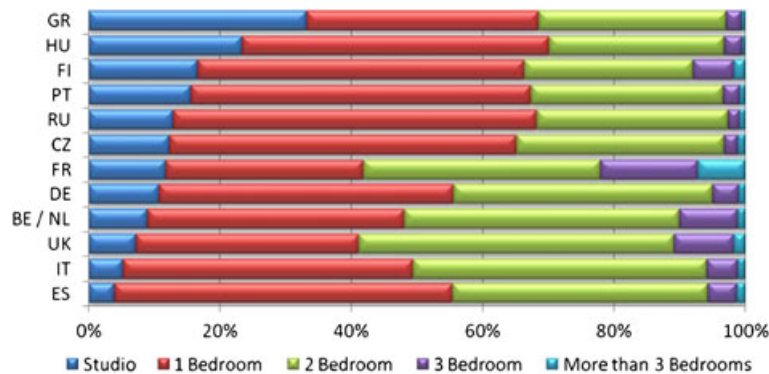


Figure 3. Unit size owned.

and Belgium/Netherlands were the most satisfied. While considering the level of satisfaction against the timeshare length of ownership, differences among owners did not appear (Table 3).

Timeshare accommodation compared to other self-catering holidays had good ratings from owners, for instance 73% of owners felt that the former type was better than the latter from which 50.9% of owners felt that their timeshare accommodation was much better. Only 19.4% considered both types of accommodation to be the same. When comparing timeshare accommodation to other self-catering holidays, there are different results by nationality of owners: 65% of UK owners felt their timeshare was much

better than other self-catering holidays, whereas a notable percentage of Portuguese, Finnish, Greek, French, Italian and Spanish owners consider their timeshare to be the same as other self-catering holidays. Finally, when taking into account the length of ownership, results show that people who owned their timeshare for a short period (5 years or less) felt that their timeshare accommodation was much better than other self-catering holidays.

Another aspect tied to satisfaction is the willingness of owners to recommend timeshare to their friends and family. From the survey emerged that 54.6% of respondents would, whereas 20.4% of owners answered that they would not recommend it.

Table 3. Satisfaction, accommodation comparison and future purchase intent

	Satisfaction		Comparison with other self-catering holidays		Plan to buy more timeshare with same resort/company		Plan to buy more timeshare with different resort/company	
	Very satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Much better (%)	Better (%)	Definitely (%)	Possibly (%)	Definitely (%)	Possibly (%)
UK	64	24	65	17	1	14	1	13
HU	61	30	38	32	1	23	0	26
BE/NL	60	22	40	26	1	18	0	13
ES	49	31	31	30	1	12	1	12
CZ	44	45	32	34	3	28	3	36
IT	43	40	30	29	1	15	1	21
FR	43	41	29	26	1	14	1	15
DE	40	47	40	26	3	17	1	15
FI	37	52	23	38	1	24	1	23
GR	36	41	24	25	2	22	1	26
RU	32	57	40	38	2	31	1	40
PT	27	55	22	28	1	25	2	25

Finally, owners were asked whether they were planning on buying more time at the same resort or company and whether they were considering purchasing more timeshare in an alternative resort or with another company. With regard to the former question, 82.8% of respondents said that they were not planning it. Differences are evident while taking into account the country of residence, in fact the Spanish, French, Italian, UK and Belgium/Netherlands owners did not plan to buy more time. Conversely, timeshare owners from Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Finland, Portugal and Greece respectively stated that they were possibly planning to purchase more time at the same resort or company. With regard to the latter question, i.e. whether owners were planning to purchase a timeshare in a different resort or from a different company, more than 80% of owners stated that they had no plans to purchase it, whereas 15.7% of owners possibly planned to buy more timeshare. Also, in this case, there are differences when considering owners' country of residence; owners from Russia and the Czech Republic stood out from the other owners who were planning to buy more timeshare in another resort or from another company.

Timeshare owners' future plans

To monitor and anticipate future demand for vacation ownership accommodation, timeshare owners were asked their future intentions, namely if owners planned on selling their timeshare in the following year and what are the eventual plans for the timeshare accommodation that they own. More than 50% of respondents were not planning on selling their timeshare in the next year; conversely, 10.6% of European owners surveyed said that they were definitely planning on selling their timeshare in the next year. The Spanish and Italian owners had a stronger desire to sell their timeshare in the next year, whereas owners from Finland, Czech Republic, Russia and Greece had the smallest proportion of owners definitely planning to sell. Other plans that owners have on their timeshare were mainly to bequeath it to their children (53.9% of respondents), whereas 39.2% were planning

to sell it in the future. The results showed that owners that plan to bequeath their timeshare to their children were largely from Greece, Russia and Hungary, whereas owners from Belgium/Netherlands, France, Germany and Italy would sell their timeshare in the future (Table 4 and Figure 4).

TIMESHARE VERSUS TOURISM

The comparison between timeshare and tourism may bring interesting insights into the similarities and dissimilarities of these leisure industries. In terms of evolution of accommodation supply, it is observed that the number of hotels and similar establishments in Europe has decreased between 2001 and 2007, whereas the number of holiday dwellings decreased in the same period by 3.9% (data from EUROSTAT). Therefore, in this 7-year period, the supply of these two types of tourism accommodation has suffered a decrease, whereas the number of traditional timeshare resorts has in general remained stable during the same period.

By contrast, occupancy levels in the hotel sector between 2001 and 2007 showed an increase of 8.6% in number of nights spent (considering both by residents and non-residents, data from EUROSTAT). Conversely, the number of nights spent both by residents and non-residents in holiday dwellings in the European countries of this study decreased by 9% during the period 2001–2007.

In 2007, the European hotel sector reported an occupancy rate of 35.7%, whereas the European

Table 4. Planning on selling timeshare in next year

	Definitely (%)	Possibly (%)
ES	17	38
IT	17	39
FR	15	40
PT	14	41
BE/NL	14	49
DE	13	48
UK	9	35
HU	9	37
GR	7	34
RU	7	32
CZ	6	38
FI	4	36

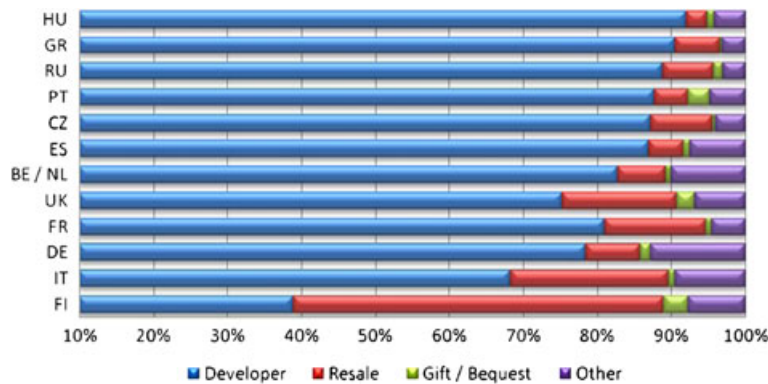


Figure 4. Source of timeshare acquisition.

timeshare industry reported an average occupancy level of 71.7% across completed European resorts.

The growth rate in total number of tourists in Europe during the period 2001–2007 is negative, the number of tourists having decreased by 15% during this period. By comparison, the European Timeshare industry has seen an increase in the number of owners for the same period, namely 7.22%.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper builds on previous research in the vacation ownership field. It outlines the results of the most recent pan-European survey of timeshare owners, outlining the demographic characteristics of owners, the characteristics of their timeshare and their market behaviour.

There exists a high satisfaction rate among timeshare owners with their product. A large majority of them felt that their timeshare accommodation was better than other self-catering holidays they had taken, whereas 51% of all respondents felt their timeshare was much better compared with other self-catering holidays they had taken. In terms of what is driving their timeshare purchase, the most important attributes and features in the owners' purchase decision were quality of accommodation, exchange opportunities and the credibility of the company.

Two-thirds of European timeshare owners own abroad, whereas one-third of them own in their own country. The preference for a destination abroad prevails over the domestic market. Interestingly, those owners from Spain,

Italy, Portugal, Greece, Finland and Hungary are the ones who prefer to own timeshare in their own country. In contrast, owners from northern countries such as the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands, Germany and France prefer to own timeshare abroad. In fact, when asking about the types of location preferred when purchasing timeshare, most owners put beach locations top of the list.

Most European timeshare owners acquired their timeshare from a developer. The most common Use Plan for European timeshare owners is mainly fixed week and floating time. Some differences were found across markets, for instance, floating time is preferred by Spanish owners, whereas points or credits are popular among German owners. In addition, the analysis revealed that three in five European timeshare owners purchased 1 week during 2007 with another quarter of owners purchasing 2 weeks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article was possible thanks to the participation of the authors, while they were at the University of Nottingham (United Kingdom), for RDO. The authors of this article are grateful to RDO and its collaborators, specially Nikkie de Waal.

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