

Sustainable Tourism and Circular Economy: Navigating the Path Towards Responsible Practices and Environmental Stewardship in Italy

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Abstract

This paper investigates the intersection between Circular Economy (CE) practices and the tourism sector, emphasizing the central role of sustainability in shaping contemporary tourism development. Through a comprehensive literature review, the study examines the application of CE principles within tourism operations, focusing on four key operational areas: energy management, food waste reduction, water management, and waste management. The analysis highlights a growing scholarly and practical attention to the adoption of renewable energy sources in tourism facilities, supported by evidence from international and European case studies.

The paper further explores innovative approaches to food waste prevention and reduction, the structural and managerial challenges associated with water resource management, and the implementation of effective waste management strategies across different tourism contexts. Particular attention is devoted to tourists' behaviors and attitudes toward CE practices, emphasizing how demand-side dynamics influence the adoption and effectiveness of circular strategies within tourism businesses.

A dedicated examination of national-level literature, with a specific focus on Italy, provides insights into circular practices in hotels and agritourism, as well as the role of environmental certifications, indicators, and monitoring tools in supporting sustainable tourism operations. The study contributes to the ongoing debate on tourism sustainability by identifying actionable strategies aligned with three priority areas for sustainable tourism development: resource efficiency, environmental protection, and climate change mitigation, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals promoted by UNWTO.

The paper also discusses the institutional and policy framework at the European level, including the Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) and EU funding instruments supporting sustainable tourism. Finally, the analysis highlights the EU Ecolabel for tourist accommodation services as one of the most widely implemented initiatives, providing operational guidelines to reduce environmental impacts across diverse tourism establishments.

Keywords

Circular Economy in Tourism, Energy Management, Food Waste Reduction, Water Management, Sustainable Tourism Operations.