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A Green Perspective for the Hospitality Sector

Why Synergy between International and Local Players is needed to address the Challenge Tourism is facing and to implement a Sustainable Approach efficiently.

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Summary

Secondo l'Organizzazione Mondiale del Turismo (OMT), il turismo viene definito come quel complesso fenomeno di molteplice natura sociale, culturale ed economica “*che prevede lo spostamento di persone in paesi o luoghi al di fuori del loro ambiente abituale per scopi personali o professionali*”. Tuttavia, il peso che questo settore comporta a livello economico non può essere smentito né sottovalutato: secondo l'OMT, nel 2019 il numero globale di turisti internazionali ha

raggiunto la cifra di 1.5 miliardi di persone che, tradotta in somma dei ricavi provenienti dal settore turistico e del trasporto dei passeggeri su scala mondiale, equivale a 1.7 trilioni di dollari.¹

Il contributo del settore turistico all'economia mondiale e al suo sviluppo, non implica che anche tutti gli altri settori connessi possano beneficiarne e trarne vantaggio allo stesso modo. Infatti, se si prende in considerazione il legame che c'è fra lo sviluppo turistico e l'impatto sull'ambiente, come ad esempio le emissioni di Co2 provenienti dai trasporti dovuti alla mobilità dei flussi turistici, è stato osservato che in mancanza di interventi e azioni mirate, la quantità di emissioni dovrebbe crescere del 25%, passando da 1.597 milioni di tonnellate a 1.998 milioni di tonnellate tra il 2016 e il 2030, deteriorando sempre di più la qualità dell'aria e il fragile equilibrio con l'ecosistema mondiale.² Mettendo in luce questi numeri e la rilevanza che questo settore ha in termini economici come ambientali, si ritiene sempre più necessario sviluppare un grado di consapevolezza maggiore riguardo alle molteplici conseguenze ambientali e territoriali che lo sviluppo turistico comporta.

In primo luogo, prendendo in considerazione la modalità con cui il nesso turismo-ambiente si traduce nella realtà e si evolve nel tempo, una varietà di effetti positivi o negativi possono rispettivamente ricadere ed influenzare le dinamiche socio-culturali, economiche nonché ambientali a livello globale. In secondo luogo, la forte interdipendenza che c'è fra turismo e ambiente si evidenzia non solo dal fatto che un'attrazione turistica viene fatta coincidere generalmente con una determinata area naturale, ma anche perché un dato territorio e le sue caratteristiche ambientali possono facilmente plasmare la tipologia di turismo, la varietà dell'offerta fornita per soddisfare i bisogni dei visitatori e perciò, una crescita del benessere ambientale, economico e sociale. In terzo luogo, si è osservato che più una destinazione adotta strategie volte a proteggere e valorizzare il paesaggio naturale in cui essa si sviluppa, maggiore è la domanda turistica e il grado di attrazione e interesse da parte dei turisti.

Di conseguenza, data la quantità limitata di risorse naturali, nel caso in cui queste ultime vengano sfruttate in maniera insostenibile e irresponsabile, gli effetti negativi non si tradurrebbero solo in un danno ambientale ma, rendendo la località meno attrattiva, nella diminuzione della domanda

¹ UNWTO. “Covid-19 and Tourism. Tourism in pre-pandemic times”.

² UNWTO, *Transport-related CO₂ Emissions of the Tourism Sector – Modelling Results* (2019).

turistica e del grado di redditività delle imprese turistiche.

Per queste ragioni, si ritiene necessario prendere in considerazione gli impatti che queste dinamiche possono generare e intervenire nell'ottica di prevenire piuttosto che curare, chiedendosi quale sia l'approccio migliore ed efficace per garantire un turismo che vada di pari passo con la crescita economica nel rispetto dell'ambiente. A questo riguardo infatti, è bene sottolineare che il vero scopo di questa tesi non è semplicemente quello di denunciare gli impatti negativi del turismo sull'ecosistema, bensì quello di offrire un altro modo di vedere e fare turismo, un'alternativa che possa rendere questo settore sempre più sensibile alle tematiche ambientali e che possa richiamare la responsabilità di ogni stakeholder nel garantire un modello sostenibile dal triplice punto di vista ambientale, sociale ed economico.

Rilevanti in questo discorso risultano essere i concetti di sostenibilità e di sviluppo sostenibile, introdotti e definiti per la prima volta nel famoso "*Brundtland Report*" pubblicato nel 1987 dalla Commissione mondiale sull'ambiente e lo sviluppo. Fondamentale punto di svolta, questo documento ha richiamato la responsabilità della comunità internazionale a volgere lo sguardo verso le generazioni future, sottolineando la necessità di trasformare le logiche del profitto economico e di una gestione illimitata delle risorse naturali in quelle volte ad adottare una visione comune nel promuovere uno sviluppo sostenibile, ovvero che sia contemporaneamente economico, sociale e ambientale. Tenendo in considerazione la profonda e complessa interdipendenza presente fra il settore turistico e l'ambiente, a partire dagli anni '70 le organizzazioni internazionali come l'OMT e l'Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite sono state promotrici di questo nuovo paradigma di sviluppo, contribuendo ad introdurre e definire il concetto di turismo sostenibile attraverso iniziative e progetti mirati a raggiungere specifici obiettivi comuni. Tra i più recenti, si possono menzionare i 17 Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile inglobati nella nuova Agenda 2030 definita dall'ONU, ed in particolare gli obiettivi 8.9, 12b e 14.7 che riguardano specificatamente il settore turistico mondiale e il suo sviluppo in chiave sostenibile.

A tal fine, sono stati individuati una serie di politiche d'intervento e strumenti strategici di diversa natura che possono essere implementati in maniera diretta o indiretta attraverso il coinvolgimento e l'influenza esercitata da una varietà di attori, istituzionali e non. Ad esempio, a livello più normativo, si possono menzionare disposizioni che mirano a regolare ed integrare in maniera responsabile lo sviluppo turistico, come le restrizioni in termini di flussi turistici o quelle relative alla circolazione per ridurre l'inquinamento urbano. Allo stesso tempo, attraverso un approccio che parte più dal basso, anche le iniziative che mirano a promuovere un'educazione e una consapevolezza maggiore in termini di rispetto ambientale contribuiscono ugualmente a guardare al settore turistico in un'ottica di sostenibilità. Infatti, per far sì che la sostenibilità nel settore turistico si traduca concretamente e con successo, è necessario che la direzione da prendere per raggiungere il

cambiamento venga indicata non solo dall'alto ma perseguita da tutti gli stakeholder coinvolti, tra cui gli stessi attori delle comunità locali appartenenti alla destinazione turistica. A questo proposito, si può menzionare la Responsabilità Sociale d'Impresa, una strategia pensata per colmare le lacune e le discrepanze tra attori privati e pubblici, in grado di fornire un approccio olistico che consenta di essere più consapevoli di quelli che potrebbero essere gli ulteriori passi da intraprendere e gli attori da coinvolgere secondo il principio delle “*comuni ma differenziate responsabilità*”.

Tuttavia, anche se la comunità internazionale sembra aver sviluppato una certa consapevolezza ambientale, i comportamenti sostenibili adottati da tutti gli stakeholder (ad esempio, tour operator, hotel, turisti o istituzioni annesse) e il loro contributo nell'individuazione di strategie efficaci e multidimensionali non sempre trovano corrispondenza nella realtà dei fatti. Questa discrepanza e l'ancora fragile presenza di una visione comune tra il livello delle istituzioni internazionali e quello nazionale-locale fa sì che la cooperazione fra pubblico e privato, fra la dimensione internazionale e quella locale, così come la partecipazione attiva di tutti gli attori coinvolti siano fattori necessari per migliorare la comunicazione e adottare una linea comune verso la transizione ecologica anche nel settore turistico.

Partendo quindi da una visione più locale e prendendo in analisi i diversi attori che entrano in gioco, un ulteriore obiettivo che questa tesi si pone è quello di non fermarsi al settore turistico in generale ma di focalizzarsi su quello dell'*hospitality*, analizzando il tipo di relazione presente tra gli hotel e l'ambiente. In particolare, se da un lato si introduce il concetto di “green hotel”, ovvero quella struttura ricettiva che si impegna a rispettare e implementare standard di sostenibilità ambientale e sociale, dall'altro si fa riferimento a quelle certificazioni o marchi ecologici che per l'appunto, rappresentano quei criteri di sostenibilità che attestano quanto un'azienda possa essere ritenuta “green” o meno. A riguardo, è bene sottolineare il fatto che sono più le grandi catene alberghiere disposte ad implementare e adottare un sistema di gestione sostenibile, soprattutto in quanto possono godere di una cultura manageriale ormai ben sviluppata ed efficace e, allo stesso tempo, di un'ampia disponibilità di risorse finanziarie e di capitale umano specializzato e formato in materia di ospitalità sostenibile. Questa situazione però, non risulta essere così per gli hotel di piccole e medie dimensioni, che molto spesso si trovano in mancanza di quelle risorse economiche e competenze necessarie per trasformare la propria struttura in un green hotel.

A questo riguardo, prendendo in considerazione il settore dell'*hospitality* in Italia, destinazione che gode di una lunga e consolidata tradizione turistica, si evidenzia come la maggior parte degli hotel siano costituiti da piccole e medie imprese a gestione “indipendente” che caratterizzano la tipica realtà frammentaria del contesto italiano. Una frammentazione che si rispecchia anche nella grande distribuzione e varietà delle destinazioni turistiche italiane e nella forte presenza di hotel a gestione

diretta, molti di più rispetto alle grandi catene alberghiere. Proprio per questo, intervenire per promuovere una gestione alberghiera attraverso politiche, progetti o iniziative attente all'ambiente e in grado di garantire comunque una crescita dal punto di vista economico, risulta essere un percorso necessario da intraprendere e che può contribuire positivamente alla transizione ecologica.

In questa tesi, per indagare lo scenario attuale e capire se e come il settore dell'*hospitality* stia muovendo verso la sostenibilità, si è analizzata la situazione della provincia di Rimini, nota destinazione turistica caratterizzata principalmente dalla presenza di alberghi di piccole e medie dimensioni, per lo più a conduzione familiare. In particolare, attraverso un sondaggio somministrato agli albergatori, un'intervista rivolta al presidente di Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna e la presentazione di un *case history*, sono stati individuati e analizzati i fattori di spinta o di ostacolo percepiti dai principali stakeholder. In questo modo, lo scopo della ricerca empirica è quello di identificare le aree o i fattori su cui sia necessario ancora intervenire per migliorare l'implementazione di tutte le iniziative, politiche e *best practices* che, se adottate, risultano essere efficaci per lo sviluppo turistico nel settore dell'ospitalità in linea con la salvaguardia dell'ambiente.

In base ai dati ottenuti, è emerso che il livello di sensibilizzazione generale sia dell'offerta alberghiera che della domanda turistica, stia crescendo. Tuttavia, l'individuazione di un gap comunicativo e conoscitivo, l'insufficiente disponibilità di contributi finanziari e la mancanza attuale di una strategia chiara e condivisa da parte di tutti gli attori coinvolti vengono identificati come i principali fattori di ostacolo su cui intervenire. Infatti, un'azione mirata promossa dagli enti istituzionali e associazioni di categoria renderebbe più facile e trasparente la diffusione di informazioni e competenze in materia di sostenibilità tra gli albergatori, gli ospiti o il personale alberghiero. Così facendo, questo porterebbe a rafforzare il loro grado di consapevolezza ambientale e a identificare le responsabilità che ogni stakeholder ha nel definire e garantire la strada per una gestione alberghiera sostenibile.

Infine, si può concludere che rendere il settore dell'ospitalità più "*green*" sia una necessità urgente e che renderlo tale attraverso un rapporto sinergico e interdipendente fra l'alto e il basso, sia la chiave per generare una molteplicità di effetti positivi sia per gli albergatori che per i consumatori, migliorando al contempo le prospettive ambientali ed economiche nel lungo periodo. Questo impatterebbe positivamente il legame tra il settore turistico e l'ambiente e, grazie ad un effetto di ricaduta, potrebbe contribuire alla diffusione della transizione verde su più fronti.

Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to provide further evidences of the strong correlation between the development of the hospitality industry and the natural environment. In particular, the research emphasizes the fact that this unrestrained expansion of the touristic sector all over the main tourist destinations has been multiplying the negative effects on their natural environment, and consequently making them less attractive over the long run. Following this line of thought, the first chapter mainly aims at explaining why tourism is a phenomenon not to be underestimated, economically as well as environmentally speaking. Moreover, the second chapter tries to analyse the extent to which the touristic industry is aware of the fact that keeping growing at this pace is being highly unreliable and risky. Consequently, by introducing the concept of sustainable tourism, the main paths officially undertaken at the international level and the measures and tools to adopt for providing a more innovative and sustainable paradigm are described. In the third chapter, instead, the main focus is related to the concept of “green hotel” and the fact that it is larger hotel companies (including many hotel chains) that easily assume those characteristics typical of green hotels, on the contrary of small and medium hotel enterprises. For this reason, the situation in Italy is analysed by highlighting, on the one hand, how most hotels are “independently managed” and, on the other, how crucial it is to intervene with policies and strategies at local level, due to the typical fragmented Italian reality. In the fourth and final chapter, taking the tourism destination of Rimini as an object of study, the strategies, policies and initiatives implemented by the main strategic and relevant actors are identified in order to understand which are the major factors that can best support the ecological transition of small and medium-sized enterprises and develop a regenerative kind of tourism in line with the preservation of the environment.

INTRODUCTION

Environment and tourism. These two dimensions are not separate and the improvement of one does not exclude the improvement of the other. They are highly interdependent and, by acting synergically, they significantly shape the dynamics of the world. Indeed, through direct and indirect influence, economic and political forces, as well as human habits can be modelled positively or negatively. It is therefore worth considering the other side of the coin, too. In fact, since tourism is a phenomenon rooted primarily in human needs, man has a certain control in deciding how to develop this sector, very often putting his own needs first and forgetting other factors or commitments, such as those relating to the environment. For while man's needs and desires may be unlimited, the resources and goods to satisfy them are not. In this way, the close relationship between tourism and the environment, or in other words, human intervention in the surrounding ecosystem driven by the desire to satisfy a human need, does not always lead to positive effects.

Following this line of thought, in this research an attempt will be made not only to better understand this singular and complex link between tourism and the environment, but also to highlight the risks that the environment and people who live in, and the tourism sector itself may face. Furthermore, it is also worth noting that the real purpose of this research is not simply to denounce what is wrong but, starting from here, to offer another way of seeing and doing tourism, an alternative that can make this sector more and more environmentally aware and that can recall the responsibility of each stakeholder in ensuring an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable tourism model.

Moreover, the decision to address issues such as this one is also dictated by the fact that the tourism sector has been increasingly expanding and diversifying, by occupying a more significant place in the European economic context and in particular that of Italy, a long-standing popular tourist destination. Following this line of thought, it is firstly important to realise the positive as well as negative impacts that tourism generates on the environment. Secondly, it is necessary to act on the problem and to intervene so that an adequate alternative can be found. An alternative that will not slow down tourism development but, on the contrary, strengthen it through instruments capable of developing a more resilient tourism and hospitality industry that will be effective in preserving the environment and, at the same time, economic growth. In this way, this dissertation will be divided into four chapters, each of which will attempt to offer interesting insights and reflections on the relation between tourism development and environment.

Furthermore, given the vast nature of the subject matter, in order not to fall into vagueness or too superficial conclusions, it has been decided to focus on the hospitality sector and, in particular, on green hospitality. Accordingly, this research will start from more general concepts and will gradually go more specific and concrete by introducing what are the push and hindrance factors, as well as the required future challenges to face in order to adopt those policies and initiatives that can help improve environmental management and sustainability in the hotel enterprises. The four chapters will be divided in two parts: the first two chapters will be mostly focused on the tourism industry and the concept of sustainable tourism while chapter three and four will analyse the current situation of the hospitality sector in the Italian context.

In particular, the first chapter of this research will investigate the reasons why tourism is a phenomenon not to be underestimated, both from the economic and environmental point of view. Therefore, it can be worth noting that the mutual influence between tourism and economy is highly strong and, as a result, this specific relation makes the tourism industry one of the main driving forces of the global economy. However, in the meanwhile, the link between tourism and the natural dimension should not be overlooked and a variety of positive as well as negative impacts can be generated and directly or indirectly influence the natural and built environment, together with local people and visitors at the destination.

Following this line of thought, the second chapter will examine, on the one hand, the degree to which awareness of environmental issues is developing internationally and, on the other hand, the meaning of sustainable development and the related concept of sustainable tourism. Furthermore, the official path undertaken at the international level and the overview of all the measures, tools and stakeholders needed to implement and ensure the development of sustainable tourism will be explored.

By introducing the concept of “green hotel” and outlining its main features, the third chapter will stress the fact that it is larger hotels (including many hotel chains) that easily assume those characteristics typical of green hotels and adopt specific eco-friendly policies and tools, on the contrary of small and medium hotel enterprises. Because of this, the Italian situation will be taken into analysis and attention will be paid on the fact that on the one hand, the majority of Italian hotels are small-sized hotels that are “independently managed”, by reflecting the typical fragmented Italian context. On the other hand, emphasis will be placed on the need for action at the local level, reversing the top-down approach and implementing green policies and initiatives that can be adapted to each specific local context.

Finally, the fourth chapter will focus on the current situation in the province of Rimini, with the aim of investigating the extent to which the hospitality sector in this area is evolving in line with the growing interest in environmental issues on the part of hoteliers and, in particular, guests. In addition, in this final chapter, an attempt will be made to understand how the small and medium-sized hotels in Rimini are declining the ecological transition in their management. In particular, through a survey administered to hotel owners, an interview addressed to the president of Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna and the sharing of a relevant case history, the pushing or hindering factors perceived by the principal stakeholders will be identified and analysed. In this way, the purpose of the empirical research will be to identify those areas or factors on which it is necessary to intervene for enhancing the adoption of all green strategies, initiatives, policies and best practices for the development of a specific kind of tourism in the hospitality sector in line with environmental preservation.

CHAPTER 1

Tourism: a Phenomenon not to be Underestimated

1.1 Tourism as a global factor

The fact that we are living in a world even more interconnected and interdependent is a reality that is hard to dismantle. A growing number of both national and international players, such as states, organizations or multinational companies have been taking a growing active role in shaping and addressing the logics of our societies: economically, environmentally and socially speaking. As a consequence, if we want to discuss global issues as well as the ways and means to deal with them, a too simplistic and general perspective could be reductive and leave us with a too limited understanding.

On the contrary, a vision that not only embraces the intertwining of social, economic and environmental aspects related to a global phenomenon but it also takes into account all the possible inputs and outputs of the latter could be a more efficient and useful way of understanding what happens around the world and which are the main players and sectors involved. Following this specific way of approach, an important sector that is strongly linked to the global dimension is tourism. More specifically, the act of asking ourselves what could be the reasons why tourism and its impacts need to be contextualized in a global world, allows readers to better define its nature and identity not only as a product of globalization but, in the meanwhile, as a driving force of this worldwide integration.³

Following this line of thought, the definition of tourism given by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) could be relevant in remarking its multiple and fluid essence: in fact, tourism is defined not simply as a sector but rather as *“a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes”*.⁴The typical features of globalization, such as the interconnectedness among the social, cultural and economic side as well as the idea of movement are clearly reflected in this representation of tourism. In addition, this complex phenomenon not only passively embodies the characteristics of globalization but it also actively gives birth to a specific segment of people called visitors that, accordingly to the UNWTO definition, *“may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents”* [through which] *“tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure.”*⁵

³ Cooper and Wahab, *Tourism in the Age of Globalization*, Preface.

⁴ “Glossary of Tourism Terms.”

⁵ “Glossary of Tourism Terms.”

In other words, by taking into account different but also complementary perspectives, on the one hand, tourism could be conceived as an ideological power able to reconfigure culture and tradition to its own needs⁶, on the other hand, other scholars still agree that globalization itself is shaping the natural essence of international tourism.⁷ Furthermore, by trying to reflect about which factors originate tourism, it can be argued that behind the presence of tourism there is also a specific demand for it. In this way, it can be said that tourism was born in order to reply to a necessity and a specific need of a peculiar category of people and other international players (such as trades, organizations and activities) that are permanently shaped by a fluid relation with the economic, cultural, political and environmental global trends.

Moreover, while in the tourism literature scholars used to talk about “tourism industry”, other authors suggest that its conception as an industry could be inaccurate, given the fact that its resulting output could not just be a single and clean-cut product. Therefore, as Gilbert (1990) put into evidence, this difficulty to establish a clear definition could be a result of the wide-ranging and complex essence of “*both tourism as a concept and of the service inputs involved in satisfying tourist demands and needs*”.⁸ Consequently, throughout the reading of these chapters, when referring to the two expressions “tourism industry” or “tourism sector”, it is important not to reduce them to a simple literal meaning but rather keep being aware of the complexity implied by the multiple facets of tourism and its strong interdependence with globalization. Therefore, only by taking this kind of broad perspective, the overall picture, and not just a small part of it, about the nature of tourism could be provided.

By having remarked the extent to which the concept of tourism can be defined and by having highlighted its strong interdependence with globalization, what can be easily deduced is the fact that tourism holds a crucial and prominent position in the international arena. Given the fact that the relation between tourism and globalization takes shape in different areas, the following paragraph will mainly focus on the crucial role that tourism plays at the economic level.

1.2 Tourism as an economic power: positive impacts and the theoretical framework

As it can be clearly seen in figure 1, tourism is a phenomenon under constant expansion and sustained growth all over the world. This growth is usually measured under economic terms and by looking at recent data, before the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in 2019, it can be observed that the

⁶ MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers*.

⁷ Keller, P. “Globalization and tourism,” 6-7.

⁸ Hunter and Green, *Tourism and the Environment: a Sustainable Relationship?*, 3.

global number of international tourists reached one of 1.5 billion: a numerical quantity that was economically translated in 1.7 trillion dollars of export revenues (the sum of international tourism receipts and passenger transports). Moreover, this data contributed in making tourism not only the third largest export category but even an influential key sector in both advanced and developing economies: therefore, it is not a case that in 2019, revenues from international visitors had grown faster than the world economy.⁹

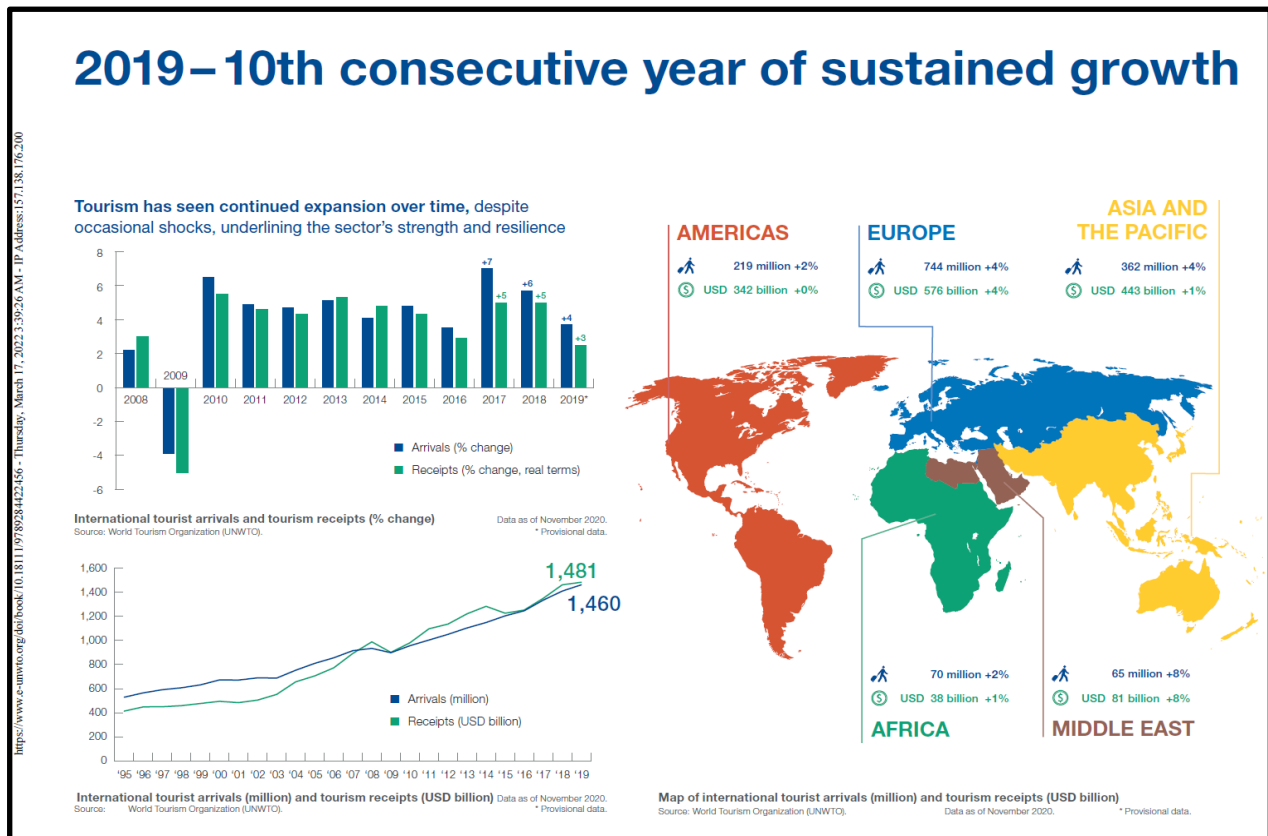


Figure 1 A visual representation highlighting the sustained growth in terms of tourist arrivals (million) and tourism receipts (USD billion) all over the world.

Source: UNWTO, *International Tourism Highlights* (2020), 3.

By putting to one side the numerical aspects for a while, what could be firstly highlighted is the analysis on the ways through which the tourist sector can contribute in an effective and positive way to economic growth. More specifically, international tourism is conceived both as a decisive player in advancing the country's economic growth and as a vital provider of foreign revenue to the country itself (Oh, 2005). For instance, as shown in the latest annual research conducted by the World

⁹ "Covid-19 and Tourism. Tourism in pre-pandemic times."

Travel and Tourism Council, the Travel and Tourism sector represented 10.4% of global GDP in 2019.¹⁰

However, what is also worth noting is the fact that the touristic sector does not only contribute to a country's GDP but, given the fact that tourism is indirectly but deeply interdependent with other kinds of sectors (such as that one of transportation and infrastructures, accommodation or food), it is likely to exercise a multiplier effect on the whole economy. Furthermore, tourism is a combination of different stakeholders, such as public or private agencies, businesses, companies and organizations that should jointly collaborate in promoting tourist destinations and welfare with the aim for adjusting energy prices and global supply chains, too.

As a result, concrete economic opportunities and sufficient revenues are generated by the tourism industry in order to guarantee a constant economic growth in the long-term.¹¹ In addition to this, balance of payments and consequently trade itself seem to benefit from the positive economic effects driven by tourism (Phiri 2016).

Following this line of thought, in tourism literature it can be easily found a proliferation of academic papers that largely contribute to study and show how tourism and economics are interrelated. As regards, it can be mentioned for instance the 'tourism-led growth hypothesis' (TLGH). Theoretically speaking, TLGH derives from the 'export-led-growth-hypothesis' which advanced the assumption that economic growth can be generated not only by a growing amount of labour and capital but also by an increasing amount of exports. Following this line of thought and given the fact that international tourism can be identified as a type of export, TLGH analyses the different and complex relations between tourism and economic growth. In particular, an attempt is made to investigate whether tourism activities are the main driver of economic growth or, conversely, whether it is economic expansion that leads to tourism growth or, possibly, whether both economic and tourism growth depend on both variables. As proof of this, an exhaustive review of some 100 peer-reviewed publications on TLGH examined by Brida, Cortes-Jimenez and Pulina (2016) found empirically that international tourism is likely to act as a driver of economic growth. In this way, TLGH, together with other kind of related theories, have encouraged scholars to carry on a large number of empirical studies that mostly demonstrated the connection between tourism and economic growth.

Moreover, by mentioning other positive tourism-related impacts on the economy, what is quite well-documented is the fact that the tourism industry can lead to a growth both in tax revenues and in

¹⁰ "Economic Impacts Report."

¹¹ Shaheen, Zaman, Batool et al, "Dynamic linkages between tourism, energy, environment, and economic growth: evidence from top 10 tourism-induced countries.", 31273.

the availability of further sources of income, and to the creation of new job opportunities for the domestic resident.¹² For instance, given the fact that a government should improve the quality of infrastructures (e.g., energy and water supply, roads, train stations...) and that one of goods and services in order to become an attractive destination for tourists, local producers can start to compete in the foreign market, too.¹³

Furthermore, because of the fact that tourism is strongly interrelated with other sectors of the economy, direct as well as additional indirect and induced impacts on third parties can be often generated. For example, with regard to the employment situation, because of the labour-intensive nature of tourism, a variety of new job opportunities can be created and provided, by enhancing the development of direct, indirect and trigger employment. In particular, similarly to the Neofunctionalism “logic of spill over” (according to which integration in one sector can be spread in another related policy areas), the development of tourism can lead to a “spill over” of new work possibilities not just into the touristic sector but also into different sectors that are not necessarily involved in a direct way, such as those concerning accommodation, food or transportation services.¹⁴

In this regard, to share some statistics, 277 million jobs were created by the tourism industry in 2014 at the global level, an amount that kept increasing until 2019, by achieving the peak of 334 million jobs. Following these trends, suffice it to say that just in Italy, before the outbreak of Covid-19, Italian travel and tourism industry contributed to generate 333 million jobs, which represented 12,2 % of total jobs.¹⁵

On the other hand, from a macroeconomic dimension, what is also interesting to highlight is the fact that economic growth generated by the tourism industry can exercise influence on the less advanced economies as well. Therefore, in the field of research concerning tourism literature, a huge panorama of surveys can show how tourism can improve not only the local, national and international economic development but also the competitiveness of the touristic destinations in both developed and developing countries.¹⁶

¹² Comerio and Strozzi, “Tourism and its economic impact”, 110.

¹³ Shahzad, Shahbaz et al., “Tourism-led growth hypothesis in the top ten tourist destinations”, 223–232.

¹⁴ Shaheen, et al. "Dynamic linkages between tourism, energy, environment, and economic growth", 31273-31283.

¹⁵ “ ITALY 2021 Annual Research: Key Highlights.”

¹⁶ Comerio and Strozzi, “Tourism and its economic impact”, 112.

Furthermore, tourism has been also seen as a useful tool in order to reduce poverty and support the local economies of small island developing states (SIDS), despite the fact that some governments have been criticized for still underestimating the potential benefits that tourism could lead to.¹⁷

As a consequence, what is often well recognizable, is the presence of a dependent and positive relation between tourism development and economic growth: a trend confirmed by the further evidence provided by the previously mentioned TLGH, indeed. In this regard, research conducted by Shahzad, Syed Jawad Hussain, et al. in 2017 tried to investigate the link between tourism and economic growth in the top ten tourist destinations over the period from 1990 to 2015: China, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Russia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. By adopting the quantile-on-quantile approach (QQ) and a new index relying on the main adopted tourism indicators, this research was able to confirm the positive dependency between tourism and economic growth among these countries.

More specifically, on the contrary of the traditional econometrics' models, the QQ method was able to estimate the impacts of the quantiles of tourism growth on those of economic growth. In doing so, this model became helpful in order to overcome the several complexities that could have emerged in the analysis, to provide an overall picture of the intertwining of variables and, consequently, to oversimplify the tourism-growth relation.¹⁸ From a more theoretical perspective, it could be argued that it is mainly for this positive and mutual relation between tourism and the economy that the so-called 'tourism-led growth hypothesis'¹⁹ emerged and through which tourism started to be identified as one of the most determinant factors in order to assure a steady economic growth in the long term.

However, the fact that there is a positive interdependence does not necessarily mean that an expansion in the touristic sector could induce an economic growth at the same quantitative and qualitative intensity across countries. For instance, the previously mentioned research conducted over the period 1990-2015 noticed that in some states such as China and Germany, the interdependence between tourism and economic growth was quite weaker compared to the other touristic destinations. In this regard, the fact that the tourism sector was not identified as one the main predominant sectors both in the German and French economy was conceived as a possible explanation for this contradictory output.²⁰

¹⁷ Comerio and Strozzi, "Tourism and its economic impact", 114.

¹⁸ Shahzad et al. "Tourism-led growth hypothesis in the top ten tourist destinations", 223-224.

¹⁹ Balaguer and Cantavella-Jorda, "Tourism as a long-run economic growth factor: the Spanish case", 877-884.

²⁰ Shahzad et al. "Tourism-led growth hypothesis in the top ten tourist destinations", 224.

At this point, what should be worth highlighting is the evidence in the fact that the link between tourism and economic growth could be quite heterogeneous. Therefore, several variables can intervene in influencing and, sometimes, increasing the gap between the two distinctive sectors. For example, this type of relation could be shaped by the degree of influence to which the tourism industry exercises on the overall national economy, the extent to which an economy is open or active in producing its capacity constraints, the role played by other businesses in the national touristic sector, as well as the level of probability to which negative externalities can be potentially generated by an exponential growth in some states.

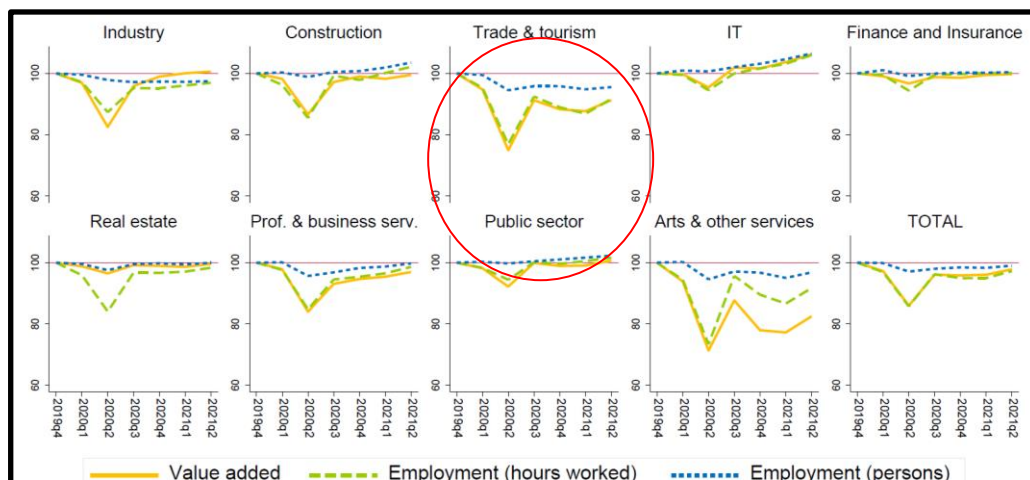
However, in spite of there being this lack of uniformity, the relation between tourism and economic growth is almost positive. This means that the two main determinants (economic growth and the tourism industry) can increase or decrease together and simultaneously. For instance, in the previously mentioned research concerning the TLGH in the top ten tourist destinations, what was observed is the fact that in seven countries (France, Italy, Mexico, Spain, Turkey, the UK and the US), the link between tourism and economic growth was relatively much evident in a period of time affected by deep economic downturn.

For this specific reason, if the focus just on the idea that a growth in economic terms leads to a growth in tourism could be true but just partially. Therefore, it should be taken into consideration the inverse situation as well, where an economic crisis could negatively impact the tourism sector and, as in the case of the seven countries, making the tourism-economic interdependence even more pronounced (Shahzad et al, 2017).

1.3 The Covid-19 pandemic

In order to better understand the dynamic through which a growth in the touristic sector can be obstructed by unexpected economic factors, the main impacts caused by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic could be taken into consideration in this discourse. Therefore, the pandemic has provoked not just a health crisis but also a social and, at the same time, financial downturn that has highly damaged the performance of the main driving sectors on which the global economic world is based. Among them, high-contact services, especially tourism and travel, have been seriously hurt when compared to those enhancing non-contact activities, such as ICT or delivery services. As shown in the graph 1, it could be noted that at the European level, contact-intensive services (e.g., food and accommodation) have represented one of the hardest hit sectors. Therefore, despite the fact that they are likely and hopefully expected to reach the pre-crisis levels, they have experienced a strong and protracted loss with the pandemic.

Graph 1: Changes in sectoral value added, employment, and hours worked, EU27 average



Note: Performance is expressed as an index (2019q4=100). Data are seasonally and calendar adjusted. Value added is calculated based on gross value added in chain linked volumes (index 2015=100). Employment, measured in hours worked and in persons, are based on domestic concepts. Following the NACE code nomenclature, considered sectors are respectively: Industry (B-E); Construction (F); Trade and tourism (G-I); IT (J); Finance and insurance (K); Real estate (L); Professional and business services (M-N); Public sector (O-Q); Arts, entertainment and other services (R-U).

Source: European Commission, *The Sectoral Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis. An Unprecedented and Atypical Crisis* (2021).

More broadly speaking, the impacts stemming from the pandemic have not concerned the tourism industry just within the European context but in many other parts of the world, too. Therefore, it could be argued that due to Covid-19 and the resulted restrictions to international mobility, the overall repercussions on travel and tourism sector have been translated into losses of around \$4.5 trillion and, in other words, into a real financial recession: just in 2020, the global contribution of these specific sectors to GDP declined by 49.1% in comparison to 2019. Moreover, if the domestic tourism spending dropped by 45%, that of international tourism decreased by 69.4%, by reaching such levels that have never been reached before. As far as it concerns the employment sector, the situation was not relatively better in 2020.

Particularly, it can be noted that the Covid-19 pandemic provoked 62 million job losses, keeping just 272 million workers in a condition of employment within tourism and travel services at a global level. The Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), which almost represent 80% of worldwide business involved in this sector, have been deeply and economically endangered, together with the social and economic conditions of several minorities, such as women and young people, threatened by the negative impacts caused by the persistence of employment decline.²¹

Consequently, taking into account all these detrimental effects, mostly belonging to an economic nature, the aforementioned idea elaborated by the TLGH, according to which the link

²¹ WTTC, “Global Economic Impact and Trends 2021.”

between tourism and economic growth could be relatively much stronger in a period of time affected by deep economic downturn, can be clearly justified by the resulting situation originated by the spread of Covid-19 around the globe.

All these recent events clearly show how the world of today is interconnected: therefore, the pandemic provoked a real global crisis, with all its multiple facets and multidimensional identities. For this reason, it can be noted that this crisis has not been just a health one, but a combination of economic, social and environmental dimensions, too. This global and multiform nature can be also confirmed by the fact that Covid-19 crisis has impacted not just a single area but all the different sectors that are strongly interconnected and intertwined among each other. In this way, not only the tourism industry itself but also the overall network of its related sectors through which it cooperates, have been affected in a very deep and unprecedented way.

As a result, it could be argued that, despite the significant economic benefits driven by the economic power of tourism, the experience of Covid-19 demonstrated that even the tourism industry can have its own Achilles' heel. In this global world, because of its multi-layered and cross-sectoral nature, the interdependence of tourism with other kinds of political, economic and social actors could represent a point of strength as well as weakness. Therefore, the other side of the coin implied by this mutual interaction and interrelationship of tourism with different sectors is the rapidity through which an effect originated by an event in a specific sector could have on the others, both in a direct or indirect way. Following the rules of globalization, this phenomenon is a double-edged sword that makes tourism on the one hand, a driving force of the economy and on the other hand, a vulnerable sector influenced by external events.

1.4 Tourism and its economic negative impacts

Having underlined how much a global sector such tourism can play an active but also passive role in interfacing the international economic and financial scenario as well as the following challenges that could stem from it, it should be mentioned that there are also several tourism-related forces that cannot always lead to positive outcomes as expected. Therefore, as soon as tourism becomes a deep-rooted activity in a certain area, serious issues of different nature can emerge. In doing so, the act of pointing out some examples of negative aspects could be a helpful way to be aware of their existence and, as a result, to develop strategies in order to manage and minimize their impacts as much as possible. Given the fact that there are different perspectives through which issues implied by tourism can be analysed, in this paragraph the main focus will be on negative economic impacts.

First of all, it might be noted that the conception of tourism as an economic power does not only mean that a growth in tourism is just the result of an economic growth. In fact, as we previously highlighted, tourism is fundamental in becoming a driving and proactive force for economic development, too. However, it is also worth noting that the interdependence between tourism and economy is a matter of fact that could conceal “bright and dark sides” as well. Therefore, if on the one hand this relation leads to positive effects, such as the increase of the number of exports, the generation of additional sources of income or new job opportunities, on the other hand, tourism could also impact the economy in a negative way.

More specifically, what can be identified as a potential risk generated by an unexpected and too rapid expansion of the tourism sector in a specific area is the so-called: “Beach Disease” effect (Holzner, 2011). This phenomenon concerning tourism-dependent countries started to be outlined under the assumptions embedded in the theory of “Dutch Disease phenomenon”. Therefore, with the elaboration of this theoretical model, the economists W.M Corden and J. Peter Neary tried to demonstrate the negative economic impacts stemming from a large inflow of foreign currency, such as a growth in a country’s real exchange rate and a loss in a country’s international competitiveness (Corden and Neary, 1982).

However, in 1991 the economist Copeland identified a link between the Dutch Disease and the role of the tourism industry, by starting to focus on the impacts affecting the economic production as a result of the increase in the level of tourism welfare Copeland (1991). He noted that, as a consequence of a tourist boom, the implied effect of letting a large amount of foreign money enter a country could highly contribute to reducing the manufacturing sector and letting the social tourism-related benefits confined to non-tradable sectors.²² For that reason, a deindustrialization process was identified as the ensuing adverse output, leading the national economy to decline instead of growing.

Following the same path, Holzner tried to examine if the tourist boom in 134 countries over the period 1970-2007 could have provoked the same effects as supposed by the Dutch Disease. However, the results obtained by his research did not find the danger of a Beach Disease Effect for tourism-dependent countries over the long run.²³ Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in spite of the fact that a contraction in the manufacturing sectors has not verified in the long period as expected, some authors still highlighted that the threat coming from the “Beach Disease” effect can be present over the short and medium run, instead (Song et al., 2012).

²² Copeland, “Tourism, welfare and de-industrialization in a small open economy.”, 515.

²³ Holzner, “Tourism and Economic Development: The Beach Disease?”, 929.

Furthermore, it can be noted that additional studies have denounced other negative impacts as a result of the interdependence between tourism and economy. For instance, due to the uncontrolled massive tourist arrivals in destination countries, resources such as land, labor and capital are exposed to a higher risk of being overexploited. For example, given the fact that land is an essential resource for tourism activities, the high and strong demand for it tends to let the prices grow. Due to this pressure on resources, a potential negative consequence of tourism could be the inflation effect that could undermine the economic welfare of the locals who belong to a community that, at the same time, is also a tourist destination (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2006).

Another negative impact that needs to be mentioned is the development of the so-called “enclave tourism”. This terminology refers to those destinations that are placed in a small and well-demarcated area where all services, facilities and operations are directly provided to tourists that, for this reason, are likely to be isolated from the local population. It is the case of cruise ships or all-inclusive resorts that, by their very “exclusive” nature, leave residents with just few opportunities to benefit. In order to exemplify this phenomenon, a study conducted in Jamaica concluded that all-inclusive accommodations did not lead to the same positive benefits on the economy as those ones generated by the other types of hotels. Therefore, what has resulted from the research is the fact that “enclave tourism” not only tends to shape the balance of trade by generating more imports rather than exports but also to provide employees with fewer job opportunities, too.²⁴

Moreover, by taking a further example dealing with the exponential transformation that a Chinese city like Macao have been experiencing as a result of a rapid tourism growth since 2000s, another negative impact that should not be overlooked is the fact that massive tourists’ arrivals induce the cost of living and speculative bubbles to increase and to deeply shape the economic, social and natural structure of the destination taken into account.²⁵

1.5 Tourism and the environment

Starting with the representation of tourism as a real economic power, this first chapter began by introducing the main positive effects of tourism in economic terms. However, it is important not to forget that this powerful economic sector could have its own Achilles’ heel, too. Particularly, what has already been said is the fact that the strong interdependence between tourism and economic

²⁴ Cristi, “An Overview on the Negative Impacts of Tourism.”, 33.

²⁵ Sheng and Yanming. “A general equilibrium approach to tourism and welfare: The case of Macao.”, 419-424.

development can be both a point of strength and of vulnerability mainly during a period of crisis, such as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, as it has been outlined in the previous paragraph, tourism might impact the economy in a negative way, too. In doing so, a chain reaction could be created, becoming the origin of other negative impacts that affect not only the economic sector but also other spheres, such as the environmental one. In fact, the link between tourism and the natural dimension should not be overlooked since it can directly influence the natural and built environment and consequently, local people and visitors at the destination. As such, tourism should be conceived as a *“territory-contingent phenomenon, with flows and activities occurring unevenly across countries, regions, municipalities or any other territorial entity”*.²⁶

The strong interdependence of tourism with territory is highly underlined not only by the fact that a tourist attraction is mainly made to coincide with the natural or built environment (like a mountain area or an unspoilt beach), but also because the specific territory and its natural features can easily shape the typology of tourism, the variety of the supply provided in order to satisfy visitor consumption and, as a result, the link with a possible generation of economic and social well-being.²⁷

As a result, what is important to underline is the fact that tourism cannot be reduced just as an economic power: in fact, the environment itself is not only a passive actor but it can also have both a direct and indirect influence on tourism, too. More specifically, visitors' motivations can change by depending on the typology of the environment. As such, several definitions of tourism types have been created and for instance, it could be mentioned those of cultural, rural, coastal, mountain or urban/city tourism.²⁸ In this regard, people decided to move in order to meet different people or discover new places where they are not used to living, such as attractions that could be cultural or natural.

From another perspective, it could be relevant underlying the fact that around the world, a fifth of tourism and travel industry is deeply dependent on open natural surroundings. Consequently, in order to appeal to specific consumer segments, the majority of tourist attractions demand for natural environments, which are one of the key factors included in the structure of what is called “tourism product”. Particularly, what is important to remark is the fact that even in the definition of “tourism product” provided by the UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), natural components, which are combined with a variety of elements like human resources, services or other

²⁶ “A Closer Look at Tourism: Sub-national Measurement and Analysis - Inroute-UNWTO Collaboration.”

²⁷ “A Closer Look at Tourism: Sub-national Measurement and Analysis - Inroute-UNWTO Collaboration.”

²⁸ UNWTO, “UNWTO Tourism Definitions.”

facilities, come to play an important role as well.²⁹ In this regard, Gilbert (1990) refers to non-industrial resources, essential for the establishment of the tourism product. Among them, climate, natural landscape, beaches as well as the local culture of the host communities represent these resources that can be freely provided by the ecosystem.

However, it could be stressed that even services, such as those one of travel, transportation, accommodation or leisure activities are not excluded from preserving an environmental dimension, too.³⁰ In fact, it can be undoubtedly argued that facilities usually provided to visitors like heat, food, laundry and cleaning services as well as the availability of drinking water are supplied by the exploitation of natural resources. Similarly, the environment is called upon to intervene in absorbing the garbage produced by tourists, too.³¹

Therefore, it is not a case that in much research literature, scholars often refer to the expression “nature-based tourism products” that are divided in three main categories: consumptive, adventure and non-consumptive nature-based products. More specifically, the first one concerns activities like hunting or fishing, the second one refers to the conception of the environment not as a place for appreciating nature but rather for living exciting experiences. Thirdly, the non-consumptive nature-based tourism is related to activities such as the observation of wild animals or, for example, particular plants in national parks.³²

For all these reasons, despite the fact that the economic factors can often be conceived as the predominant driving forces of the tourism industry, it can be deduced that the environment itself can clearly be represented as a constitutive element through which the concept of tourism is developed as well. Consequently, what should be perceived as a necessity is that of being aware of the strong and complex relationship between tourism and the environment that could be analysed only by taking into consideration all the possible outcomes generated by this interdependence. Particularly, due to the fact that natural and man-made resources are not endlessly renewable and resilient to the pressure that tourism used to exercise on them, both positive and negative impacts should be considered in this analysis.

Furthermore, because of the increasing awareness of the possibility to face environmental issues led by tourism, a balance between on the one hand, the need to achieve tourism-generated

²⁹ UNWTO, “UNWTO Tourism Definitions.”, 18.

³⁰ Buckley, “Tourism and Environment.”, 399.

³¹ Hunter and Green. *Tourism and the Environment a Sustainable Relationship?*, 6.

³² Buckley, “Tourism and Environment.”, 399.

economic development and on the other hand, a more responsible way of managing and employing environmental resources should be required.³³ In doing this, a more comprehensive and holistic approach would be able to take into account the huge variety of impacts resulting from the growth in tourism and to analyse in what manner these effects can interact among themselves.

Moreover, the act of classifying which are the main environmental resources for the tourism industry could be quite useful rather than too reductive given the fact that these resources also represent the key components of environmental impacts. Consequently, the understanding of these key factors, the backbone of the relation between tourism and the environment, would lead to the establishment of a systematic configuration and approach aimed at preserving or advancing an environmental quality through a more responsible management of the resources employed.³⁴

In this way, the environment can be divided into three main dimensions: the physical, biological and socio-economic one or, more generally speaking, it can be classified under the natural, built and cultural framework. Starting from these three categories, the different tourism impacts will be pointed out in the next paragraphs. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that the diversity in the nature of impacts (positive and negative, local or global, direct, indirect or even induced) can be the result of the intertwining of the multiple identities embedded in the multi-layered definition of environment and its interdependence with tourism.

In order to assess which are the main tourism impacts concerning the environment, it could be highlighted that this analysis can be problematic, too. As reported by Briassoulis (1991), the main difficulties to recognize and quantify the impacts highly stem from the fact that the components of both tourism and environment are not stand-alone identities. For instance, tourism is based on different types of interlinked activities that are carried out both by visitors and the local population. Because of this complexity, the attempt to represent tourism as the only cause at the origin of impacts could become quite problematic.

Concerning the environment, another issue is generated by the fact that tourism does not affect the environmental dimension just in a direct way: indirect as well as induced impacts could be provoked too. Moreover, given the fact that environmental components are interlinked like those of tourism, a tourism activity that affects one side of the environment can indirectly generate further impacts on another one. Furthermore, the complexity in the assessment of tourism impacts can be seen in the fact that the existing research literature on this field is quite reductive. On this matter, Pearce

³³ Hunter and Green. *Tourism and the Environment a Sustainable Relationship?*, 7.

³⁴ Hunter and Green. *Tourism and the Environment a Sustainable Relationship?*, 11.

(1989) argues that the lack of efficient methods and resources associated with insufficient and inadequate multidisciplinary approaches have been responsible for the scarcity of tourism impact studies.

It can be concluded that the link between the environment and tourism is not always unidirectional or simplistic and, as it was previously mentioned, a network of multiple and interrelated impacts has to be taken into account in the analysis of this interrelation. For this reason, the recent environmental changes have been affecting not just the natural landscapes but also the whole ecosystem in which tourist destinations belong to. In particular, a variety of negative consequences on the multiple dimensions of the environment and several examples have been summarized in Box 1.1., even though, in the next few sections, impacts of tourism on the natural built and cultural environment will be respectively discussed in a more detailed way.

Box. 1.1 An overview of the main environmental consequences of tourism

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Problems</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<p>Resource usage: tourism competes with other forms of development and human activity for natural resources, especially land and water. The use of natural resources subsequently leads to the transformation of ecological habitats and loss of flora and fauna</p>	<p>Some natural resources that tourism relies upon have characteristics of Common Pool Resources (CPRs). Thus there is a propensity for overuse. Indigenous and local people can be denied access to natural resources upon which they base their existence and livelihoods. Land transformation for tourism development can directly destroy ecological habitats and ecosystems. The use of resources for tourism involves an ‘opportunity cost’, as they are denied to other sectors of economic development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Airport construction in tourism generating and destination areas such as London and Malta uses large areas of farmland. · Draining of coastal wetlands in Kenya for hotel developments. · Loss of beach and coral reef ecosystem in the Caribbean · Deforestation of mountainsides associated with tourism in the European Alps and Himalayas. · Lowering of the water table below the level of local wells as in Goa, India. · Induced change to ecological habitats and subsequent reduction in the number of species of flora and fauna as in Scotland and the European Alps.

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Problems</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Human behaviour towards the destination environment	Local people encouraged by the revenues to be gained from tourism, and tourists, may display ignorance and/or a disagreement for the environment and indulge in inappropriate behaviour. This can lead to a range of consequences for the physical and cultural environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Disruption to eating and breeding patterns of wildlife animals in Maasai, Kenya. · Local people breaking off coral to sell to tourists off the Mombassa coast. · Dynamiting of fish in the Amazon to provide entertainment for tourists. · Tourists walking over coral in the Caribbean. · Increased crime, prostitution and drug taking in many destinations.
Pollution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Water · Noise · Air · Aesthetic pollution 	A range of different types of pollution can result from tourism. These impact on different spatial scales from the local to the global. In destinations the effects of pollution are often associated with the level of tourism development and the degree of implementation of planning and environmental management controls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Problems of human waste disposal generated by tourism in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. · Air pollution problems in the European Alps and the contribution of jet engine emissions to global warming and ozone problems. · Noise pollution of air balloons in the Serengeti Park in Africa. · Many coastal areas such as in parts of the Mediterranean and the Caribbean have had their coastlines transformed by standardized construction and are indistinguishable from each other.

Source: Holden, *Environment and Tourism*, pp. 74-75.

1.6 Tourism-related impacts on the natural environment

Any action that provokes a change in the vegetation, animal habits and their wildlife is considered a potential threat to the ecological balance of an area. In this regard, tourism activities play

a central role in affecting the natural self-regulating ecosystem in a positive or negative way. For instance, the natural environment could be often exposed to the risk concerning the land conversion to tourism uses, with the aim of increasing the provision of tourist accommodation and facilities. Therefore, it can be highlighted that international tourism is expanding at 3-4% per year globally and the existing tourism areas have been fully exploited.³⁵ Consequently, human intervention can generate not only the direct loss of vegetation but further and unexpected effects, such as the higher probability of soil erosion, floods and avalanches.

Examples of vegetation removal replaced by tourist facilities could be found in the mountain tourism of the European Alps. For instance, research conducted in the Austrian area of Galtür, Tyrol, analysed the cause-effect relationship between two factors: on the one hand, the growth in the number of tourists following the expansion of tourism activities and, on the other hand, the increase of the avalanche risk. Particularly, experts conclude that the development in the touristic sector and the introduction of ski pistes, new accommodations and other related facilities can strongly enhance the occupancy rate as well as triple the risk of potential damages.³⁶

However, indirect impacts have to be considered, too. For instance, during the winter season, the heavy and constant exploitation of skiing areas contribute to making the snow surface even more compacted and as a consequence, the spring thaw and the following blooming season is made to be postponed, by altering the local ecological balance. Moreover, it could be noted that human interventions on the natural environment, through for example the construction of tourism infrastructures, have been affecting not only the traditional touristic areas such as Europe or North America. In fact, several emerging tourist attractions, which are mainly situated in other developing regions such as the Riviera Maya in Mexico or Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic, are highly exposed to the risk of environmental destruction.³⁷

Furthermore, other negative impacts affecting the ecosystem can be related to the overexploitation of natural resources that, as a result, could be altered or even depleted. In addition to that, it should be underlined that the implications stemming from the use of natural resources are not limited to the local area where they are directly taken and exploited. In fact, these strategic resources are often brought from other distant regions and the negative effects implied by this action could indirectly impact the natural environment of the importing countries as well. For instance, it could be

³⁵ UNWTO. *Tourism and Biodiversity*, 18.

³⁶ Keiler, "Development of the damage potential resulting from avalanche risk in the period 1950-2000, case study Galtür.", 255.

³⁷ UNWTO. *Tourism and Biodiversity*, 18.

mentioned the adoption of tropical autochthonous wood tree species just for building or decoration purposes.

In this way, it can be evident how negative environmental implications could be extended over different natural areas, both in a direct and indirect way. Moreover, the removal or killing of rare flora and fauna species can represent another dangerous risk of losing biodiversity that is also related to tourism development. In this regard, it could be observed that, for example, the preservation of coral reefs is increasingly undermined as a result of the unnatural human presence mainly due to diving and fishing activities designed for tourists (Hamele, 1988).

Last but not least, the tourism industry is one of the largest contributors to environmental pollution. The different ways of polluting can deeply damage the overall ecosystem, including human health and living resources, and threaten a responsible use of the environment. More specifically, a rapid growth of tourism makes the local sewage treatment overload and the quality of water worsen by provoking a water pollution that negatively impacts the underwater life as well as the health of tourists and locals in the event of bathing in sewage-contaminated waters or eating sewage-contaminated food. By doing so, these serious impacts not only hurt the environment but they can also translate into direct loss of tourists. Therefore, the previous uncontaminated and idyllic tourist destinations become polluted and unhealthy places, by losing all their original attractiveness.

In addition to that, a further tourism-led impact is related to the production of air pollution. In particular, tourist vehicles emissions together with the exploitation of fossil fuels to provide heating and power for the maintenance of tourist infrastructures, largely contribute to pollute the natural environment. Moreover, it can be also underlined that if the effects implied by water pollution tend to be circumscribed to a specific and restricted area, the effects generated by air pollution could affect and expand on a larger-scale dimension in an easier way.

Following this line of thought, research conducted by the UNWTO was able to highlight the deep cause-effect relationship concerning the transport-related Co₂ emissions of the tourism sector. More specifically, data provided by the research confirmed the upward trend in transport-related Co₂ emissions from tourism. In particular, the amount of emissions is supposed to grow by 25%, increasing from 1,597 million tonnes to 1,998 million tonnes between 2016 and 2030, together with the exponential increase of international and domestic arrivals, too. In addition to that, according to the UNWTO study, it could be highlighted that Co₂ emissions, which are caused by tourism related transport, represented 5% of all human-induced emissions and 22% of all transport emissions in 2016,

and they are even predicted to increase respectively to 5.3% and 21% by 2030.³⁸

Fig. 2: Overview of transport-related emissions from domestic and international tourist arrivals by mode of transport

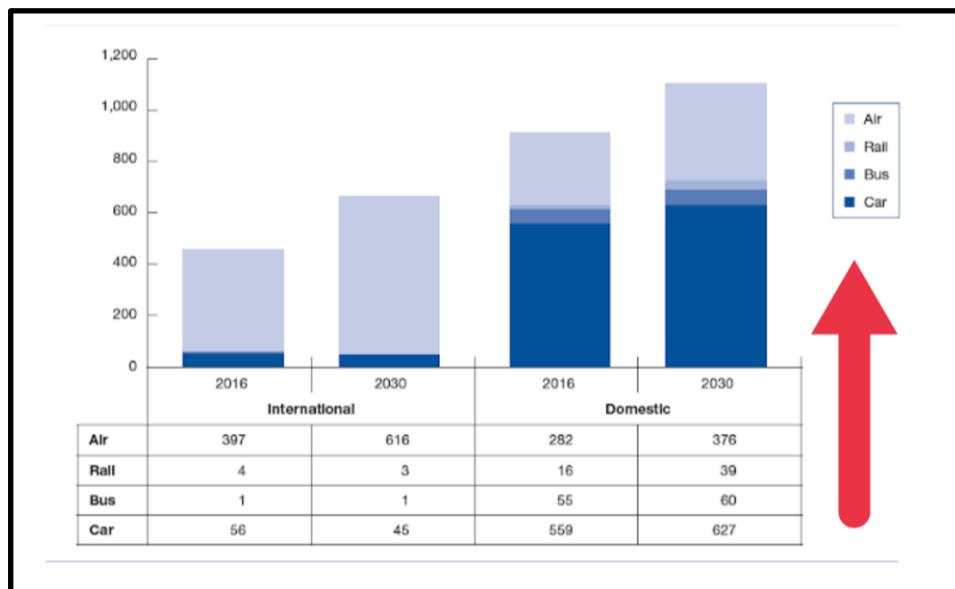


Figure 2: A visual representation highlighting the transport-related emissions from domestic and international tourist arrivals by mode of transport: air, rail, bus and car, 2016 and 2030 (mt of Co2).

Source: UNWTO, *Transport-related CO₂ Emissions of the Tourism Sector – Modelling Results* (2019), 47.

As a consequence, thanks to the elaboration of data provided by the UNWTO, it can be shown that tourism’s transport-related Co2 emissions represent one of the most dangerous threats negatively affecting the ecological balance. For that reason, a more responsible tourism sector should play an active and direct role in both cooperating with the mobility sector and promoting the decarbonisation process, as required by climate targets established at the international level.³⁹

Nevertheless, what is important to underline is the fact that tourism activities, if well-managed, can contribute to generate positive effects on the environment. For instance, there are even more tourism projects aimed at creating and preserving wildlife parks and natural reserves. Therefore, according to some scholars, the development of wildlife tourism and protected hunting are one of the least intensive factors positively enhancing wildlife conservation (Luxmoore, 1989). In a similar way, the study carried out by O’Donnell (1991) emphasizes the several benefits related to the preservation of the rural and cultural Irish environment that can stem from the development of agri-tourism.

³⁸ UNWTO, *Transport-related CO₂ Emissions of the Tourism Sector – Modelling Results* (2019).

³⁹ UNWTO. “Tourism’s Carbon Emissions measured in Landmark Report Launched at COP25.”

Furthermore, the tourism sector can be a pivotal agent in encouraging the conservation of plants and animals, too: indeed, despite detrimental consequences such as deforestation, soil erosion or deprivation of agricultural land, the development of responsible tourist activities, all aware of their own potentialities as well as controversial implications and limits, could highly facilitate the protection of biodiversity.

1.7 Tourism-related impacts on the built and cultural environment

On a more positive note, by taking into consideration the several impacts both on the built and cultural environment, potential benefits generated by a touristic growth can be pointed out, too. With regard to the built environment, tourism could act as a sort of catalyst able to improve and upgrade urban areas in decline, from which tourists and the local community itself could benefit. And, for instance, that is what happened in some developing tourist destinations in Jamaica in the 80s. In particular, it could be observed that after having introduced and improved not just tourism-related infrastructures but also those aimed at satisfying the basic needs of local people, including new roads and a more efficient water supply and garbage collection system, the quality of the citizens' life in Jamaican villages was largely improved.⁴⁰

However, another positive result to be mentioned is that one related to the concept of "beautification". More specifically, this expression refers to the act of transforming abandoned or unattractive areas into new appealing and renovated ones, by aesthetically improving their visual impact and qualitatively ameliorating the environmental dimension.

An example to be mentioned is the environmental improvement achieved in the Norwegian capital city of Oslo, with the requalification of the Aker River area. In spite of being originally a heavily polluted river, the construction of tourism infrastructures and green recreation spaces transformed this area into a wide urban park where nowadays, both local people and tourists can easily enjoy its clean and high-quality surroundings.⁴¹

Nevertheless, in spite of there being important environmental enhancements resulting from the adoption of specific and innovative environmental management techniques, the multiple detrimental consequences of tourism on the built and cultural environment should not be undervalued. In fact, it

⁴⁰ Henry, Ben. "The environmental impact of tourism in Jamaica."

⁴¹ Bettum, Ola. "The Aker River Environmental Park, Oslo. Re-use of industrial and riverside built heritage as part of a comprehensive conservation plan."

can be highlighted that a massive presence of tourists can deeply contribute to the erosion and degradation of historical monuments. In addition to that, it has been noted that the reduction in the availability of private houses and the resulting changes from a more residential to other land uses can represent another potential negative impact of tourism on the built environment. Therefore, it has been noted that tourism can stimulate the replacement of residential areas with hotels and other accommodation buildings, often by side lining and dislocating the private housing sector into completely different areas. Consequently, the emergence of structural differences between the urban area where local people used to live and that one mainly designed to host tourists has been identified as a potential threat to the environmental balance and a key factor generating social tensions between residents and visitors, too.⁴²

With regards to the cultural environment instead, it could be argued that tourism management and marketing are even more engaged in raising awareness about the relevance of the local culture of a touristic destination. In particular, local culture represents an important resource to use in order to attract tourist demand and give shape and value to the tourist offer. As such, tourism could become a useful tool in order to promote and reinforce cultural history, traditional practices or other different aspects belonging to the so-called “cultural environment”. In this regard, cultural initiatives such as the organization of historical commemoration or the promotion of the territory and its local products are all examples that clearly show the presence of a strong correlation between tourism and the cultural sphere. However, it is on the basis of the type of nature, dimension and duration of the interrelations between the local community and tourists that cultural transformations could be beneficial or detrimental. In fact, the way tourists are involved together with the local tourism industry and the host community is identified as one of the main driving forces influencing the social, economic as well as cultural environmental aspects. In particular, these inter-connected dynamics can deeply define the socio-economic and cultural distance that could emerge between local people and tourists.

With the development of mass tourism, this kind of divergence is much more pronounced while the possibilities to interact and dialogue with different cultures are much more limited. Furthermore, the resulting establishment of areas exclusively designed to host tourists on their holidays intensifies the distance with locals and highly contributes to give rise to hostilities and further separation between them. Despite the fact that touristic strategies mostly adopted by European countries are increasingly engaged in promoting and recognizing the autochthonous cultural aspects of a destination in a more

⁴² Page, S. J. “Tourism planning in London.”, 12.

responsible and sustainable way, it can be also worth noting that the authenticity of cultural heritage can be easily lost or simply become a merchandising product if not well managed.

Finally, depending on the different ways through which the tourism industry takes shape, a variety of impacts can affect the cultural environment positively or negatively. Moreover, it can be highlighted that changes in the cultural environment are not only implied by tourism. Therefore, given the fact that tourism is a direct agent and product of globalization, the transformations and further impacts brought about by this worldwide integration play a decisive role as well. In this regard, it can be highlighted the tendency of globalization to reduce cultural differences and increase the development of a uniform cultural system. Consequently, the act of conceiving tourism-related effects as single entities separated from those ones stemming from the globalization process, should not be very effective in order to provide an exhaustive understanding of tourism-related cultural changes.⁴³

1.8 Conclusions

What can easily emerge from the reading of these previous paragraphs is the evidence of a complex multi-variety of impacts driven by the tourism sector. More specifically, positive or negative effects can have a strong influence in shaping not only the overall economy but also the several dimensions of the environment, such as the natural, built and cultural one. Furthermore, the ways through which these impacts affect the economic, social or environmental area are multiple and different: in particular, direct, indirect or even induced effects can be generated by the emergence and further development of the tourism industry.

Therefore, one sector can positively or negatively shape the dimensions and effects of the other one, depending on the situation and the nature of the impacts.

Moreover, it is also worth noting that the mutual influence between tourism and the economy is highly strong and evident and, consequently, this specific relation makes the tourism industry not just a simple economic power but one of the main driving forces at a global level. For this reason and because of these complex interlinks among tourism and the other sectors, the idea of tourism as a potential and strategic player able to deal with global issues should not be overlooked.

Therefore, the proliferation of economic, social and environmental impacts underlines the fact that tourism cannot be considered a stand-alone entity but rather a multi-layered sector that is deeply

⁴³ Hunter and Green. *Tourism and the Environment a Sustainable Relationship?*, 33-39.

intertwined with others. In this regard, the dependence of tourism on environmental resources is quite evident: as a matter of fact, every single tourist activity has to rely on natural resources in some way.

However, it can be argued that potential and damaging effects on the environment can go along with the development of tourism, making the related activities often unsustainable over the long run. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that a higher degree of awareness about the tourism-related impacts on the environment could positively contribute to making tourists more environmentally-conscious and the host communities more actively engaged in the protection of the environment, despite the considerable economic and social benefits generated by a rapid growth of tourism.

For this reason, tourism literature has largely recognized the fact that the identification of new strategies aimed at combining tourism-related economic growth with a more responsible management and employment of natural resources seems urgently needed.⁴⁴ In fact, the strong pressure exercised by tourism on the cultural, built and natural environment does not go unnoticed.

As a result, the analysis of the complex variety of impacts should be useful to identify and better understand which are the main leading forces rooted behind the deep influence of tourism on the environment and, consequently, where and how to intervene. To do this, the site-specific nature, the intensity and the frequency of the wide range of interrelated impacts in a specific place and time should be taken into consideration in order not to fall into simplistic generalizations.

Furthermore, in spite of being aware of the high level of hybridity of the tourism industry, another important step to take for achieving a positive and real change in favour of the environment is represented by the identification and implementation of innovative strategies and alternatives.

In particular, by starting from a more responsible management of the touristic sector, the social, economic and environmental benefits could be easily provided with the aim of harmoniously integrating economic growth implied by the development of tourism with environmental protection and conservation. In this way, tourism can be identified as the junction point between the adoption of a more sustainable approach and economic prosperity, and strategic policies together with amelioration measures could become decisive tools leading towards the achievement and enhancement of what is called “sustainable tourism development”.

Following this line of thought, the adopted measures and the actions already taken at the international and national level will be discussed in the next chapter. However, it could be highlighted

⁴⁴ Hunter and Green. *Tourism and the Environment a Sustainable Relationship?*, 6.

that several existing measures have not deeply led to a concrete and positive change for the environment yet, even though the necessity of urgently intervening is widely recognised and denounced. In this way, the identification of the tourism industry as a potential promoter of change and sustainability will be later investigated in order to be supported and confirmed.

CHAPTER 2

How the Touristic Sector is aware of Environmental Challenges?

2.1 A sustainable approach as an alternative model of growth

At this point of the research, what seems almost unquestionable is the fact that the touristic sector could clearly represent an economic power at the global level. In this regard, data gathered from studies in the field can easily show the upward trend towards economic growth even in a future perspective. Therefore, despite the serious economic, social and health issues that have hardly hit the lives of people in the period of extreme global emergency caused by the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the tourist sector is expected to largely recover in 2023 and international arrivals are predicted to rapidly reach the pre-pandemic levels from 2024 on.⁴⁵ As a consequence, it could be observed that the general tendency of considering tourism an easy and accessible source of income in the short term is increasingly becoming a widespread and shared belief.

Nevertheless, what is worth noting is the fact that behind the economic growth enhanced by the development of this sector, not only lights but even shadows have to be taken into account as well. Therefore, as it had been previously mentioned in the first chapter, the growth and expansion of tourism in a specific area largely leads to the creation and spread of several different factors that can negatively impact, in a direct or indirect way, the economic, social, cultural and notably the environmental dimension of all the other sectors interconnected with the touristic one.

Moreover, it should be even highlighted that a frequent and common risk is to underestimate the potential damages of a too rapid and unrestrained growth, given the fact that the main repercussions and transformations could be almost observed over the long-term perspective. For instance, from a more environmental point of view, according to the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), the exploitation of crucial resources such as water, energy, land, fossil fuels, biomass and other natural elements increasingly contribute to damaging the overall ecosystem with the production of solid waste and greenhouse gasses. More specifically, under a “business-as-usual” scenario, tourism is estimated to reach a global increment of 154% in energy consumption, 131% in greenhouse gas emissions, 153% in water use and 251% in garbage disposal by 2050.⁴⁶ Precisely because of this, an oversimplification of all the possible adverse effects stemming from tourism should be unreliable as well as risky.

⁴⁵ UNWTO, “World Tourism Barometer”, 1.

⁴⁶ UNEP, “Tourism”.

Consequently, what seems of great urgency is to shift from a traditional paradigm to a more innovative, smart and sustainable one: in this way, the concept of sustainability has to come into play and start to become one of the main pivotal forces leading to the development of the touristic sector in today's world. A new model no longer based on a limitless exploitation of natural resources and an unsustainable profit maximization in the shortest possible time.

Especially for this reason, it is also worth highlighting that there is a difference between “development” and “growth”, even though these two terms are often considered synonyms. In particular, if the latter refers to the idea of becoming bigger and larger from a more quantitative perspective over the short run, the term “development” is mainly related to the idea of a better improvement in the change of state over the long run, rather than in the size of this transformation.⁴⁷ However, in order to provide an exhaustive explanation about the different key definitions at the heart of this research, the concept of “sustainable development” needs to be mentioned as well.

More specifically, starting from the main idea of not maximizing today in order to have a higher return tomorrow, the multiple values and meanings incorporated in the concepts of “sustainability” and “development” can be also embedded in the broader definition of “sustainable development”. In this way, before going ahead in the analysis about the link between sustainability and tourism, and the implementation as well as the adoption of what is called “sustainable tourism”, the first step to undertaken should be a better understanding of what sustainable development stands for.

2.1.1 What does sustainable development mean?

As it was previously mentioned, sustainable development incorporates the concepts of both sustainability and development. Nevertheless, it can be highlighted that a certain level of vagueness is rooted behind these two concepts; as a consequence, finding a straightforward and single definition of sustainable development seems quite difficult to provide. Therefore, it should be argued that if “development” can be generally described as a change of state or a progressive growth, “sustainability” can be considered the new and alternative perspective to see development. More specifically, it can be argued that the concept of sustainability can be understood by starting from that one of development, with a focus on the idea of expanding and changing, qualitatively and quantitatively speaking, for the better.

⁴⁷ Holden. *Environment and Tourism*, 149.

However, it is also worth noting that “sustainability” is not a simple synonym of growth and progress and, throughout its evolution, this specific terminology has started to acquire multiple nuances and multi-layered dimensions. Following this line of thought, one of the most important definitions was provided by the United Nations Brundtland Commission in 1987, according to which sustainability was identified as a complex process aimed at “*meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”.⁴⁸

What can firstly emerge from the reading of this definition is the great emphasis on the necessity to contribute in preserving and supporting not just the imminent reality but mainly the world of tomorrow, with its future generations and challenges. In particular, in view of the expanding environmental issues that the current ecosystem is facing nowadays, the adoption of a sustainable approach means that, in addition to the mere fulfilment of development needs, states have to undertake concrete actions and be aware of the fact that growing today will not negatively impact the overall economic, social and environmental dimension of the society of tomorrow to which future generations belong.

Nevertheless, as it has already been mentioned, what can be identified as a sign of vulnerability hidden behind the idea of sustainability could be that one of vagueness. More specifically, this ambiguity is mainly due to the fact that a multiplicity of different nuances is embedded in this concept as a result of its threefold dimension (economic, social and environmental one). In this regard, it should be also worth noting that the definition offered by the Brundtland Report “Our Common Future” contributed to increasing the ambiguity of the concept of sustainability, by not providing an effective clear-cut and complete explanation. Therefore, much more emphasis was put on the meeting of human and social needs rather than the environmental aspects, an important even if complementary dimension that belongs to sustainability.

As a result, due to the high level of hybridity, vagueness and incompleteness of this concept, international organisations have increasingly felt the need to find a common line on how to understand the concept of sustainability. In fact, international attention has been paid on this matter since 2001, when the Earth Charter claimed that:

“We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging

⁴⁸ United Nations, “Sustainability”.

*world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed”.*⁴⁹

Consequently, it can be implied that in order to exhaustively and deeply understand the concept of sustainability, people should be aware of its complexity and multifaced identity, even though the general tendency could be to indistinctly look at sustainability just in terms of the environment and at development just from a purely economic perspective. In fact, it could be highlighted that sustainability and development, in spite of being different, are deeply interconnected and the enhancement of “sustainable development” can be seen as a potential and useful means in order to mitigate and reduce the dualism between the two.⁵⁰ In this regard, the words stated in the first paragraph of the Agenda for Development (A/RES/51/240) seems quite relevant in this discourse:

*“Development is one of the main priorities of the United Nations. Development is a multidimensional undertaking to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development.”*⁵¹

Nevertheless, the presence of ambiguity and vagueness affects the concept of sustainable development, too. Therefore, a marked unclearness and generalisation of the term can be easily perceived in the broad definition given by the “Brundtland Report” in 1987.

“In essence, sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development; and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.”

(WCED, 1987: 43)

“...Interpretations will vary, but must share certain general features and must flow from a consensus on the basic concept of sustainable development and on a broad strategic

⁴⁹ Earth Charter. “The Earth Charter, Preamble”.

⁵⁰ Jabareen, Yosef. “A new conceptual framework for sustainable development.”, 181.

⁵¹ United Nations, Library. “Un Documentation: Development”.

framework for achieving it.”

(WCED, 1987: 41)

Following this line of thought, the definition provided in the Report by the World Commission on Environment and Development seems a “political fudge” (Richardson 1997) aimed at finding a compromise among the several opposite visions lacking of a single and agreed-upon interpretation on the meaning of sustainable development. However, the fact that sustainable development mainly aims at enhancing a kind of development able to meet the needs of present and future generations together with those of the environment seems the best and most clearly explained part of its definition.

“Economic growth and development obviously involve changes in the physical ecosystem. Every ecosystem everywhere cannot be preserved intact. [...] In general, renewable resources like forests and fish stocks need not be depleted provided the rate of use is within the limits of regeneration and natural growth.”

(WCED, 1987: 43)

As a consequence, it can be implied that key concepts such as conservation, natural resources management, recycling or a responsible economy of use have been jointly recognised as pivotal forces driving sustainable development towards its inherent social, economic and environmental dimensions.⁵²

2.2 Sustainability, tourism and sustainable tourism

The wide concept of sustainability is much more interlinked with the tourism industry as it could generally be expected. More specifically, the idea or, it is better to say, the necessity of applying the concept of sustainability to the tourist sector has been expanding even further. Therefore, it is true that in 1997, at the Earth Summit II in New York, tourism was officially recognised to be a very important economic sector. Nevertheless, on the same occasion, it was highlighted the need of not underestimating its negative impacts on the environment and the urgency of growing in a sustainable way, with the focus on the conservation and protection of the environment as well as the enhancement of what can be called “sustainable tourism”.⁵³

In accordance with the World Tourism Organization (WTO), sustainable tourism can be

⁵² Holden. *Environment and Tourism*, 152.

⁵³ Holden. *Environment and Tourism*, 150.

identified as “*tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities*”. In this definition, emphasis is put on the triple social, environmental and economic dimension on which sustainability is based, together with the focus on the present as well as the future needs of the several actors involved.

In addition to that, the fact that sustainable tourism has been widely recognized at the official level can easily show on the one hand, how much the values rooted behind this concept have been increasingly shared among people and organizations, and on the other hand, the growing awareness concerning the international relevance that this concept has been gaining so recently.

Since the 90s, it can be underlined that sustainable tourism has become a central concept that has started to embed all the different nuances belonging to the typical nature of sustainability. In particular, from a more holistic perspective, the whole environmental, social and economic dimensions should be included to provide an overall understanding of sustainable tourism as well. However, even though the values and dimensions belonging to sustainability can be identified as the point in common that both sustainable tourism and sustainable development share, it is also worth noting that the goals of the first are not necessarily the same as the second.

Therefore, on the one hand, it can be argued that sustainable tourism is more focused on the customer and the elaboration as well as the adoption of marketing strategies to actively and directly promote the tourism industry in accordance with sustainable criteria. On the other hand, sustainable development could be described as an indirect way of making tourism a tool to enhance and achieve environmental and social benefits.

Furthermore, another typical aspect that characterizes sustainable tourism is its complex and multi-layered structure that sees the participation and intertwining of different actors in different spheres of actions: cultural, political and economic ones. In particular, it can be highlighted that the political dimension, which is mainly represented by the political weight and decision-making power that people have, has been widely recognised in playing a very active and influencing role in shaping the interpretations of sustainable tourism. In this regard, Butler (1998) puts the emphasis on the strong pressure exercised by the external social order, and he underlines the incapacity of splitting sustainable tourism from “the value systems of those involved and the societies in which they exist”.

Moreover, the academic research of Saarinen (2006) also emphasizes the presence of a broad heterogeneity in the understanding of sustainable tourism by describing the different schools of

interpretations concerning this concept. In particular, in order to explain the multi-facet link between sustainability and tourism, the professor contributed to pointing out three distinct traditions, each one with its own way of looking and understanding sustainable tourism.

In this regard, what can be firstly mentioned is the so-called “Resource-based tradition”. By taking this kind of perspective, the main focus of sustainable tourism should be the preservation of nature and culture that are under the risk of being damaged by the harmful impacts of tourism. Following this line of thought, sustainability is perceived as a real and physical order, subject to conservation and measurement management strategies in order to be preserved.

Secondly, the “Activity-based tradition” is a further alternative to interpret sustainable tourism. According to this position, tourism is identified as a dynamic, constantly changing activity, which produces a variety of impacts. For these reasons, the previous tradition, since it is focused on a more static preservation of the natural order, appears problematic for the identification of development models capable of adapting to this changing sector. The activity-based tradition, on the contrary, is more industry-oriented and assumes that tourism activities, like economic activities, may have limits to growth that depend on a maximum of capacities or products that, if exhausted, lead to the stagnation of a tourist destination. In this way, sustainability in tourism is founded on the idea of transforming the environment, with its natural resources by modifying the carry capacity of a touristic area through specific marketing and infrastructural activities so as to introduce another new lifecycle.

Thirdly, the “Community-based tradition” focuses more on the direct involvement of several stakeholders, paying particular attention to the host communities. More specifically, this current of thought mainly conceives sustainability as a social construct in which the different stakeholders and political exponents play an active and strong role in influencing and orienting the adoption of sustainable approaches and their following outcomes.

Despite the fact that these three positions provide three different ways in representing sustainable tourism, it does not necessarily mean that they are contradicting in nature. In fact, it can be even said that several truths, which need to be highlighted, can emerge from each distinct tradition in a complementary way. In particular, by referring to the first tradition, it can be argued that tourism provokes real environmental damages that cannot be easily measured, requiring additional effort to do so. Secondly, given the fact that tourism can be considered an agent of the impacts affecting the ecosystem, the “Activity-based tradition” should be right in affirming that a more responsible

development of the touristic sector could become a valid alternative and solution to reduce the negative environmental damages. Finally, by referring to the third current of thought, it can be undoubtedly recognised the strong influence that several stakeholders (such as politicians, consumers, residents, workers, and providers of tourist goods and services) exercise in making tourism development as sustainable as possible.

Concerning the role of organisations engaged in the tourism sector, it is also worth noting that there is a growing demand for pushing them to re-orientate their business model towards sustainability. In particular, it can be observed that organizations have been increasingly more aware of the fact that they are directly concerned in causing environmental damages and as such, their responsibility to undertake a change of direction for the better has been widely recognised.⁵⁴ More specifically, it can be said that effective and positive results can be largely achieved by making destinations, together with their local and international stakeholders, more sustainable. Indeed, with the aim to pursue this goal, new forms of governance have to be identified and applied to the whole touristic system. Therefore, it has been noted that in those destinations where a shift towards sustainability has been already undertaken, new forms of management, innovative and smart tools of intergovernmental cooperation, through the involvement of both public and private actors in decision-making processes, have emerged as well.⁵⁵

Further evidence of the benefits that can be achieved through the application of sustainable tourism is also the link between competitiveness and sustainability. More specifically, competitiveness and sustainability are deeply interdependent and it can be said that one factor highly contributes to improving the level of the other one. Therefore, it has been noted that even in today's tourism planning there is no competitiveness without taking into account the sustainable dimension and similarly, there is no sustainability if the competitiveness at the economic, natural, cultural, educational and participatory level is undervalued. It is also for this reason that the tourism industry, rather than doing business as usual, should change its paradigm and try to make touristic destinations more sustainable and consequently competitive as possible (or vice versa).

However, it is also worth noting that a real transformation in this sense cannot effectively be achieved without the establishment of a more formal and authoritative guideline to follow. Therefore,

⁵⁴ Ekins, York et al., *"Analysis of Hotels' Environmentally Sustainable Policies and Practices."*

⁵⁵ Angeles Sanfiel-Fumero, M. *"Governance, Corporate Social Responsibility and Cooperation in Sustainable Tourist Destinations: The Case of the Island of Fuerteventura."*

both sustainability and competitiveness have to be promoted and safeguarded through the application of actions and practices that have to be included in tourism policies and governance (Bramwell, 2011). For this reason, having stressed the relevant link between competitiveness and sustainability and the fact that they should be incorporated within a specific policy framework, the assumption that 64% of policies connect sustainability with competitiveness (as highlighted in the following picture 2.1), gives further evidence of this specific relation in a more detailed way.

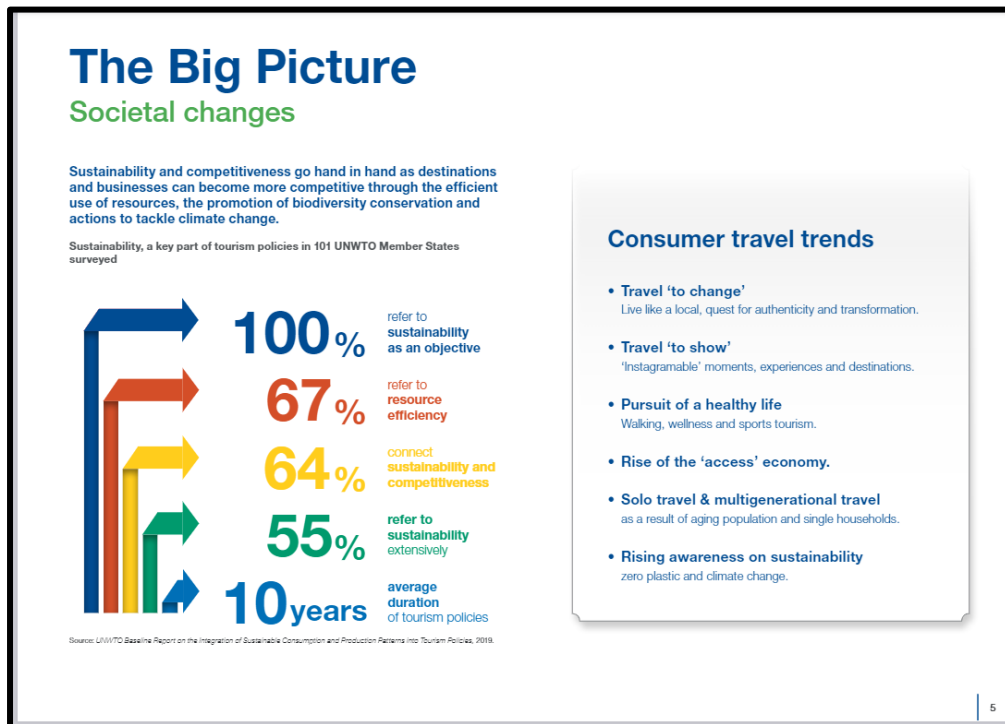


Figure 2.1. Source: UNWTO Tourism Highlights (2019).

Moreover, by looking at the right side of the same picture, it should be taken into account that a change in the policies is going hand in hand with a transformation in consumers' perceptions as well. More specifically, the reference to the item "Travel to change and raising awareness" puts emphasis on the fact that the imperative of a renewable sustainable tourism is also demanded by consumers, by leading to a transformation through a bottom-up approach.

In addition to that, the fact of addressing policies towards sustainability also means that the resulting adoption of sustainable measures in the management of tourist destinations could increase the level of competitiveness of businesses and their ability to become as efficient as possible, by guaranteeing profitable advantages under economic terms, too.

Following this line of thought, it could be also highlighted that improving the level of both sustainability and competitiveness could be even translated into a source of investment for the tourism

industry. In this regard, the application of ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) investing on the touristic sector could support this position.

2.2.1 ESG factors

More specifically, ESG investing is composed of three key factors aimed at measuring the extent to which companies and countries are sustainable in their investments. Being in line with the goals set by the Paris Agreement and the well-established Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it can be observed that investors' decisions have been even more shaped by the application of ESG approaches as well as the inclusion of a climate transition set of standards.

Nowadays, it is also worth noting that ESG investing can be represented as one of the most dominant examples of sustainable development finance and an instrument used in order to create long-term value with respect to social principles. In addition to that, the application of ESG approach contributes to regulating capital flows with low-carbon emissions with the aim of reducing transition risks and ensuring more favourable opportunities, too.⁵⁶ In this way, the growing focus on ESG factors and the increasing influence they have in the investor's choices can firstly sustain the idea that today what can be fundamental if not necessary is to prioritize the responsibility of including the pillars of the concept of environmental and social sustainability even in the context of making financial decisions. Secondly, on the other hand, it is also important to underline that the act of investing in sustainability does not exclusively imply costs for investors but rather leaves open the possibility to reduce risks and costs for better returns and market outperforms.

Following this line of thought and keeping in mind the global economic significance of the tourism industry, the adoption of ESG strategies can be related to this sector as well. In particular, according to the research conducted by Ionescu et al. (2019), it has been observed that the environmental, social and governance factors have been increasingly getting attention by companies and the several stakeholders acting in this sector.

Nevertheless, despite the growing recognition and awareness of the potentiality of ESG strategies, the final observations stemming from the research showed that the current commitment by investors in the environmental, social and governance sphere is still not sufficient and further steps should be needed in order to achieve sustainable changes. Therefore, by inquiring the extent to which the ESG factors exercise influence and are taken into account in stakeholders' choices, it has been

⁵⁶ OECD. "ESG Investing and Climate Transition Market Practices, Issues and Policy Considerations."

noted that there is still a certain distrust and scepticism among tourist investors in enhancing transparency and a proactive and responsible management towards social and environmental sustainability. In fact, this study contributed to support the idea that a higher awareness and interest about the social, environmental and governance-related dimension should be insufficient if not translated into a concrete accomplishment of the ESG rating.

Furthermore, what clearly emerged is the fact that the act of investing in the social or environmental dimension requires the adoption of a long-term perspective rather than just focusing on short-term benefits or costs. Only by doing so, investors will be increasingly likely to change their positions in favour of a higher recognition of ESG factors and to recognize the several additional benefits concerning the social, environmental but also economic and financial dimension, too.⁵⁷

In conclusion, it can be deduced that the link between sustainability and tourism is very complex but what seems clear is the necessity of strengthening the awareness concerning the importance to effectively undertake environmental sustainable initiatives within the touristic sector. Similarly, the idea that each stakeholder can contribute, positively or negatively, to a change should be kept in mind. However, in order to better understand the extent to which this sense of awareness is spread and the ways through which concrete actions have been undertaken by marking a significant step forward, the local, national as well as international legal framework about the application of sustainability to the touristic sector will be analysed and discussed in the following paragraphs.

2.3 Sustainable tourism: the milestones

By taking into account the growing influence that both social and environmental dimensions have been assuming, it can be similarly observed that a deeper sense of awareness about the necessity of officially recognizing the proactive enhancement of social and environmental responsibility is becoming an even higher priority. In particular, despite the fact that there is still much to be done, an increasing number of several stakeholders, from the customers to companies, are paying greater attention to the negative impacts stemming from the general irresponsible way of production and consumption and contributing in undertaking a shift towards a different kind of approach. However, it is also worth stressing again that this change of paradigm could be concretely realized through the support of a specific set of rules and policies able to provide a clear guideline to follow and respect by the several stakeholders. Only in this way, the adoption of new strategies can effectively become a

⁵⁷ Ionescu et al. “*The impact of ESG factors on market value of companies from travel and tourism industry.*”, 843.

concrete alternative to address environmental and social changes, as well as an important source of additional economic gains to invest, from which all sectors of society, including the tourist one, can benefit.

Following this line of thought and by taking into consideration the complex but also deep interdependence between tourism and sustainability, it is important to highlight that since the '70s, international organizations have been active in giving the right direction to let this change of paradigm start.

In this regard, the main official steps marking the path towards a sustainable tourism have been listed hereunder.

1975

In this year, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) General Assembly, which represents the supreme organ of the organization, was held in Madrid for the first time. The fact that this significant meeting took place marked the beginning of a growing and proactive commitment undertaken by an international organization that could be identified as the official guide aimed at handling the widening development of the tourism sector all over the world.

1980

On 27th September 1980, the first World Tourism Day was proclaimed in order to celebrate the anniversary of the official approval of the UNWTO Statutes occurring on the same day, ten years before. Moreover, another event that marks 1980 as a significant year is also the establishment of the Manila Declaration on World Tourism. Therefore, thanks to this official document, important and useful guidelines were provided in order to develop a fairer and more respectful form of tourism all over the world and push states to align national policies as well as to introduce new programmes and plans in accordance with the directions provided by the WTO.

1982

In this year, the Acapulco Document was approved and tourism started to be seen in a different way compared to before. In fact, the underlying message that emerges from the document is the identification of tourism as a provider and promoter of a better quality of life and an influential tool to promote peace and international cooperation.

1985

The Tourism Bill of Rights and Tourist Code were introduced in this year with the aim of calling international attention to the rights and duties belonging not only to the “upper categories”, such as international organizations, states or businesses but also the “lower ones” represented by tourists and hosting populations.

2002

The World Ecotourism Summit in 2002 marked a turning point in the context of the International Year of Ecosystem. Therefore, in this specific circumstance, attention was paid on key concepts regarding the implementation and regulation of ecotourism policy and planning, the management of ecotourism marketing and the related cost-benefits analysis.

2003

The first International Conference on Climate Change on Tourism was held in 2003 with the aim of bringing together the most important key actors (such as tourism authorities, companies and scientists) to debate about the impacts of climate change on the tourism sector. In the same year, it is also worth noting that the WTO became a specialized body of the United Nations through the adoption of Resolution A/RES/58/232.

2008

In this year, another relevant step undertaken in order to shape the path towards a more sustainable way of managing tourism was the establishment of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria. The main objective rooted behind the formulation of these criteria is to develop a common language with regard to the implementation of sustainable tourism. In particular, it is about the provision of minimum global standards that any tourism business should respect with the aim of ensuring the preservation of the natural and cultural dimension of the environment and making tourism a pivotal instrument for poverty alleviation. These 41 criteria are classified in four main categories, respectively those related to sustainable management, social and economic impacts, cultural effects and environmental impacts concerning ecosystem conservation, natural resources consumption and the reduction of pollution. Furthermore, it can be also highlighted that these standards are mainly designed to be adopted at the local level, due to the fact that each tourist destination has its own cultural, environmental, socio-economic as well as normative entity.

2009

This year was particularly relevant since it marked the setting up of the so-called “Roadmap for Recovery”. It consists of 15 recommendations mainly addressed to three specific areas of action: resilience, stimulus and green economy in order to enhance the expansion of both the tourism industry and global economy.

2012

This year was of great importance in shaping the development of tourism in the framework of sustainability. In particular, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which is also known under the name “Rio+20” or “Earth Summit 2012”, took place in Rio de Janeiro and it resulted in a significant outcome document aiming at providing clear measures and guidelines to promote and implement sustainable development all over the world. With regard to tourism, it can be underlined that in the document “The Future we want”, paragraphs 130-131 were crucial in providing an official definition of what Sustainable Tourism is.

Therefore, Member States recognize “the need to support sustainable tourism activities and relevant capacity-building that promote environmental awareness, conserve and protect the environment, respect wildlife, flora, biodiversity, ecosystems and cultural diversity, and improve the welfare and livelihoods of local communities” ...

Par.130, The Future we Want

... As well as to encourage the promotion of investment in sustainable tourism, including eco-tourism and cultural tourism, which may include creating small and medium sized enterprises and facilitating access to finance, including through microcredit initiatives for the poor, indigenous peoples and local communities in areas with high eco-tourism potential.”

Par.131, The Future we Want

2015

2015 was a landmark year, marking another significant turning point in the evolution of sustainable tourism. More specifically, in the context of COP21⁵⁸ held in Paris, 196 Parties adopted the so-called Paris Agreement, the international treaty on climate change, aiming at keeping global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. Being legally binding, this treaty gives nations the

⁵⁸ This is the acronym for the 21st Conference of the Parties and indicates the signatory states to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

opportunity to commonly fight against climate change and become active promoters in building resilience in order to adapt to changing climate patterns, altered by rising temperatures.

Nevertheless, in the same year, it is also worth noting that another remarkable event occurred. In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly approved the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Tourism, a 15-year plan resulted in the establishment of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at tackling the social, economic and environmental challenges that are seriously threatening the whole ecosystem balance of both developed and developing countries all over the world. Being built on the UN Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015), the 2030 Agenda targets mobilize a global as well as local action with clear-cut purposes, such as those of ending extreme poverty, social inequality, injustice or fixing climate change by the end of 2030. In this way, it can be said that the SDGs represent another fundamental milestone of the path towards the promotion of multilateral partnership and implementation of innovative strategies that should be translated into an active engagement and concrete effort of nations in achieving these goals.

Moreover, it has to be said that the SDGs incorporate multiple dimensions of sustainability and a huge variety of stakeholders from different sectors are called to action, such as those belonging to the tourism industry. Therefore, the 2030 Agenda gives a clear direction to the enhancement of a more sustainable approach within the touristic sector and in particular, through the establishment of goals number 8, 12 and 14, respectively concerning the achievement of “Decent work and economic growth”, “Responsible consumption and production” and “Life below water”.⁵⁹ Furthermore, it can be noted that even though the word “tourism” has been explicitly written just three times in the Agenda, tourism should be always considered a relevant sector that has to contribute to achieving SDGs through a direct or indirect way.

In fact, in goals 8.9 and 12.b, it has been clearly highlighted that the implementation of sustainable tourism should be considered a pivotal force for creating new jobs and improving local culture and products. Moreover, in SDGs target 14.7, particular emphasis has been put on the potential growing economic benefits that tourism can provide to Small Island developing States or least developed countries.

2017

Another significant event showing the spread of awareness about the necessity of achieving a sustainable way of tourism is the identification of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable

⁵⁹ United Nations, *Do you know all 17 SDGs?*.

Tourism. Through the adoption of the General assembly resolution 70/193, the International Year strongly contributed to reorienting the international attention to the importance of shaping policies, consumer behaviours and business practices for the development and implementation of sustainability in the touristic sector towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The active effort in making a shift from “tourism as usual” towards a more sustainable way of doing tourism can be highlighted and supported by the words of Gloria Guevara, at that time President and CEO of the World Travel and Tourism Council: “*Sustainability remains the bedrock of our activity. We will continue to drive the conversation on planning for and managing tourism growth, define a sector-wide response to climate change, work on how the sector can reduce illegal trade in wildlife and contribute to inclusive job creation*” (UNWTO, 2017).

Finally, it can be argued that since the 1970s, greater attention has been paid by the international community on the need to prepare the field where to establish proper guidelines for the enhancement of environmental, social and economic sustainability. However, it could be noted that the majority of the official steps undertaken mainly resulted in a set of general directions rather than specific policies or normative rules. Therefore, a sense of generalization and vagueness can be perceived as a typical feature of the definitions concerning key concepts and criteria to implement, by resulting in a partial and too simplistic understanding of what should be effectively done.

Moreover, it can be also noted that there is a general tendency to read the development of the touristic sector only by focusing on the implied effects under economic terms. Therefore, with particular regard to the SDGs targets established in the 2030 Agenda, great emphasis is mainly put on the identification of touristic activities as a source of new jobs and local production without taking into account the different outcomes that affect not only the economic sphere but the social, cultural and environmental dimension as well.

Furthermore, another point to question emerging from the analysis of the main official steps undertaken to orientate touristic activities towards sustainability is the limited vision concerning the relation between tourism and climate change. In fact, even during the first international conference on Climate Change in 2003, it can be noted that the international community tended to mainly focus on the impacts that climate change had on tourism, without having undertaken a more comprehensive vision of this link that, on the contrary, would have been able to bring to light the fact that the growth of tourism could be even considered as one of the sources at the origin of environmental transformations, too.

Nevertheless, despite the lack within the official international context of a more clear-cut vision and awareness of the complexity of tourism and the multiple nature of its resulting positive and

negative impacts, it is worth noting that a change of course has been undertaken, after all. In fact, regardless of these limitations, over the years it can be said that an increasing effort on the part of the international community in providing a clearer and definite vision can emerge, by enhancing the global interest and active participation in what is defined as sustainable tourism.

2.4 A mix of tools to enhance sustainable tourism

Notwithstanding that a higher level of environmental awareness among policy-makers and the several international institutions has been observed, the split between what should be done and what is effectively be done is still high. Therefore, by analysing the hierarchy of national goals set by O’Riordan (1981), it is not a coincidence that the environmental concerns and the national efforts in safeguarding the natural environment come only after the fulfilment of national security and economic growth.⁶⁰ This dynamic can be also reflected in the touristic sector, since traditionally the majority of tourism policies have been firstly aimed at achieving economic development, which can be declined in many ways, such as the creation of new job opportunities or the economic improvement at the regional or local level. In addition to that, the natural environment has been often perceived more as an instrumental attraction for the local tourist destination to directly exploit in order to gain short-term benefits rather than being conceived as a tourist-related dimension to be well-managed in a sustainable way. Therefore, only by undertaking a longer-term perspective, the resulting economic, social and environmental benefits that stem from the application of a more environmentally-conscious approach could be taken into account and appreciated.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that, independently by the typology of tourism, there are a variety of policy tools and planning measures that could be efficiently employed in order to lead tourism towards sustainability. Therefore, as it has already been mentioned, sustainable tourism can be translated into the protection of the environment without precluding economic growth, by putting further evidence on the fact that the economic and environmental dimensions are not mutually exclusive. In this regard, specific policy tools represent a worthy alternative to enhance sustainable development by meeting economic goals, by intervening in the market system and leading it to behave in a more environmentally-conscious way, through an indirect or direct involvement of a variety of different actors⁶¹. For more in-depth discussion, examples of different varieties of measures will be highlighted in the next sub-chapter 2.4.1 and 2.4.2.

⁶⁰ Holden. *Environment and Tourism*, 171,172.

⁶¹ Hunter, and Green. *Tourism and the Environment a Sustainable Relationship?*, 87.

To make these tools really effective, however, it is worth noting that the local dimension represents a very influential factor. In fact, it can be said that each policy is deeply dependent on the economic, social and environmental characteristics of each touristic destination. Moreover, it can be highlighted that despite the wider general sense of environmental awareness, the implementation of environmental policies is still undermined by the lack of homogeneity of the tourism industry itself. In particular, it is worth noting that each tourist destination strongly relies on specific firms, markets, transportation agencies, different categories of tourists and local governments characterized by their own local issues, priorities and different tourism policies.

As a consequence, due to this high level of heterogeneity, what can be perceived as inevitable is the fact that the promotion and implementation of sustainable tourism should be firstly achieved mainly through local monitoring and planning, by enhancing the promotion and creation of local initiatives and the reliance on self-regulation. However, even though the local actors play a crucial role in making policies adaptable to the different local conditions of each tourist destination, the public sector and the central government are responsible for providing the proper guidelines to coordinate environmental planning and management of tourism, raising awareness on environmental concerns and hoping that local authorities and main stakeholders will cooperate and respond to this call to action in a positive and proactive way.⁶²

In order to achieve this results, specific measures can be employed by a multiplicity of actors, with the involvement of the international and the domestic dimension, together with the interrelation between the public and private sector. For instance, it is worth underlying the active role of national governments, market forces, international organizations but also that one of tourists, hotels, employees or the several categories of associations. In this regard, it can be mentioned the principle of “*Common but differentiated responsibilities*”, a key assumption set out in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)⁶³, according to which developed countries should have a greater responsibility in addressing global environmental issues and leading developing states towards an effective implementation of the objectives of the UNFCCC.

Even though this principle mostly refers to the responsibility of states related to the context of international environmental law, inspiration and useful conclusions could be drawn from it within the context of sustainable tourism, too. More specifically, it can be highlighted that every private or institutional actor, regardless of their size, is concerned with climate change and has the duty and the

⁶² Hunter, and Green. *Tourism and the Environment a Sustainable Relationship?*, 90.

⁶³ UNFCCC, *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Article 3, Principle 1*.

responsibility for assisting other actors to take the lead in mobilizing climate action. In this sense, even policies and other planning measures related to sustainable tourism should take into account the idea that each player should have its own common but different responsibilities, with the constant awareness of being an example to lead and assist other actors.

In this regard, the variety of policy tools and planning measures that are currently adopted for the achievement and implementation of sustainable tourism will be outlined in the following paragraphs. What is important to highlight is the fact that the adoption of these tools can occur in multiple ways, throughout an indirect or direct application. More specifically, it has to be said that the way through which these instruments are applied could be translated into the application of different approaches and consequently, different levels of intervention concerning the environmental management of tourism.⁶⁴

2.4.1 Examples of measures that implement sustainable tourism indirectly

By focusing on the indirect measures, it has to be said that measures and activities concerning learning by doing approaches and spreading knowledge could be considered the first examples of tools that can contribute to enhancing sustainable tourism. More specifically, education and information provided by the local and central government or tourism agencies could be quite effective in defining sustainability within the tourism sector and raising as well as widening general awareness about environmental issues caused by the tourism industry. An example of these measures could be found in the Responsible Tourism Initiative, promoted by the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO). More specifically, the main mission pursued by the AITO concerns all the actions undertaken in order to support and raise awareness related to the necessity of preserving the ecosystem. For this reason, the association has set itself specific goals, such as spreading knowledge and useful information on sustainable tourism among their staff and clients as well as the act of spreading good practices for this educational and learning purpose.⁶⁵

Secondly, it is also worth noting that the way through which infrastructures are provided to their users could play a central and active role in spreading eco-friendlier behaviours. Therefore, with the implementation of treatment facilities and an amelioration in the efficiency of public transports, a more sustainable approach could be encouraged. In this way, the strategy adopted in the area of North

⁶⁴ Holden. *Environment and Tourism*

⁶⁵ AITOS. *Sustainable Tourism, AITOS Ethos*.

Sardinia (Italy), which was aimed at establishing a sustainable alternative to the development of intensive coastal tourism could be quite interesting and inspiring. More specifically, given the fact that in this area the level of exploitation in the use of natural resources is very high and negatively contributes to the phenomenon of marginalization, the creation of a slow train line and cycle tourism paths was found as a valid strategy to deal with these issues. Therefore, a study conducted in the area showed that the enhancement of both cycle and rail tourism, not only stimulated economic, social and cultural regeneration but it also fostered the creation of green jobs, green economy and sustainable tourism in those marginalized areas.⁶⁶

Thirdly, agreements between private and public sectors could represent more flexible alternatives to implement sustainable tourism through an indirect way. Therefore, agreements are not as strict as regulations or quotas and they can be related to a variety of activities. For instance, the decision of setting a maximum number of hotel rooms or a maximum height of tourist buildings could be an example of agreement that can be made in order to reduce the negative effects stemming from an unsustainable way of making tourism.

By having mentioned just a few examples of tools that could be employed to indirectly implement sustainability within the touristic sector, it has to be highlighted that they can lead to potential advantages or disadvantages, too. Therefore, on the one hand, thanks to their strong flexibility, they can easily contribute to elaborating more innovative and creative ideas. On the other hand, however, these kinds of measures, due to their higher level of vagueness and adaptability, which is intrinsically inherited by their indirect nature, could not be effectively result-oriented and under the risk of lacking coordination and support for implementation.

2.4.2 Examples of measures that implement sustainable tourism directly

With regard to planning measures acting directly on sustainable tourism, it has to be said that in spite of being characterized by a certain rigidity and a decreasing flexibility, these instruments tend to be more result-oriented due to their higher level of specificity. Among them, it is worth mentioning permissions or quotas that seem quite efficient to achieve several objectives such as one of limiting the absolute amount of pollution from tourist operators or of setting the maximum number of tourists allowed in a specific area at a given time. To this regard, positive results stemming from the application

⁶⁶ Sechi, Moscarelli and Pileri. "Planning tourist infrastructures to regenerate marginalised territories: the study case of North Sardinia, Italy".

of quotas emerged from the research carried by Orsi, Scuttari and Marcher (2020) related to the vehicles quotas in a natural landscape, such as that of Dolomites, in the Italian Alps. The outcome of the research seems quite positive: more specifically, it has been observed that specific quotas can have positive and concrete effects on reducing pollution caused by car traffic. Indeed, according to the survey, through the adoption of this direct measure, traffic congestion decreased from 25% to 35%.⁶⁷

In addition to permissions or quotas, it has to be underlined that other different forms of legal instruments could directly encourage the tourist sector to behave in a more environmentally-conscious manner. More specifically, it can be mentioned the development of an efficient control local planning framework and the implementation of land-use planning strategies. In particular, three main strategies seem quite noteworthy.

Therefore, it could be firstly mentioned the “zoning”, an urban planning law that not only refers to the regulation of the distribution of a territory into urban areas but it even aims at integrating tourism within specific areas of land characterized by varying suitability or capacities of tourism.

Secondly, another policy measure is the so-called “carrying capacity analysis” that aims at stabilizing a threshold limit that once exceeded, it can deteriorate the social, environmental and economic condition of a tourist destination.

Thirdly, another legal tool is the “Limits of Acceptable Change” (LAC), a mechanism that instead of focusing more on the quantity of tourists that a specific area can accept, it is designed for setting specific indicators through the combination of both scientific and social measures in order to manage and preserve protected landscape. More specifically, the innovative element of the LAC model is its proactive and “qualitative” approach based on the idea of firstly identifying the attractive conditions fostering tourism activity and only by then, all the management actions needed to protect the environment.

Furthermore, another legal tool needed to be mentioned is the compulsory use of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). It is a largely employed planning tool whose main objective is one of assessing the environmental impacts of both public and private development and building projects. In this way, by intervening at the decision-making level, the EIA procedure can implement transparency and protecting the environment before the project begins. This tool evaluates a variety of environmental factors, such as those related the likely levels of noise pollution, air and water quality

⁶⁷ Orsi, Scuttari, Marcher. “How much traffic is too much? Finding the right vehicle quota for a scenic mountain road in the Italian Alps, Case Studies on Transport Policy”.

or the effects stemming from land-use changes.⁶⁸

Given the fact that the tourism sector is recognised as a very important driving force of environmental change, facilities such as hotel complexities, visitor attractions, and infrastructures involved in this sector should be subject to environmental impact assessments. For instance, at the European level it can be said that thanks to the adoption of the EU Directive (97/11/EC), the Article 4(2) claimed that all the projects concerning the establishment and development of ski-lifts, cable cars, marinas, hotels complexities and theme parks must be subject to environmental impact assessment.

Despite the potential advantages concerning EIAs, criticism on the use of this specific planning instrument, emerges as well. First of all, EIA is very expensive in its implementation, since it demands a high number of environmental scientists. Secondly, if the impact assessments are paid from who carries the study, there will also be the problem concerning the presence of bias and lack of objectivity. In addition to that, another point of weakness is the presence of timing issues related to a correct prediction of when impacts will occur. Finally, a further problem is the fact that the majority of tourism developments are based on small scale enterprises which are not subject to EIA. For this reason, given the fact that small-scale tourism development is likely to cause incremental, cumulative and less predictable impacts on the environment⁶⁹, the efficiency and consequent reliability of EIA seems quite jeopardized.

2.5 Cooperation between public and private sector: an intertwining of multiple actors

What has been highlighted so far is the fact that the act of investing in the environment through a more sustainable approach also means ensuring long-term economic development. The quantity of tourists as well as the number of destinations have been increasing worldwide and the expansion of the tourism industry inevitably has some impacts and influence on the performance of the other sectors of the economy. Consequently, the effects stemming from the rapid growth of tourism have prompted the executive agencies and other policy-makers to identify tourism development as an entity based on a set of activities that need to be planned in a proper way, through the involvement of both public and private sector.⁷⁰

In order to achieve this goal, the direct and indirect measures that have been previously mentioned, could represent a valid and effective instrument to drive tourism towards the green

⁶⁸ European Commission. *Environmental Impact Assessment*.

⁶⁹ Holden. *Environment and Tourism*, 193.

⁷⁰ Hunter, and Green. *Tourism and the Environment a Sustainable Relationship?*, 95.

transition. However, to actually have a real and positive effect on the level of sustainability of destinations, there must be real synergy between the public and private sectors. In fact, while there are policies and planning measures that come from the top, it is crucial that a tangible response comes from the bottom, too. Therefore, it should be stressed again that sustainable tourism requires active engagement with all the stakeholders. For this reason, new forms of governance, which are based on the creation of intergovernmental cooperation and networking instruments, have emerged by providing the conditions in which public and private agents are taken into account in the decision-making process.

Nevertheless, it is important to underline the fact that each tourist destination belongs to a specific territorial dimension and in the same way, the local, regional, national and international public institutions involved in the sector, are located in different areas with different competences and responsibilities. Consequently, for the proper management and planning of sustainable tourism, it is essential to identify which direct and indirect instruments can be used and by whom to achieve specific objectives, avoiding the risk of falling into overlapping decisions and a failure to comply with the measures adopted. In this sense, tourism management could be identified as a network that aims to promote the development of an area not through traditional hierarchical criteria, but rather through innovative processes that enhance collaborative decision-making, teamwork and the elaboration of new types of management and the improvement of public-private relations.

At the same time, it should not be underestimated the fact that the tourism industry needs a higher level of specialization and differentiation between the different destinations, too. As a result, for this hybrid and multi-layered nature, a strong collaboration and open dialogue among the different stakeholders is needed. More specifically, reference is made to the establishment of new ties with providers, concerning industries, facilitators, local authorities, customers and the local community as a whole.⁷¹ Only by this, the regulative structure at the basis of sustainable planning tourism can be actively supported by a network of agents that aims at achieving the same as well as shared goals. Therefore, if on the one hand, the regulatory and legal framework is binding for companies, on the other hand, it is also worth noting that everything concerning social values is not. In this regard, it should be kept in mind that one of the three main pillars on which the concept of sustainability and consequently sustainable tourism is based, is the social dimension.

⁷¹ González-Morales, et al. "Governance, corporate social responsibility and cooperation in sustainable tourist destinations", 2- 4.

2.5.1 Corporate social responsibility and the Triple-Bottom Line Approach

Following this line of thought, it is equally worth introducing the relevant concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in this discourse. In particular, this notion refers to a management approach according to which companies should include in their core values, social and environmental concerns, in strong collaboration with the networks of related-stakeholders. This concept can be also identified with the Triple-Bottom-Line Approach, a strategic path that allows businesses to achieve economic, social and environmental goals and to respond to the different expectations coming from investors and stakeholders.⁷²

With regard to the tourist sector, according to Cole (2014), local communities have been demanding tourism business to be more proactively involved in reducing the discrepancies among the several measures ensuring a sustainable tourism management.⁷³ In particular, it has been observed how the idea of recognising and assigning responsibilities to private actors, one of the main pillars of CSR, can effectively contribute to identify the key factors that drive sustainable tourism (Tepelus 2008).

Furthermore, starting by the idea elaborated by Font (2017) according to which tourism is not an end itself but rather “a tool for the sustainable development of societies”, it can be said that CSR actions and their social contributions are seen as instruments able to create shared values, increase economic profit over the long run as well as to support sustainable development.⁷⁴ For this reason, the CSR approach could be identified as a valid model that can easily be adapted to the hybrid structure and complex networks on which tourism development is built and, in the same way, can likely reduce the risk of falling into unsubstantial decision-making processes.

CSR in the hospitality industry and tourism was firstly a business-oriented approach, mostly aimed at allowing businesses to improve their economic benefits (Farrington et al., 2017). Only at a later stage, theoretical foundations started to put more emphasis on development-oriented goals. Therefore, mainly thanks to the introduction and international recognition of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), CSR activities came to be seen as driving forces for sustainable development and the creation of shared values, too. In the academic field, it is thanks to the contribution given by Hughes and Scheyvens (2016) that the focus on the direct and active involvement of the multi-layered network of tourism organizations in the application of CSR approach

⁷² UNIDO. What is CSR?.

⁷³ Hatipoglu, Bengi, and Duygu. "Corporate social responsibility in tourism as a tool for sustainable development.",1.

⁷⁴ Hatipoglu, Bengi, and Duygu. "Corporate social responsibility in tourism as a tool for sustainable development.", 2.

came to increase. In particular, these scholars were able to provide a more holistic approach to sustainable tourism by emphasising the fact that the touristic sector is characterized by the presence of different stakeholders, some of which are particularly responsible for identifying the best and effective policies in order to well coordinate tourism management.

Consequently, despite the fact that this specific management concept has been included in the hospitality and tourism narrative only recently, the application of CSR strategy has proven effective in achieving quality improvements of social, economic and environmental resources, and prosperity for the society over the long run. More specifically, research conducted on hotels, travel agencies and tour operators demonstrated that a proactive engagement of tourism stakeholders in CSR activities can likely result into positive outcomes such as the establishment of a more solid company reputation and a better qualitative workplace (Camilleri, 2016). For example, this is what the management decisions taken by Intercontinental Hotel Group lead to, in particular through the adoption of a “Green Engage Tool” supporting hotels to optimize their level of sustainability and company’s active engagement in recognising the importance of monitoring impacts generated by its stakeholders. In this way, the path supported by specific actions undertaken by this company can be a valid model to follow and contribute to show how the application of CSR strategy can effectively create shared value for the company as well as for the society.

2.6 Conclusions

In this second chapter, it can be said that the two main points of discussion were, on the one hand, the level of awareness of the touristic sector concerning the environmental issues and its effects and, on the other hand, the measures and potential strategies to employ in order to address these challenges. With the aim to find an answer to these questions, the concept of sustainable development and its deep relation with tourism have been firstly introduced and explained. Secondly, it was also worth referring to the idea of sustainable tourism, the concept that perfectly links the sustainable dimension with the touristic one. In particular, it has been observed the complex nature of sustainable tourism and its triple-layered structure based on the economic, social and environmental dimension.

Generally speaking, it can be said that sustainable tourism seems widely recognized at the international level, especially thanks to important milestones that have been achieved with the active engagement of international organizations and that have marked the path towards a more sustainable governance of public resources within the tourist industry. Along with the official steps undertaken,

what has been recognized is the fact that different policies and planning measures should be adopted to better ensure a sustainable tourism development. Specifically, it has been observed how these actions and decisions could lead to direct or indirect effects, by taking into account the role and influence exercised by a huge variety of different actors. Nevertheless, throughout the chapter, it has been also shown that identifying, choosing and adopting specific policies or planning measures could be not enough for granting a sustainable development of the tourism industry.

Therefore, in addition to the regulative framework, what is of great importance is the proactive effort in meeting the expectations demanded by all stakeholders and consequently, even the local communities belonging to the touristic destination. In this regard, particular attention was given to the Corporate Social Responsibility, a strategy designed to fill the gaps and discrepancies between private and public actors and to provide a holistic approach to be more consciously aware of what could be the further steps to undertake and improve.

Moreover, it can be said that the development of sustainable tourism with its potential positive outcomes, firstly depends on the quality of policies availability; secondly, on the quality of stakeholders' engagement and natural resource management provided by institutions and international organizations and thirdly, on the quality of the answer coming from the local community. Nevertheless, despite being based on this complex network of actors and interaction among them, it can be said that the tourism sector should largely profit from valid and diversifying instruments aimed at ensuring the development of tourism sustainably. Only in this way, the introduction and adoption of specific planning measures and policies, as well as the official recognition of sustainable tourism internationally, could support the position according to which the touristic sector can be perceived as quite aware of the issues related to climate challenges and the responsibility that it has in improving or worsening the environmental situation.

However, this narrative does not necessarily mean that there are no discrepancies between the theoretical and practical level, the regulative framework and the effective respect of directives between the international dimension and the local communities. In fact, what seems quite evident so far is the difficulty and the resulting necessity of tourist businesses to include in their core values the concept of sustainability and to translate it into different practices, norms or innovative ways of making tourism, together with the achievement of environmental, social and economic goals. (Bocken et al., 2014; Lubin and Esty, 2010).

For this reason, it can be concluded that the extent to which sustainable development of tourism is actually translated into eco-sustainable behaviours by tourist stakeholders (for instance, tour operators, hotels, tourists or institutions) and their general awareness about the necessity of finding out complex and multidimensional strategies is still not sufficient.⁷⁵

In this respect, by taking this perspective, the third chapter will analyse the Italian situation, with a focus on a specific stakeholder category: the hotels and their different nature and roles that could and should have in taking a lead towards sustainable tourism. In particular, the main aim will be to investigate if there are specific policies and measures in favour of the development of sustainable tourism and otherwise, to identify what could be the main drivers or the main obstacles for an effective enhancement of sustainable tourism in Italy.

⁷⁵ Galuppo, Anselmi, and De Paoli. "The challenge of generating sustainable value: narratives about sustainability in the Italian tourism sector.", p.580.

CHAPTER 3

Green Hotels and the Italian Context

3.1 SMEs as central players in sustainable tourism

Tourism development can be really successful and profitable economically, socially and environmentally speaking if it is planned and managed in compliance with sustainable principles and environmental protection. As it has been previously remarked, this result can be achieved only by the direct and indirect involvement of the main stakeholders that can, on the one hand, influence the improvement of sustainable tourism in a positive or negative way, or, on the other hand, can be affected by the damaging impacts stemming from an unsustainable development of this sector. In this regard, the active role played by official organisations and other national political actors in both raising international environmental awareness and providing indispensable guidelines and tools for the development of a more responsible tourism is highly relevant.

However, the persistently strong correlation between the development of the tourism sector and the high level of CO₂ emissions could be a further confirmation that there is still much to be done. For this reason, it is necessary to focus on other key players that could exert a strategic influence in shaping sustainable tourism, so as to emphasise that a change towards ecological transition does not only have to come from above, but also needs to be supported and heard from below.

In this way, it could be worth focusing on the crucial role played by businesses that are related to the tourist sector (such as hotels or restaurants), particularly because of their strong link between the degree of profitability belonging to companies and their degree of commitment into implementing the safeguard of the environment in their organisation. The adoption of a more responsible strategy aimed at protecting and preserving the natural landscapes and resources strongly contributes to preserving the touristic destination with its natural beauties, a factor that positively influences the touristic demand. In fact, it has been seen that the more attractive a destination is in terms of natural conservation, the greater tourist demand. Therefore, it can be said that the extent to which a destination is sustainable represents a central element on which the destination itself should rely in order to increase tourism demand. In other words, sustainability, with its regenerative nature, could be identified as a qualifying asset for ensuring the attractiveness of a place, the growing number of tourists and a high level of profitability for tourism businesses.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Iraldo, Fabio, et al. "Greening competitiveness for hotels and restaurants.", 608.

However, it is also worth noting that technical as well as organisational costs can shape companies' decisions and interfere in the implementation of a sustainable destination. This assumption is quite relevant since the majority of touristic businesses are Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)⁷⁷, companies employing fewer than 250 workers with an annual revenue of no more than €50 million⁷⁸. For this reason, bringing attention to the role of SMEs is important to raise awareness on the fact that they can be identified as strategic stakeholders within the tourist sector that can have a strong influence on the environment. Consequently, focus on them is needed to identify the weak points where to intervene and all the necessary tools to be provided to SMEs to implement their sustainability degree.

In order to give further demonstration of the weight that SMEs have, it is relevant to note that in Europe, in 2022, the tourism industry is mainly based on 2.3 million small and medium-sized enterprises, giving employment to around 12.3 million of people.⁷⁹ In 2019, one in ten EU non-financial businesses were represented by tourism enterprises and 15% of them were engaged in the accommodation sector. In the same year, it was observed that 55% of EU tourism enterprises were placed in Italy, France, Spain and Germany. Moreover, it has been observed that after the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, the turnover of tourism businesses declined dramatically, although it has been reaching the pre-pandemic standards from July 2021 onwards.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, several studies highlighted that SMEs, since their fast growth rates as well as their large diffusion, are highly pollutant.⁸¹ In particular, as we can see in table number 3.1, according to the Eurostat, SMEs related to the tourism sector in Europe are particularly concerned with the production of GreenHouse Gas emissions (GHG emissions) with respect to other sectors.

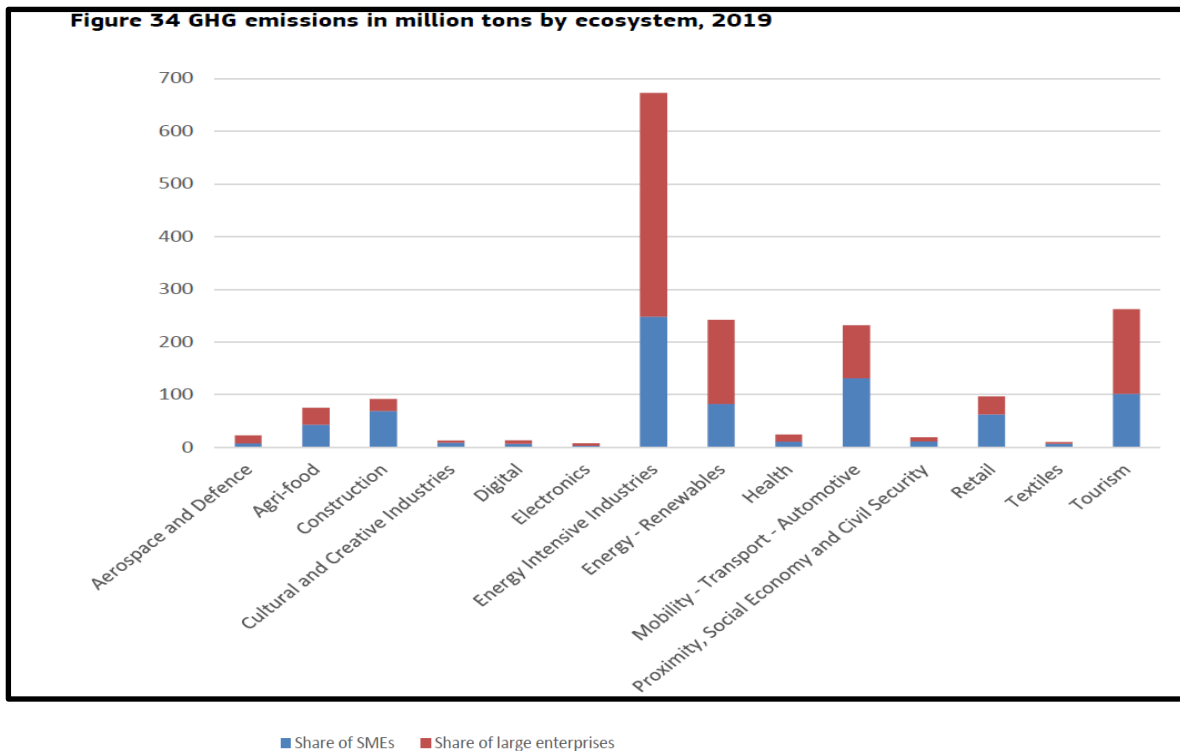
⁷⁷ Thomas, R. et al., "Understanding small firms in tourism: a perspective on research trends and challenges."

⁷⁸ European Commission, "What is an SME?"

⁷⁹ European Parliament. "Fact Sheets on the European Union. Tourism."

⁸⁰ Eurostat, *Statistic Explained. Tourism industries - Economic analysis*

⁸¹ Iraldo, Fabio, et al. "Greening competitiveness for hotels and restaurants.", 609.



Source: Eurostat Structural Business Statistics and Air Emissions Accounts, DIW-Econ calculations

Figure 3.1. Source: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, Annual Report on European SMEs 2021/2022 (2022).

Moreover, a further analysis carried out by the Eurostat between the years 2021 and 2022 (see table number 3.2), showed that SMEs related to service sectors which can be also linked to the tourist one (for instance, digital, cultural, creative and health care industries) will be those supposed to have more possibilities of achieving the expected goal. On the contrary, SMEs belonging to the most pollutant sectors (such as ‘agri-food’, ‘energy-intensive industries’, ‘mobility, transport and automotive’, and ‘aerospace and defence’) will be those expected to encounter the greatest difficulties in reaching the EU emissions reduction target of 50% by 2030.

As far as SMEs in the tourism sector are concerned, reducing GHG emissions seems quite challenging for them. This does not mean that there are no possibilities to improve the current situation, but rather that a concrete shift towards sustainability can be achieved through effective support, providing the right tools and guidelines to reduce GHG emissions.

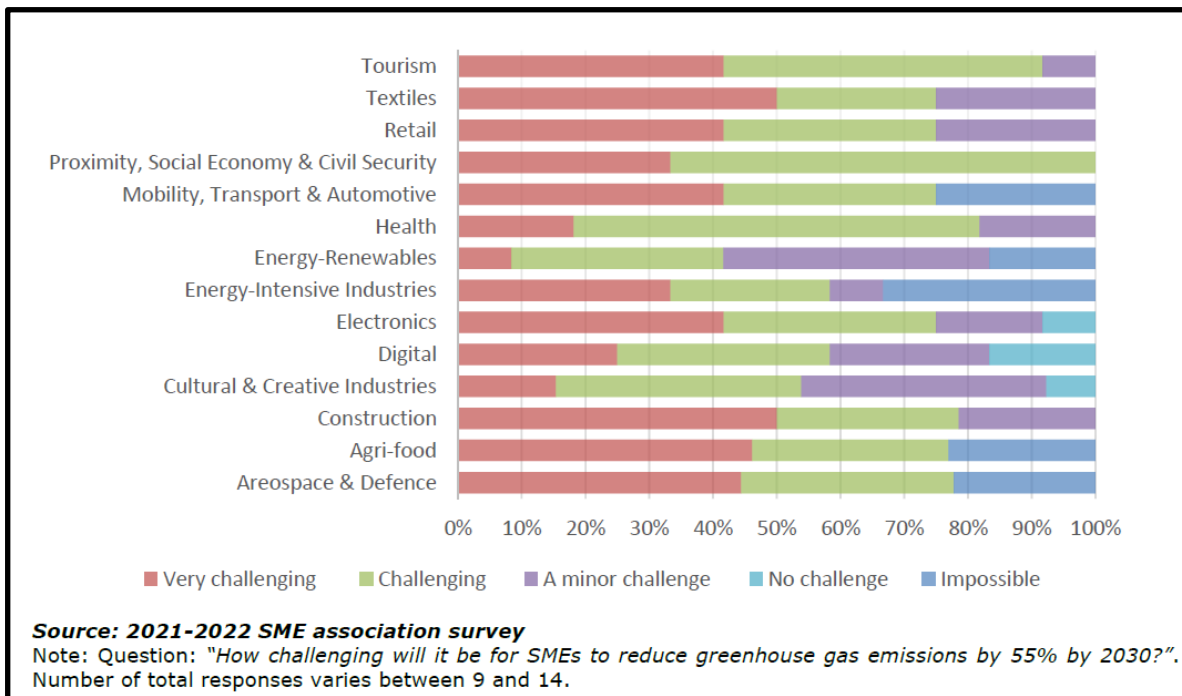


Figure 3.2. Source: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, Annual Report on European SMEs 2021/2022 (2022).

Despite the obvious impacts tourism-related SMEs have on the environment in terms of pollution, their awareness of the need to change direction has started to develop relatively recently. Indeed, as it has been noted in the previous chapter, the sense of awareness is present but not sufficient to ensure effective change, despite the growing involvement of international organisations and the increased interest of the people on this matter.

Furthermore, this lack of awareness may influence the main stakeholders of SMEs in tourism and the way they look at the relationship between the adoption of a sustainable strategy and the consequent level of profitability. In fact, stakeholders firstly tend not to see the potential and strategic link between their activities and the natural environment, while always bearing in mind that a natural and preserved landscape can be a strategic source of tourist attractiveness. Secondly, there is an increasing tendency to consider that running a business in a sustainable manner could lead to costs exceeding the benefits and this generates a fear that leads to mistrust in managing one's business sustainably. Thirdly, another factor that undermines SMEs' sense of awareness in undertaking green strategies is the presence of a gap between attitude and behaviour, mainly due to a lack of sufficient resources (McKercher and Robbins, 1998; Sampaio et al., 2012).

Moreover, further research has identified a variety of internal factors as barriers to the adoption and improvement of environmentally-oriented strategies on the part of tourism enterprises. In

particular, it has been observed that the main barriers identified are those related to implementation and maintenance costs, lack of professional advice, in-house expertise and knowledge, and lack of resources.

For these reasons, it is worth emphasising the need to establish specific criteria for both the environment and the hospitality sector in terms of legal compliance and to promote the active involvement of key SME stakeholders of the touristic sector. Therefore, after having underlined the importance of SMEs as potential green stakeholders, this research will seek to study a relevant stakeholder operating in the “hotel, restaurant, café” (HORECA) sector. In particular, the focus will be on the hotel, conceived as one of the main stakeholders of touristic SMEs. Therefore, as there are 28.135,845 million hotels in Europe,⁸² the next paragraphs will analyse the role this specific category plays in prioritising sustainable practices to achieve an effective transition towards a resilient tourism ecosystem.

3.2 Green hotels: features and tools

Hotels can be identified as relevant as well as crucial stakeholders: therefore, it can be said that this category constitutes the principal form of accommodation and represents the most significant sector of the travel and tourism industry⁸³. In spite of its strong relevance, there is also the other side of the coin: in fact, mainly due to its cumulative impacts, the hotel industry is one of the most energy and water-intensive sectors in its daily operations. As regards, it should be mentioned that waste management and particularly food waste, represents a very serious challenge for hotels, both for all the environmental negative effects and all the related costs implied by mismanagement of waste. In fact, instead of recognising the link between all these associated costs and a business-as-usual approach, people are often restrained by the simplistic idea to consider sustainable practices just as a source of costs and expenses. On the contrary, several scholars (Todd and Hawkins, 2002) suggest in their studies that proper waste management could lower costs for hotels by up to 60 per cent and others (Parfitt et al., 2013) claim that 75% of food wasted produced in the UK hotel industry could be likely avoided.

However, it is also worth noting that hotel owners have started to behave in a more

⁸² Eurostat, Statistic Explained. *Tourism statistics - Annual results for the accommodation sector industries*.

⁸³ Merli, Roberto, et al. “Why should hotels go green? Insights from guests’ experience in green hotels.”, 169.

environmentally responsible manner, driven in part by the growing demand from consumers who are increasingly sensitive to the issue of environmental sustainability. Consequently, due to this increased pressure from consumers on a more genuine green consciousness applied to hotel operations, more and more stakeholders linked to the hotel industry have responded by transforming their activities into “eco-friendly” hotels.

This fairly recent category of “green hotels” can be defined as: “pro-environmental lodging properties which implement different green practices such as saving water and energy, reducing the solid waste, and recycling and reusing the durable service items (e.g., bins, towels, etc.) to protect the earth we live in” (Green Hotel Association). According to this definition, it can be said that the main determinant to fostering a sustainable management within the hospitality sector is the implementation of the so-called “green practices”, identified as “a value-added business strategy that benefits a hospitality operation that engages in environmental protection initiatives”. Therefore, the adoption and development of green activities are not only the “right thing to do” but mostly the “profitable and smart thing to do” in order to gain in the market. Indeed, being of strategic value for companies, the implementation of green practices can lead to the achievement of several benefits, both for the environment and the economic interest of a touristic company. In particular, it can be seen that a hotelier’s choice to adopt green initiatives fosters the competitiveness of the hotel and the acquisition of a sustainability-sensitive customer segment that helps to promote a wide range of more responsible and sustainable practices.

However, it is worth noting that in order to be competitive in the market, green activities should reduce operational costs while creating perceived values for consumers in order to strengthen their sustainable awareness and sensibility. Indeed, it can be argued that the extent to which a hotel is committed to the implementation of sustainable practices is a key determinant of guest satisfaction. Furthermore, it has been noted that the implementation of green strategies within the hospitality industry can multiply positive effects on consumers’ habits, such as the growth of guest green loyalty and, consequently, the increasing demand to pay for holidays in green facilities. Nevertheless, the relation between what is stated and what is actually achieved is closely influenced by the way guests see the hotel operates and engages in the adoption and promotion of environmentally friendly activities.

It has been noted that one of the ways of demonstrating to customers that the hotel is committed to a sustainable management policy is through green certifications, such as the ecolabels. For instance, within the Italian context, it can be mentioned the “Legambiente Turismo” eco-label, which is one the most diffused Italian green tool to bring sustainability in tourism. It can be argued that these eco-

friendly tools, within the framework of the Environmental Management Systems (EMSs), have been identified as very efficient in mitigating hotels' negative impacts on the natural landscapes and in revealing companies' active commitment to sustainability.⁸⁴ Furthermore, it can be said that hotels can adopt other forms of EMSs, in order to be in line with international standards, such as ISO 14001:2015 designed to: “*specify the requirements for an environmental management system that an organisation can use to enhance its environmental performance*”⁸⁵ and ISO 21401:2018, which “*specifies environmental, social and economic requirements to implement a sustainability management system in accommodation establishments in the tourism sector*”.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, the fact that there are formal and established standards does not mean that all approaches are the same for all certified hotels: very often each hotel has its own way of implementing its green strategy, thus developing different levels of environmental performance improvement. Moreover, it is equally worth noting that three main variables on which the success or failure of ecolabels depends have been identified: in particular, guests' perception, behavioural intention and their willingness to collaborate with the hotel in adopting green activities.

As a consequence, it can be said that the development of an efficient communication strategy is very important to find a point of encounter for cooperation and the enhancement of environmental performance. Therefore, a company should directly and clearly address both to its own guests and employees, which are two fundamental stakeholders to take into account. As regards, it has been observed that most travellers are unable to tell if they stayed in a green hotel or not⁸⁷ and this puts evidence of the fact that communication regarding hotels' commitment to sustainability is still insufficient or not well conveyed.

Finally, it can be concluded that the need to standardise the process of EMSs through the acquisition of a certification is not solely dictated by the environmental concern that for instance a hotel owner might feel, but also by other interests. As regards, reasons could be to ensure legal compliance, to optimise the use of energy and resources or even to improve brand image and customer satisfaction.⁸⁸ However, in spite of these advantages and the growing diffusion of sound pro-

⁸⁴ Merli, Roberto, et al., “Why should hotels go green? Insights from guests' experience in green hotels.”, 170.

⁸⁵ ISO. *ISO 14001:2015 Environmental management systems - Requirements with guidance for use*.

⁸⁶ ISO. *ISO 21401:2018 Tourism and related services — Sustainability management system for accommodation establishments - Requirements*.

⁸⁷ Hang, H., et al., “Application of the theory of planned behaviour to green hotel choice: testing the effect of environmental friendly activities”

⁸⁸ Iraldo, Fabio, et al. “Greening competitiveness for hotels and restaurants.”, 612.

environmental strategies, it has been observed that the application of green certifications and other kinds of eco-friendly management tools within the hotel sector is still slow and unevenly distributed at a global level.

3.3 Hotel chains and their green managerial culture

Several scholars have analysed a variety of examples concerning green initiatives and practices adopted by hotels' owners in their way of managing their business, particularly focusing on the factors that can influence their decision-making approach and those that can act as drivers or barriers in the application of a more responsible approach. As regards, it has been noted that not every typology of hotel can implement environmentally sustainable practices at the same level: in fact, studies have put evidence on the fact that chain-affiliated hotels are likely to adopt an eco-friendly management approach with respect to small and medium enterprises.

For instance, according to Chan (2011), small and medium-sized hotels have to deal with a variety of barriers, mostly of them internal, that hinder their effective commitment to the implementation of an environmental management system. Therefore, it has been found that smaller organisations often have no sufficient skills, knowledge and resources needed to concretely translate theories from practices.⁸⁹ In fact, a lack of human resources with the necessary skills is identified very often as one of the main barriers to implementing environmental management. Additionally, taking into account the economic and financial dimension, it has been noted that small and medium enterprises have to deal with ongoing maintenance costs that do not help and foster them to change their habits in favour of the protection of the environment. Moreover, it can be also observed that less pressure from customers is exercised on these typologies of hotels as compared to that of hotel chains and, at the same time, it has been noted that related stakeholders tend to make less efforts in implementing green practices.

On the contrary, by taking into account the situation of hotel chains, it can be said that this category could benefit from a more developed green managerial culture than small and medium-sized hotels. Indeed, it has been observed that hotel chains are much more likely to adopt eco-friendly management of their business, given their greater financial resources and the presence of well-

⁸⁹ Khatter, Ajay, et al., "Analysis of hotels' environmentally sustainable policies and practices: Sustainability and corporate social responsibility in hospitality and tourism.", 2397.

structured and goal-oriented management strategies. In this respect, several studies have shown that one of the strengths of hotel chains is brand affiliation or franchising.⁹⁰ In particular, this specific nature allows them to benefit from their economies of scale, to provide technological improvement in training and multiply the potential effects stemming from their innovative and responsible business management.

These factors are particularly relevant and constitute a real advantage for these larger enterprises. In fact, due to a more widespread environmental awareness and stronger external pressure on environmental protection from customers and international organisations, companies have been increasingly encouraged to comply with this new “green” demand. However, it is worth noting that the adoption of a sustainable approach in hotel management seems quite high at the beginning, representing a relevant barrier for a smaller enterprise with less economic, financial and human resources. Nevertheless, it is not the case of hotel chains that, for the points of strengths mentioned above, they can benefit in terms of cost reduction and consequently can afford these expenses more easily with respect to independent small hotels.⁹¹

Furthermore, according to the research conducted by Khatter et al (2019), it has been observed that hotel chain companies are more motivated to invest in sustainability while economically optimising their business. Additionally, given the fact that hotel chains’ corporate offices have a great influence on their affiliated hotels in the implementation of environmentally sustainable policies and practices, it has been highlighted that they can easily provide and spread information concerning the protection of the environment as well as eco-friendly practices through online platforms. This makes them effective and strategic players in disseminating green information and implementing CSR actions through indirect and informal channels.

Moreover, it is worth noting that there are other factors that exert a positive influence on the implementation of a sustainable strategy in the management of hotel chains. First, by taking into account the global market situation, it can be said that those hotel chain companies that adopt a more global perspective are more likely to implement their green commitment and benefit from it. Therefore, adopting a global perspective makes these companies more susceptible to international pressure on environmental issues exercised by a range of related stakeholders, such as international organisations, governments or simply, employees, guests or locals.

⁹⁰ Sun, Kyung-A., and Seoki Lee. “Effects of franchising on industry competition: The moderating role of the hospitality industry.”

⁹¹ Chen, Long-Fei. “Hotel chain affiliation as an environmental performance strategy for luxury hotels”, 2.

Secondly, it has been observed that if a hotel chain enters an international foreign market through joint ventures, it becomes more committed to the preservation of the natural ecosystem, gaining benefits by exploiting a competitive advantage based on ecology.

A third factor that fosters hotel chains to shift away from a business-as-usual into a more responsible one is their usually high level of decision-making autonomy. In particular, this stronger flexibility allows companies to adopt a greater variety of innovative green practices and eco-friendly initiatives, letting their resilience to local environmental issues increase more easily. Finally, regarding foreign business standardisation and adaptation, it is worth mentioning that international hotel chains that standardise their policies and practices by crossing international borders while adapting to local conditions, are more inclined to adapt their technical standards and environmental procedures to the specific requirements of the host countries, such as those related to the regulatory framework, industry standards or consumers' demand.

In order to provide an example showing the active engagement for climate action of large hotel companies, it could be interesting and useful mentioning the establishment of a well-recognised organisation that has been working at the international level since 1992: the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance.⁹² In particular, it is a tourism partnership which provides several tools and guidelines to positively change the way of doing tourism, bringing together a variety of hotel managers that become active Alliance members and donors that are engaged to develop a positive and eco-friendly hospitality industry. More specifically, it can be said that these partners represent 45.000 hotels, 6.2 million rooms, 35 supply chains and strategic partners, 220 brands, accounting for 35% of the global hotel industry in terms of rooms and incorporates 21 leading hotel companies worldwide: important values that cannot be overlooked and that confirm a growing desire and interest in achieving an effective change not just from a top-down perspective but also from a bottom-up approach.

However, by analysing the different partners of the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, what emerges is the fact that the majority of them are mainly represented by large hotel chain-affiliated companies while small and medium enterprises are just a minor part. Unsurprisingly, this once again confirms the potential resource advantages for large hotels and the greater opportunities they have to implement and strengthen their green managerial culture compared to small independent hotels.

⁹² Sustainable Hospitality Alliance. *Responsible Hospitality for a better world.*

3.4 Is Italy a sustainable tourist destination?

Generally speaking, it is quite well established to consider Italy as one of the most popular destinations for national and international tourists. As a result, the tourism sector has a very significant weight in the Italian economy, even higher than the average of other European countries: according to data gathered by the Italian National Statistical Institute (ISTAT), international tourist arrivals coming from European countries during 2019 reached a peak of 147, 5 million.⁹³ Moreover, it should also be noted that, despite travel restrictions due to the Covid pandemic in 2020, in 2022 Italy even recorded 164 million international tourist arrivals in Italy.⁹⁴ Although these numbers are encouraging from an economic point of view, this is not always the case if one takes into account the potential impacts on the environmental and social dimensions. In particular, the unrestrained development of the tourism industry, the so-called “over tourism” originates a multiplicity of negative impacts over the ecosystem that fuel the deterioration not only of the natural environment but also of the preservation of the tourist destination itself. It is not a coincidence that the recent and exceptional floods that hit the Italian city of Venice confirm that we are going towards this direction, highlighting how urgent and immediate a call to action is needed in order to implement a green transition in the Italian tourist sector.

Following this line of thought, it can be said that the country has recently started to implement specific regulations and provide guidelines in order to establish a more structural and environmentally goal-oriented regulatory body. For instance, it can be worth mentioning the Strategic Tourism Development Plan (2017-2022) drafted by the MICBAT, the national Ministry of culture. As regards, strong emphasis is put on the need to strengthen the level of sustainability of tourism that, together with innovation and specific actions and interventions, should be able to responsibly develop the environment in its many facets, including the local territory, heritage protection and the improvement of the socio-economic system, culture and citizenship. Furthermore, it was clearly observed and well recognised in this strategic plan that several tourist destinations in Italy are subject to excessive tourist demand pressure that contributes to an increased risk of a loss of territorial identity.⁹⁵

Moreover, by considering Italy as a member state of the European Union, it has to be mentioned Italy’s Recovery and Resilience Plan prepared in order to outline where to invest funds provided by the recovery instrument *NextGenerationEU*. In particular, to foster the post-pandemic recovery of the

⁹³ ISTAT. *Turismo*.

⁹⁴ ISTAT. *Il turismo nei primi nove mesi del 2022*.

⁹⁵ Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo. *Piano strategico di sviluppo del turismo in Italia per il periodo 2017-2022*, 3.

Italian tourist sector, the plan identifies a number of specific interventions that leverage the country's comparative advantage as a privileged tourist and cultural destination.

Therefore, more than €2.4 billion are allocated to the tourism sector and these investments are mainly aimed at improving tourism facilities and services, and promoting a tourism offer based on environmental sustainability, innovation and digitisation of services. As regards, chapter 4 of the Recovery and Resilience Plan points out the several projects related to the touristic sector and, from the environmental point of view, it should be mentioned the investment number 3 "Caput Mundi".⁹⁶ In particular, in order to counter the "over tourism" phenomenon and its negative impacts on the ecosystem, €0,50 billion are intended to develop a model of sustainable tourism through the creation of a national tourist route that, starting from Rome, would take tourism along national routes that are often less known but no less fascinating.

In addition, it is worth mentioning again one of the most widespread associations operating in Italy: Legambiente. As it has been previously introduced, this non-profit organisation, by conducting research, developing innovative projects and collaborating on a both national and international level, is strongly advocating the ecological transition, building eco-friendly policies and promoting change among local, national and international stakeholders and institutions.

In particular, created as a project of Legambiente in 1997, the Legambiente Tourism eco-label is able to certify the level of environmental footprint of accommodation facilities, providing them with support and improvement and spreading sustainable values among all tourism stakeholders. Therefore, the organisation provides a set of well-defined guidelines that all its members are required to respect in order to lower the environmental impacts generated by accommodation facilities, while improving the quality of services and reinforcing a more responsible way of doing tourism. Nowadays, it can be said that among tourism facilities certified by Legambiente Turismo, 84 are the hotels that have obtained the Legambiente Tourism eco-label in Italy.⁹⁷

The adoption of strategic plans by Italian institutions such as the PNRR and the Strategic Tourism Development Plan, or the presence of certifying bodies and specific organisations (such as Legambiente) show a certain interest and proactive involvement in the provision of specific guidelines on sustainable tourism. However, to answer the question of whether Italy can be considered a sustainable tourism destination, taking into account only the regulatory framework provided by

⁹⁶ Scuola Nazionale dell'Amministrazione, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. *Turismo e Sviluppo Sostenibile, Pagina Monografica*, 6.

⁹⁷ Legambiente Turismo. *La sostenibilità nel turismo*.

national institutions or non-governmental organisations is insufficient. In fact, to have a more comprehensive understanding of the degree of sustainable awareness and engagement of the Italian tourism sector, it is also necessary to focus on how sensitive Italian tourists are to the issue of sustainability. Indeed, if it can be said that there is no tourism without tourists, there will never be sustainable tourism without sustainable tourists.

Following this line of thought, according to various surveys, it can be observed that between 2011 and 2021, Italians have become very familiar with the idea of sustainable tourism: in fact, while only slightly more than 60% of Italian interviewees were familiar with this concept in 2011, in 2021, 85% of respondents confirmed that they become closer with the meaning of sustainable tourism.⁹⁸ Moreover, overbuilding was perceived by Italians as one of the main environmental problems caused by an unsustainable growth of tourism, and this highlights the fact that Italian tourists are not indifferent to the environmental challenges that the national tourist system has to face nowadays.

Additionally, it is relevant in this discourse mentioning the results that the well-known travel portal *Booking.com* published in a survey carried out in February 2022 among 32 countries around the world, including Italy (with a one-thousand-person sample), and over thirty thousand people interviewed. In particular, the survey reveals that more and more people are opting for sustainable travel, looking for making more conscious choices throughout the whole travel experience by deciding where and how to spend their money while travelling. In order to share some numbers, it can be observed that for 93% of Italian travellers (in comparison of 81% at the global level), sustainable tourism is important and 60% of them (50% globally) say that recent news about climate change has influenced their travel choices in favour of a more sustainable and responsible way of travelling. More specifically, 76% of Italian tourists confirmed their desire to be more environmentally responsible next year and 61% of respondents said they were more committed to making sustainable travel choices than a year ago.⁹⁹

3.4.1 Typical structure of the Italian Touristic Enterprise: independent hotels in a fragmentary context

Still, to investigate the extent to which Italy as a tourist destination is moving towards sustainability, it is also necessary to focus on the typical structure of the Italian tourism enterprise, which is mainly characterised by the presence of independent and small-sized hotels in a very peculiar fragmentary context. Indeed, if it has been said that a sustainability-conscious tourist is very important

⁹⁸ Statista. *Most appreciated services offered by eco-tourism hotel facilities according to Italian individuals in 2021*.

⁹⁹ Booking.com. *Sustainable Travel Report. 2022*, 4-11.

for sustainable tourism, it can be similarly said that the typology of the content (“green tourists”) is equally as fundamental as the typology of the container (in this case a “green hotel”): in other words, for the respect and implementation of sustainable approaches within the tourist industry, all the related stakeholders have to be actively engaged on an equal scale.

In the previous paragraphs, it has been highlighted that the hotel is a relevant stakeholder in a touristic destination not only for its direct correlation and responsibility in generating positive or negative impacts on the environment but also for being a potential as well as a strategic actor in spreading sustainable values.

Following this line of thought, what can be particularly relevant in this discourse is taking into consideration the Italian tourist situation. Therefore, compared to the other European tourist destinations (such as France, Germany or Spain), Italy represents a peculiar example of a tourist destination where hotels, for their considerable numerical presence, are key players in shaping the type of tourism supply and consequently, in having the possibility to highly contribute to the ecological transition of the touristic sector. In particular, it has to be highlighted that the Italian hotel market takes a leading position all over the world mainly due to their high number of available bedrooms. In particular, in 2019 Italy registered more than one billion rooms, ranking first in Europe, followed by Germany and France. (See Table number 3.3)



Figure 3.3. Source: STATISTA, Number of bedrooms in hotels and similar accommodation in Europe in 2019, by country. (2021).

However, despite the high quantity of this kind of accommodation, the Italian hotel market reveals several anomalies with pros and cons, that make it an interesting case study.

Therefore, the first peculiar feature can be linked to the fact that the Italian hotel industry has been developing in a highly fragmented reality. More specifically, fragmentation can be observed in the distribution of tourist destinations, as these are very often small villages or towns with their own cultural heritage, specific geographical features and a higher degree of flexible self-management. For instance, it can be said that the most famous tourist destinations in Italy such as Florence, Rome, Venice and Milan account for just a minor part of the total number of international overnights that are provided by the huge variety of small destinations across Italy.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, fragmentation can be found in the building properties and in the typology of hotels. In particular, most companies are small family-run businesses, mostly three-star hotels: in 2021, Italian three-star hotels amounted to 14 837 versus 6 217 four-star hotels and 601 five-star hotels.¹⁰¹

Concerning the presence of national and international hotel chains, it is much lower in Italy than in other European countries. While in France and Spain the penetration of hotel chains corresponds to 21% and 34% respectively, in Italy it is only 5%.¹⁰² Therefore, this family-based vision in the management of tourist accommodation activities as represented by the strong presence of small independently managed hotels is a factor that on the one hand, makes the hotel market in Italy really unique, but on the other hand, hinders the adoption of a clearer and shared vision of strategy able to lead towards a cohesive and efficient implementation of sustainable practices.

In fact, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, having such a hotel market, which is characterised by small and medium enterprises, drives to advantages such as a high level of flexibility and autonomy, but at the same time, to disadvantages such as insufficient financial resources, knowledge and skills, and a lack of efficient planning that do not provide small hotels with the same potential resources as hotel chains have in ensuring a more sustainable management approach.¹⁰³

Following this line of thought, it may be interesting to note that if one analyses the map provided by Greenview (a well-known provider of sustainable tools and programmes specifically for the hospitality sector), one can observe that in European countries with a greater presence of hotel

¹⁰⁰ Goffi, and Cucculelli. “Components of destination competitiveness. The case of small tourism destinations in Italy.”, 297.

¹⁰¹ ISTAT. *Esercizi ricettivi: Capacità degli esercizi ricettivi per Movimento dei clienti negli esercizi ricettivi per tipo di esercizio*.

¹⁰² Il Sole 24 Ore, Econopoly. *Hotel Italia, ecco i dati per capire anomalie e limiti del sistema*.

¹⁰³ Goffi, and Cucculelli. “Components of destination competitiveness. The case of small tourism destinations in Italy.”, 310

chains (such as France and Spain), the amount of carbon emissions per night per room is lower (1,4 - 9,4 KgCo2e) than in other tourist destinations where hotel chains are less numerous, such as Italy (9,5 - 21,6 KgCo2e).¹⁰⁴

As a result, it can be seen that something is changing in Italy as well. The link between tourism development and environmental protection is becoming more evident in the eyes not only of national institutions and organisations but also of the main actors involved: both tourists and tour operators (such as hotel owners). However, the hotel market in Italy presents anomalies that differentiate it from other tourist destinations.

The high level of fragmentation is reflected in the variety of destinations and especially in the high presence of predominantly family-run hotels, which slows down the penetration of hotel chains (with their developed managerial culture more attentive to the issue of sustainability, greater economic and human resources and their capacity to adopt shared strategies at national and international level). However, this does not mean replacing Italian small hotels with hotel chains, but optimising this fragmented reality that is typical of Italy through a quality systematic organisation capable of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism sector and providing them with the tools and guidelines that make tourism policy looking sustainable. Everything, however, through the synergy of all key stakeholders involved at every level, by encouraging and developing a network of collaborations and initiatives to act as a unifying force in this complex, fragmented and multi-layered reality.

3.5 The local dimension and the most strategic actors

What can be deduced from the preceding paragraphs is that the context where the Italian hotel sector develops is characterised by a high level of fragmentation. In fact, since each destination has its own geographic, socio-cultural and administrative specificities that make the Italian hotel market profoundly heterogeneous, it can be said that a one-size-fits-all approach does not seem to efficiently work in this situation. For this reason, the local dimension and the main actors operating at this level must be taken into account in order to identify which among them are the most strategic in pushing small independent hotels, on the one hand, to undertake a sustainable management approach of their businesses and, on the other hand, to provide them shared and flexible guidelines that can overcome

¹⁰⁴ Hotel Footprinting Tool. *Heat Map of Carbon Emissions per Room Night (KgCO2e)*.

this fragmentation by being adapted locally.

Following this line of thought, it is worth introducing in the discourse the stakeholder theory under the framework of the hospitality sector. In particular, according to this theory, hotels should be conscious of belonging to a network of interdependent stakeholders operating at different levels and be responsive to their specific needs. Moreover, since it has been observed that there is often a gap between a comprehensive set of sustainable goals and clear-cut green practices and initiatives, it has been noted that the adoption of stakeholder-filter model can be considered a valuable tool to identify impactful sustainable initiatives in specific local scenarios of the hospitality sector.

Stakeholders could be differentiated in external and internal. The first one includes guests, tourists, local communities, governments, organisations, professional associations and so on. Internal stakeholders are mainly represented by employees, managers, shareholders or corporate actors (in particular in the context of multinational hotel chains).¹⁰⁵ Generally speaking, it is a common tendency to identify external stakeholders adopting environmental regulation or driving by external business interest as the main source of environmental pressure. However, by adopting a multidimensional point of view, stakeholders can be considered not only as an external force exerting environmental constraints, but also as strategic partners who, if linked to specific sustainable problems, could act as catalysts or otherwise as obstacles in identifying synergies in order to implement sustainable effective initiatives.¹⁰⁶

For this reason, the application of the stakeholder-filter model to the hospitality industry could be useful for this research to identify the key stakeholders that are strongly linked to the Italian local dimension and, consequently, to analyse how they can intervene for the implementation of a more responsible and sustainable management of the Italian hotel industry. In particular, in the next few paragraphs, considering the wide spectrum of different stakeholders, emphasis will be placed on three of them: the role of trade associations, the role of independent hotels and that of guests.

Firstly, with regard to trade associations and specific interest groups, it has been observed that they mostly act as catalysts for the implementation of eco-friendly actions in hotels.¹⁰⁷ More specifically, thanks to their intermediary role between public institutions and hotel owners,

¹⁰⁵ Pérez-Pineda, et al, "Creating sustainable value in the hospitality industry: a (critical) multi-stakeholder study in the Dominican Republic".

¹⁰⁶ Kim, S.H., Lee, K. and Fairhurst, A. , "The review of 'green' research in hospitality, 2000-2014:current trends and future research directions".

¹⁰⁷ Raub, Steffen P., and Carlos Martin-Rios. "'Think sustainable, act local'—a stakeholder-filter-model for translating SDGs into sustainability initiatives with local impact.", 2438

partnerships with trade associations represent a valid alternative to establish multi-level synergies and to adopt a specific bottom-up process to effectively respond to the local and specific needs of other interdependent stakeholders, such as Italian independent hotel managers. For instance, it can be worth mentioning the Federalberghi, one of the most national representatives of the needs and proposals of Italian hotel enterprises to national institutions and other related political, economic and trade union associations.¹⁰⁸

Together with Federalberghi, it is also relevant referring to the Associazione Italiana Confindustria Alberghi. Operating throughout the country, it represents a key player in the Italian tourism economy and provides its member companies with a wide range of services in the day-to-day management of the main business issues.¹⁰⁹ Regarding their commitment to sustainability initiatives, it can be highlighted their agreement signed with Intesa Sanpaolo at the beginning of 2022. In particular, the Italian Wealth Management and Protection Company, together with Confindustria Alberghi, Federalberghi and Federterme, has renewed its support for the Italian tourism industry through the implementation of ad hoc measures, aiming to assist businesses in their relaunch that is also linked to the opportunities offered by the Italian Recovery and Resilience Plan and other government incentives. In particular, the envisaged funding plan amounts to €1.2 billion for implementing measures in favour of SMEs and strengthening their sustainable transition along three key pillars: upgrading and raising the quality standards of accommodation facilities, environmental sustainability of supply through the renovation of facilities and services, and digitisation of the service pattern. As regards, emphasis is placed on the S-Loan Turismo, the sustainability funding aiming to encourage investments in the energetic transition of hotel facilities, with a focus on the environmental impacts of their interventions.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, another relevant association acting as catalyst for sustainable initiatives in the Italian scenario is the Associazione Italiana Turismo Responsabile. Therefore, since 1998 has been promoting and spreading all the cultural values and practices related to sustainable and responsible tourism all over Italy through the active dialogue, partnership and training initiatives with local communities, tourists and tour operators.¹¹¹ Furthermore, in 2005 it provided its own definition of “Responsible Tourism” and the various good practices that underpin it, which the association is committed to enforcing among its members and making all actors more aware and therefore more

¹⁰⁸ Federalberghi. *Chi siamo*.

¹⁰⁹ Associazione Italiana Confindustria Alberghi. *Chi siamo*.

¹¹⁰ Intesa Sanpaolo. *Comunicato Stampa - Turismo: Da Intesa Sanpaolo nuove risorse e misure per far cogliere alle PMI le opportunità del PNRR*

¹¹¹ Associazione Italiana Turismo Responsabile. *Il 2022 di AITR: tra novità, ripartenze e nuovi progetti*.

responsible (in terms of corporate social responsibility, environmental sustainability, gender equity and good practices in general) in what they are involved in.¹¹²

Secondly, independent hotel owners can act as important stakeholders, particularly considering the strong potential influence they would have in adopting sound pro-environmental strategies and disseminating them through their close ties with local communities and their direct relations with their guests. However, as it has already been pointed out in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, the presence of various internal barriers (implementation/maintenance costs, lack of qualified professional consulting and specific knowledge) generates an attitudinal-behavioural gap between the positive green attitudes that hoteliers would like to undertake and what they actually do.¹¹³ As a consequence, while hotel chains are able to allocate more significant resources to sustainable CSR initiatives, special emphasis should be placed on the need for smaller hotels to establish strategic synergies with local associations and their support to successfully overcome industry expertise.

Nowadays, by taking into analysis the Italian situation, it has been observed that even in small hotels, such as family-run hotels, there is a growing interest in adopting environmentally friendly management. Very often, this trend translates into the choice of renewable energy (solar and hydroelectric), low-consumption lighting (through LED lamps) or natural, environmentally sustainable and biodegradable materials. In addition, it has been highlighted that several hotels decided to use fruit, vegetables and other kitchen products from their own gardens, vineyards or olive groves, which very often also become educational spaces for children to raise their environmental awareness through learning activities. On the other hand, hotels which for logistical reasons do not have their own vegetable garden, tend to collaborate with local and eco farms by using and promoting their local products.¹¹⁴

Furthermore, as far as sustainability initiatives are concerned, emphasis should be placed on actions related to waste reduction (since waste management is a relevant issue for hotels), by implying a high level of collaboration with hotel managers, staff, guests; water and energy optimisation or other specific communication strategies for informational and learning purposes mainly addressed to guests and employees. However, despite this growing interest on the part of some small independent hotels, the will and attitude of the individual owner are not enough to have a significant impact on the local area sufficient to bring about a real change of direction. In fact, in order to be in a position to look at the Italian hotel sector from a sustainability perspective, it is important that independent Italian

¹¹² Associazione Italiana Turismo Responsabile. *Cos'è il turismo responsabile*.

¹¹³ Iraldo, Fabio, et al. "Greening competitiveness for hotels and restaurants.", 610.

¹¹⁴ Rinnovabili.it, Il quotidiano sulla sostenibilità ambientale. *Il turismo sostenibile made in Italy*.

hoteliers are supported by other national, regional and mainly local players, both public and private, who can provide specific guidelines and tools tailored to independent hotels' needs, disseminate best and responsible practices and consequently multiply the positive benefits in a broader context. Following this line of thought but under a more economical perspective, it was also noted that the adoption of sustainable business models could be a useful management tool not only to offer insights, but also to support independent hotel owners in implementing sustainable practices and, at the same time, to ensure their sustainable economic growth.¹¹⁵

Thirdly, by keep taking into account the local dimension, another strategic player is represented by the guest/tourist. Several studies have recorded a growing interest on the part of Italian tourists in making their holidays sustainable, and many of them have stated that they are willing to pay a higher price in order to rely on services and operators that are certified to work in a sustainable manner.¹¹⁶ Moreover, it has also been said that researchers identified a positive correlation between a guest who is more environmentally aware and his/her desire to spend for eco-friendly products and services as well as his/her commitment to environmentally responsible behaviours.

As it has been already confirmed in the previous paragraphs of this chapter, an increasing number of Italian tourists are more and more aware of environmental issues and oriented to make pro-environmental choices also in terms of where and how they spend their holidays. Consequently, it can be said that guests and their preferences or attitudes towards environmental responsibility represent a catalyst force that can strongly influence the type of offer provided by tour operators such as hoteliers, and actively lead to the diffusion and respect of sustainable behaviour. More specifically, according to research conducted in October 2022 by Deloitte and AICEO (Italian CEO Association), seven out of ten respondents state that they easily transferred responsible habits developed at home during their holidays. In particular, they claimed to be in favour of adopting conscious behaviours and practical measures to reduce their impact in the place where they are staying, such as reducing waste by reusing plastic bottles (46%), reducing water consumption (40%), electricity (39%) or preferring less polluting way of transportation to achieve the destination (44%).¹¹⁷

Consequently, these data show the extent to which sustainability as a concept and its translation into practical, goal-oriented actions are two factors influencing sustainability due, on the one hand, to the growing demand from Italian and foreign tourists who are increasingly oriented towards a

¹¹⁵ Raub, Steffen P., and Carlos Martin-Rios. ““Think sustainable, act local”—a stakeholder-filter-model for translating SDGs into sustainability initiatives with local impact.”, 2440.

¹¹⁶ Deloitte. *Turismo, cresce la propensione a viaggi e soggiorni sostenibilità*.

¹¹⁷ Deloitte. *Turismo, cresce la propensione a viaggi e soggiorni sostenibilità*.

“sustainable” kind of holiday. This means that the choices of individual guests are becoming more and more influenced by those hotels or other tour operators capable of responding to the needs, preference and attitudes of the new tourist, who is increasingly attentive and aware of environmental issues. Not surprisingly, it was observed in the study conducted by Deloitte and AICEO that sustainability is considered by more than half of the Italian respondents to be a determining factor in feeling positively satisfied with their accommodation experience.

On the other hand, it can be also said that the type of supply should, at the same time, respond to the trend of this new demand. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that effective communication by accommodation facilities in clearly conveying their sustainability activities and strategies is of utmost importance. However, several studies have put emphasis on the fact that in Italy, many tourists are still uncertain about how to find sustainable accommodations, stressing the need to develop a more transparent and clear communication in order to allow consumers to make a more conscious choice about where and how to spend their holidays.¹¹⁸

For this reason, a stronger partnership between hotel owners and guests is not only a valuable way from which both parties can benefit, but also a useful approach for sustainable implementation. Indeed, sustainable initiatives that directly involve guests and take into account the new attitudes and trends that make tourists increasingly sustainability-oriented cannot be read as a result of costs and barriers that hinder their implementation. On the contrary, it was observed that several initiatives undertaken by some hotels through close collaboration with their guests were well appreciated and translated into successful environmental engagement by both hoteliers and tourists.¹¹⁹

3.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, it has been concluded that among the various actors related to the tourism sector and mainly to hospitality, the role of hotels is significantly important. Not only because of hotels’ potential negative impact on the environment resulting from unsustainable mismanagement but also because, on the contrary, if managed responsibly they become key catalysts for the implementation and dissemination of sustainable practices in the hospitality sector. In particular, it was observed how the idea of a green hotel is becoming increasingly widespread, attentive to adopting sustainable management through the implementation of green practices, considered as value-added activities that reinforce and spread the awareness of translating the protection of the environment and natural resources into specific habits and attitudes even during holiday. However, it has been observed that it

¹¹⁸ Booking.com. *Sustainable Travel Report. 2022*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Raub, Steffen P., and Carlos Martin-Rios. ““Think sustainable, act local”—a stakeholder-filter-model for translating SDGs into sustainability initiatives with local impact.”, 2438.

is large hotel chains that are more likely to provide a set of common strategies and criteria to follow in order to adopt a sustainable hotel management system.

With a particular focus on the Italian situation, it was noted that the typical Italian hotel market is a fragmented and heterogeneous reality. In particular, it is predominantly characterised by a large number of independent hotels, mainly SMEs that, due to their significant volume within the Italian territory, could lead to far-reaching negative impacts on the natural landscape. Moreover, unlike hotel chains, small independent hotels often lack a specific set of common guidelines as well as economic and human resources necessary for the implementation and dissemination of green practices within the Italian hospitality sector. On the other hand, it is also worth noting that international and Italian tourists are becoming more sensitive to sustainability and are increasingly open to choosing sustainable options for their holidays.

This is a clear sign that the Italian tourism offer, with its specific characteristics and structure, must be in line with the new demand characterised by the changing attitudes and individual preferences of new guests. To do this, however, synergy and the intervention of all the major stakeholders at the public and private level is required. As regards, in this research trade associations, independent hotel owners and guests/tourists have been identified as three main players acting as potential catalysts of green transition within the hospitality sector in the Italian framework.

CHAPTER 4

Case Study in the Province of Rimini

4.1 Introduction

The fourth and final chapter deals with an empirical study carried out with the aim of analysing the supply side and thus detecting the behaviour, initiatives or attitudes of accommodation facilities with regard to sustainability. For this purpose, firstly the tourist destination of the province of Rimini was analysed, which is traditionally based on seaside tourism characterised by strong seasonal tourist pressure and, consequently, by a high presence of accommodation activities. Secondly, a questionnaire was administered to hoteliers to understand if and how they are moving towards a more sustainable hotel management approach. In addition, an interview was conducted with the president of Federalberghi of the Emilia Romagna region in order to highlight the region's current and future actions and projects in the hotel sector in relation to the environment. The survey also shows what are the perceived hindering and driving factors in making hotel entrepreneurs more environmentally aware and what are the main areas where action can be taken to facilitate the green transition process in the hospitality sector. To complement the empirical study, the case history of a green hotel in the province of Rimini was analysed so as to take a closer look at how sustainable management of a family run hotel, such as in this case, can be translated into practice.

4.2 An overview of the Emilia Romagna region and the province of Rimini

The Emilia Romagna region is located in the north east of Italy, with a population of around 5 million of people. The region is one of the richest in Italy and it is characterised by a higher degree of employment opportunities and a strong inclination to the internationalisation of its economy. Furthermore, in terms of well-being and the quality of life, Emilia Romagna can provide a variety of cultural offerings and landscapes, mainly thanks to the density and coexistence of different natural beauties, such as the Appennini mountains, the hilly hinterland and coast along the Adriatic seaside.¹²⁰

Economically speaking, the region is particularly based on its manufacturing sector, typical of the regions located in the north of Italy, which is represented by small and medium enterprises. As far as the tourism industry is concerned, it can be said that this sector represents one of the most significant sources for the Emilia Romagna region. In particular, this specific trend can be detected in the data

¹²⁰ It-ER, International Talents Emilia Romagna. *Geography of Emilia Romagna*.

and statistics showing the evident receptive and attractive capacity of its territory, in terms of extension and great variety offered.¹²¹

In this way, it can be noted that in 2019, the number of tourist arrivals recorded was very high, reaching 11.937.000 visitors. Even in 2022, despite the significant negative impact of the Covid pandemic on the main driving sectors of the national economy, such as tourism, the recorded 11.499.500 arrivals could confirm a strong recovery in this sector, which saw the region almost reaching pre-pandemic levels.¹²²

4.2.1 The tourist sector in the province Rimini

The first regional destination in terms of number of tourists is Rimini, which in 2021 registered 5.222.151 overnight stays, representing 16,9% of the total regional flow. A slightly lower share than in 2019, when it was 18,7%.¹²³ The province of Rimini as a tourist destination has a long and well-established tradition: in fact, since the 19th century, this coastal area was a well-known seaside holiday destination. After World War II, the strategy that was adopted to relaunch the local economy had been focused mainly on directing most of the financial resources for the implementation of the tourism sector in the province of Rimini.¹²⁴ This decision led to a series of structural changes in shaping the organisation and management of tourism, both in terms of demand and supply. Therefore, in the mid-20th century, local people from the hinterland began to move to the coast, giving rise to significant internal migration flows. At that time, this displacement of human capital also highlighted the general tendency to see the investments in tourism as a great opportunity to improve the still precarious social and economic living conditions, fuelling the idea of transforming peasants or, in any case, families of humble origins, into real entrepreneurs.

This growing interest in allocating financial resources to tourism can be witnessed in the increase in the number of tourism activities: while in 1946 only 136 accommodation facilities were located in Rimini, in 1972 there were 1631. This was the beginning of the “*Golden Age*” and tourism in this area evolved, attracting a growing number of tourists and consequently generating a mass tourism based on low-medium level hotel enterprises mainly intended to cater for the lower-middle class of employers of the industries of northern Italy.

¹²¹ Regione Emilia Romagna, Statistica. *Ambiente, territorio, infrastrutture*.

¹²² Unioncamere Emilia – Romagna, Regione Emilia Romagna. *Rapporto 2022 sull'Economia Regionale*, 95.

¹²³ Regione Emilia Romagna. *Rapporto annuale sul movimento turistico e la consistenza ricettiva alberghiera e complementare in Emilia-Romagna*, 11.

¹²⁴ Masini. “Rimini allo sbando. Kursaal addio! Da Clari a Ceccaroni tra macerie e caos.”, 59.

The province of Rimini thus becomes a specific scenario characterised by the phenomenon of “widespread entrepreneurship”, where a multiplicity of small and medium-sized enterprises have begun to coexist and operate in the area.¹²⁵ This type of entrepreneurship, typical of the structural configuration of Italian companies, while on the one hand contributing to a higher level of creativity and flexibility, on the other hand undermines the efficiency and optimisation of programming capacity and common guidelines: in this way, once again, it can be noted how the structural fragmentation of Italian companies also shaped the tourism sector in Rimini. Over the years, tourism in Rimini has evolved and been influenced by the intertwining of external social, economic and cultural events. However, the strategy designed after the Second World War, aimed at relaunching the local economy through the creation and affirmation of a new model of tourism, has been able to maintain its fragmented structural asset throughout the years, which is mostly characterised by small and medium-sized hotels independently run by their own families.

Moreover, still today fragmentation can be perceived in the different typologies of tourism that are offered in this area. Therefore, thanks to the strong differentiation of its local territory in terms of natural landscapes, arts, history and culinary traditions, it can be observed that not only coastal tourism is highly developed but also food and wine tourism and cultural tourism are considered noteworthy. As far as the number of hotel businesses in the province of Rimini is concerned, it can be stated that in 2021 the total number of tourism businesses was 2.154, of which 1.226 were three-star or three-star superior hotels.¹²⁶ Most of them are only open seasonally, since the tourist presence is mainly concentrated in the summer. Therefore, the most impactful tourist flow generally occurs in August: for example, in 2021 it accounted for about 27,6% of total arrivals and 34,1% of total stays for the whole year.¹²⁷

4.2.2 Tourism in Rimini and its environmental impacts

The evident correlation between tourism and the environment, together with the resulting negative impacts stemming from an unsustainable and irresponsible management of natural resources are still a source of concern to be taken into account when analysing the current situation in the province of Rimini from the environmental perspective.

As it has been previously said, the province of Rimini represents one of the most developed tourist areas, where the tourism industry has a very significant influence in the regional economy. In

¹²⁵ Battilani, P. “Ascesa, crisi e riorientamento del turismo”

¹²⁶ Regione Emilia Romagna, Statistica. *Strutture Ricettive – Territorio Provincia di Rimini. Anno 2021.*

¹²⁷ Camera di Commercio della Romagna, *Il movimento turistico nell'anno 2021 a Forlì-Cesena e Rimini.*

this way, it can be said that this territory has been evolving and coming closer to become a sort of “mature tourism” destination that has been able to reach well-developed and stable economic achievements for a long time now.

However, from a more environmental point of view, it should be worth stressing the fact that the coastal area in the province of Rimini, in addition to being “mature”, appears “tired” as well. The rapid growth in building hotels and the constant seasonal peaks of touristic flows has been causing strong pressure over the environment and in particular over the Adriatic sea, the principal natural source of attractiveness that is turning to be even more fragile and worn out.¹²⁸ In the province of Rimini, the average number of tourist presences is much higher than in the others in Emilia Romagna, and consequently so is the tourist pressure: in fact, during the summer months of 2021, the average daily growth in population due to the presence of tourists reached the peak of 9,1%, as opposed, for instance, to one of the largest cities such as Bologna where the tourist pressure is 0,8%.¹²⁹ For these reasons, it can be easily deduced that the environment and its natural resources cannot benefit from this uneven anthropic pressure on the coastal area. As a result, in order to preserve the future of this ecosystem, which represents the main source of attraction for tourists, it is necessary to develop and implement eco-friendly policies and initiatives.

Furthermore, another factor linked to the tourism industry and that should be taken into account when analysing the generation of environmental impacts is the amount of waste production. In this discourse, it is worth mentioning the 29th “Urban Ecosystem” report elaborated by Legambiente and Ambiente Italia by using data collected in 2021. By referring to 18 parameters grouped in 5 categories (air, water, waste, mobility and environment), 105 Italian cities were classified and 20 of them were identified as the most virtuous urban centres in the country.

As far as Rimini is concerned, it can be seen that the city ranked 11th in the final classification, which could be considered a good position and a successful achievement. However, looking deeper into the results elaborated for each single category, in the one concerning waste production, Rimini ranked 100th out of 105 cities, with an annual urban waste production per capita of 682, 588 kilograms.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Provincia di Rimini, Assessorato al Turismo. “L’albergo eco-sensibile. Manuale di marketing per realizzare un’ospitalità attenta all’ambiente.”, 15.

¹²⁹ Regione Emilia Romagna. *Rapporto annuale sul movimento turistico e la consistenza ricettiva alberghiera e complementare in Emilia-Romagna*, 18.

¹³⁰ Il Sole 24 Ore, Lab 24. *Ecosistema Urbano*.

The causes of this negative trend affecting the province of Rimini could be multiple and different. Nevertheless, it could be easily found an analogy, a positive correlation between the strong anthropic pressure stemming from tourist presences and the significant quantity of waste production. In particular, as the 2021 report elaborated by ARPAE (Regional Agency for Prevention, Environment and Energy of Emilia-Romagna) on the waste management in the region pointed out, the touristic presences in some coastal areas have been identified as key factors influencing the value of total per capita waste production. For example, it has been estimated that during 2020, the waste produced in Rimini without tourist presence would have decreased from 689 kg per habitant to 643 kg: not a drastic change but at least something to show that tourist pressure is still an indicator of influence.¹³¹

In addition, another element to be taken into account in order to investigate the most impactful drivers of environmental deterioration within the touristic context in Rimini, is the quality of the mobility sector. According to the above-mentioned report “Ecosistema Urbano”, Rimini, compared to other Italian cities, is well placed, offering a relatively well-managed public transport system, especially in terms of availability of public transport and number of users.¹³² However, with reference to mobility, what cannot be overlooked in this discussion is the number of cars arriving at motorway toll stations: a very influential index strongly linked to tourist flows, which can have a great impact on the quality and degree of environmental sustainability.

In particular, by taking into account that the total number of tourist arrivals recorded in the so-called “Riviera Romagnola” (from January to September 2022) was 6.619.000, it is also worth noting that, in the same period of time, the total number of cars arriving at the motorway toll stations in the province of Rimini alone (Rimini Nord, Rimini Sud, Riccione and Cattolica) peaked at 7.485.048.¹³³ In terms of the quality of the mobility sector in this area, on the one hand, this data highlights the fact that the pressure of income tourists moving to a limited local area is very high and particularly concentrated during summer months.

On the other hand, from a more environmental point of view, the presence of a considerable amount of cars underlines the necessity to better promote the use of public and less polluting means of transport. In fact, it can be deduced that there is not yet a strong desire and interest on the part of tourists to use more sustainable means of transport to reach the Rimini area.

¹³¹ ARPAE, Regione Emilia Romagna. *La gestione dei rifiuti in Emilia Romagna. 2021*, 16.

¹³² Il Sole 24 Ore, Lab 24. *Ecosistema Urbano*.

¹³³ Unioncamere Emilia – Romagna, Regione Emilia Romagna. *Rapporto 2022 sull’Economia Regionale*, 98.

In this way, local authorities or tourism-related associations should be proactive in elaborating specific policies and initiatives aimed at encouraging tourists to prefer a more sustainable and alternative way of transport and, consequently, at providing a less polluted environment and preserving the natural resources of the territory.

By analysing the current situation concerning the link between tourism in the province of Rimini and the degree of environmental respect, it can be clear to realise that the majority of environmental impacts are human induced and that the development of the tourism industry has a significant weight. More specifically, it has been observed that in this specific tourist area, the anthropic pressure, which is concentrated in a limited period of the year, generates and multiplies a variety of negative impacts, such as growth in waste production and Co2 emissions. As a result, the necessity to intervene on these catalyst factors and manage this uncontrolled flow of tourists in a more sustainable and responsible way through the active involvement of all stakeholders, is becoming a priority both for present and future generations.

4.3 Objectives of the research

Some general information about the origins and features of tourism in the area of Rimini as well as some of the resulting drivers to environmental impacts have been provided and described in the previous paragraphs. However, in order to address this topic directly and go more into depth, an interview and a survey have been designed through the involvement of two important stakeholders: the president of Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna, Giorgetti Alessandro, and some family hotel owners in the territory of Rimini. In this research, the main focus is on analysing the aspects related to environmental issues within the hospitality sector, and emphasis has been put on what are the policies and initiatives that can contribute to improve the environmental management and sustainability in the small and medium enterprises, which significantly characterised the structure of the Italian Touristic enterprise.

Following this line of thought, the current situation of the hospitality sector in Rimini, as a case study of a tourist destination, is taken into analysis and through the adoption of two different survey methodologies, the main objectives of this research are as follows:

1. Firstly, the main objective is to examine in which direction hotel trade associations are moving (due to their strategic position as intermediaries between hotel owners and public institutions),

and the extent to which they are interested in promoting the adoption of sustainable measures and the development of sustainable hotel management in Rimini and province.

2. Secondly, the research aims at investigating in what direction hotel businesses located in the province of Rimini are moving, how much importance they give to the green variable and what are the main obstacles and drivers for the adoption of a strategy aimed at implementing a sustainable management system.
3. Based on the data and answers obtained, the third and last objective is to identify the key factors on which to act for assuring the creation, sharing and adoption of sustainability-oriented policies, initiatives and common guidelines that could be replicated in a broader context as well.

4.4 Methodology

For these purposes, the methodology used for achieving the objectives of this research have been different. In particular, for the one addressed to the President of Federalberghi, a semi-structured interview in oral form was used; the Rimini hotels, on the other hand, were directly given a written questionnaire.

4.4.1 Methodology of the interview with the President of Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna

In order to achieve the first objective which is mostly related to the role of trade associations within the tourist sector, the oral interview directly addressed to the president of Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna has been chosen as the best way to reach the goal. In particular, this choice has been supported by the purpose to investigate the policies and projects aimed at implementing a sustainable development of the touristic sector. In this way, due to the fact that Federalberghi is one of the main business associations representing Italian hotels, the contribution given by President Giorgetti has been considered highly relevant and useful in order to highlight the current and future initiatives of the region undertaken at a more institutional level, putting particularly emphasis on the touristic destination of the province of Rimini.

The interview has been divided into 7 questions that can be grouped in 4 main categories.

- Questions number 1 and 7 focus mainly on the type of policies or initiatives implemented or planned to support the ecological transition process of small and medium enterprises in the tourism sector. Furthermore, attention is also paid to the presence of tax breaks or funds made

accessible by the Emilia-Romagna Region to enable hotel businesses to implement sustainable measures.

- Question number 2 investigates which factors, according to President Giogetti, the Federalberghi Association should be more focused on in order to ensure that hotels in the Rimini area adopt a more sustainable management approach for their businesses.
- Questions number 3 and 6 are mostly related to the identification of the main obstacles and limits that undermine the ecological transition in the tourism sector within the province of Rimini.
- Questions number 4 and 5 examine, in the President's opinion, to which extent hotel owners and tourists are sensitive to the issue of sustainability.

4.4.2 Methodology of the survey administered to hotel owners

This survey was conducted by adopting a quantitative approach, with the aim to obtain objective results and go more in depth into the analysis of sustainability within the hospitality sector in the province of Rimini. This data was collected by taking a representative sample of 16 entrepreneurs owning hotels in this touristic destination. Information was gathered through self-administered questionnaires in paper formats that were distributed during a masterclass organised by the “Consorzio Piccoli Alberghi di Qualità - Rimini” on the 17th January 2023. The class was attended by hotel members of the consortium and external hotel owners who were given a questionnaire consisting of 16 multiple-choice and dichotomous questions. The survey template will be attached in the appendix of this research: as regards, it is important to clarify that questions are written in the Italian language given the fact that all the stakeholders involved are Italian entrepreneurs.

The main purposes of this survey are to investigate the sense of awareness of this specific category of stakeholders on the topic of sustainability and their point of view with respect to the concept of “eco-friendly” hotel. In particular, the assessment was oriented towards hotel owners' interest in adopting a more sustainable management of their businesses, the identification of green services and measures that can be provided by hotels, such as the use of biodegradable materials or the promotion of less polluting transport, and the individualization of initiatives to implement tourists' awareness of sustainability. In addition, both factors perceived as obstacles and those perceived as catalysts for the adoption and implementation of green business management were identified and evaluated.

4.5 Results

After having outlined the objectives and methodology, the results of the research that principally aims at investigating the institutional and supply-side are presented below. Initially, the results of the interview with the President of Federalberghi on initiatives, obstacles and factors for action in the field of sustainability in the tourism sector in the Emilia Romagna Region and the Province of Rimini will be presented. This will be followed by quantitative research on the hotel offer and the perception of Rimini hoteliers regarding the adoption and implementation of eco-friendly initiatives.

4.5.1 Sustainable tourism in Emilia Romagna and in the province of Rimini

As it has been previously mentioned, the interview with Alessandro Giogetti, President of Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna, has been divided into four main fields of investigation.

By starting with question number 1 (*“Nowadays, considering the Rimini province as a tourist destination, what kind of policies or initiatives are implemented to support the ecological transition process of small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism sector? Has the Emilia-Romagna Region provided tax breaks and funds for hotel facilities to implement sustainable measures?”*), it has emerged that the Federalberghi has always collaborated with the Region in order to elaborate a regulatory framework and provide funds for the sustainable management of the tourist accommodation sector. According to the President, ecological transition starts with making hospitality facilities more energy efficient and thus greener. Therefore, these are initiatives aimed at a “structural” rather than a “process” change and are intended to achieve the decarbonisation and energy efficiency of firms, including tourism businesses.

For instance, with regard to regional laws, it is worth mentioning the new Legislative Decree No. 199/2021 incorporating EU Directive 2018/2001. In particular, the norm obliges all existing buildings under construction and renovation (hotel buildings as well) to comply with the obligations set out in Article 26 of the decree, with the aim of increasing before 2030 the amount of energy from renewable sources, such as the use of photovoltaics, and to concretely reduce CO₂ emissions.¹³⁴ On the level of loans and tax breaks, President Giorgetti mentioned the Energy Fund that was reopened by the Emilia Romagna region in March 2022. The financing provided low-interest loans for improving energy efficiency, the development of self-production of energy from renewable sources,

¹³⁴ Regione Emilia Romagna, Energia. *Edilizia: nuovi obblighi energetici*.

and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.¹³⁵

To question number 7 (*“Are there any initiatives and/or projects - at regional and provincial level - to reduce environmental impact in the tourism sector in the coming years?”*), President Giorgetti anticipated that a new bonus to incentivise the use of photovoltaics will soon be officialised and come into force, which will also be available to hotel facilities in the Emilia Romagna region. During the interview, the President repeatedly emphasised the importance of facilitations and strategy policies aimed at making hotels increasingly green and energy efficient, showing the fact that becoming resilient and at the same time, increasing the value and quality of the tourism sector and the tourism enterprise itself should be a necessary change to undertake.

He analysed the province of Rimini, with a particular focus on the high agglomeration of hotel facilities that profoundly characterise the territory’s urban layout. In particular, he stated how transforming these hotels, most of which were built in the 1950s, into fully sustainable structures in terms of construction and energy production is a complex and not immediate process. However, there is a growing interest and willingness on the part of hoteliers to move in this direction, a positive sign also confirmed by the fact that the applications to request the green funding and eco-bonuses made available by the Region so far have almost all been exhausted.

As it has been previously introduced, question number 2 (*“In your opinion, is it necessary a higher degree of engagement by Federalberghi in order to assure that hotels in Rimini will become more sensitive to sustainable issues? If yes, on which factors should Federalberghi be focused on?”*) is mainly focused on identifying possible points of intervention that imply a higher degree of engagement by trade associations, such as in this case, Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna. To this question, President Giorgetti firstly highlighted the main point of strength of the association that is mostly related to its peculiar intermediary nature. Therefore, he argued how Federalberghi has always had a dialectical relation with municipalities, provincial authorities as well as regional and national bodies.

However, he stressed the necessity to intensify the involvement of the association in order to strengthen the general level of environmental awareness and make people more sensitive to the adoption of concrete eco-friendly practices. To achieve these goals, the President of Federalberghi claimed that credibility and targeted marketing actions are two important tools to make hotel owners

¹³⁵ ENEA. *Emilia Romagna riapre Fondo Energia: finanziamenti per efficienza e rinnovabili.*

more sensitive to sustainable issues and willing to make eco-friendly choices. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of pursuing common objectives that have to lead tourist facilities towards qualitative improvement of the local urban ecosystem as well as to focus more on shared norms and common strategies. In this regard, he said that Federalberghi is aiming to fully achieve these goals, even if the perspective for succeeding is in the long term.

Concerning obstacles and challenges in encouraging hotel entrepreneurs to implement sustainable measures, question number 3 (*“In your opinion, which factors act most as an obstacle for Rimini’s hotel facilities in adopting sustainable practices?”*) can provide interesting and useful insights. In particular, the President of Federalberghi noted that many hotel entrepreneurs today are still tied to the idea of maximising their profit, without considering the sustainable management of their business as a potential alternative and valid source of income. In addition, he noted that another obstacle is the potential risk of falling into “greenwashing”: a misleading practice that promotes green services, but which in reality are not, making green choices only for marketing strategies and consequently, for attracting a larger share of customers with deception instead of credibility.

Furthermore, other issues and challenges have been presented by replying to question number 6 (*“Rimini organised the first International Conference on Sustainable Tourism in 2001 during which the urgency of rethinking territorial and tourism development models with a view to sustainability was emphasised and a series of initiatives/recommendations were promoted that were then presented in the Rimini Charter. Do you believe that after 22 years, Rimini has succeeded in providing an effective alternative to mass tourism capable of guiding the various tour operators, and hotels in particular, towards the adoption of a model that respects the environment and the natural resources of the area, which are indispensable for the survival of the tourism business itself? If so, how?”*). President Giorgetti replied that he was part of the national team for this project in 2001 and he was actively involved in the elaboration of different initiatives. However, he stated that after 22 years, the province of Rimini has not managed to provide an effective and green alternative to mass tourism yet. He pointed out that since 2001 only about 50 hotels have responded positively, a very low number when compared to the huge number of hotels to which the initiatives presented in the Rimini Charter were addressed. Insufficient environmental awareness, generational issues, and structural aspects linked to the typical hotel agglomeration of the Rimini coast are, according to the President, some of the obstacles that have not yet made it possible to develop and offer more environmentally-friendly tourism in this area.

Question number 4 (“*Do you think there is a growing interest on the part of hoteliers to move towards sustainability? Are there any green hotels in the province of Rimini?*”) and question number 5 (“*At the same time, how much do you think the demand of the tourist/customer more sensitive to sustainability issues will influence the type of offer*”) sought to investigate the President’s perception of the extent to which tourists and hoteliers are sensitive to sustainable issues and consequently more interested in developing sustainable tourism. To both questions, the President emphasised that, in his opinion, both hoteliers and guests are not sufficiently sensitive to the issue of sustainability and are not willing to make concrete changes in their habits.

On the side of hoteliers, he took as an example the initiative designed after the International Conference of Sustainable Tourism in 2001. Specifically, a series of volumes containing guidelines for making a hotel eco-sensitive were distributed by mail to each single hotelier in the province of Rimini. However, the President stated in the interview that nowadays, he is more than certain that only a very small part of the hoteliers actually took this initiative seriously, emphasising once again that there is not yet sufficient environmental awareness and demand among entrepreneurs to change their usual management model. As for the second part of question number 4 on the presence of green hotels, no answer was given by the President.

Regarding question number 5, President Giorgetti said that for him, typical tourists in the province of Rimini are not very sensitive to sustainability and are willing to pay for environmentally friendly holidays. In this sense, he argued that on the part of Federalberghi and hoteliers in general, there has been some encouragement to spread green practices during holidays, but on the part of tourists there is still no real sign of interest in respecting them.

4.5.2 Sustainability in the hospitality sector of the province of Rimini

By processing the information from the questionnaire, it was observed that most of the hotels belong to the three-star category, which are mainly family-run hotels with an average of 33 rooms each. The sample, despite the low number of establishments participating in this survey, is representative of the range of hotels that tend to characterise typical Italian destinations and, in particular, the tourist structure of the Rimini province.

With regard to question number 3 aimed at evaluating how much hotel owners are willing to adopt an eco-friendlier management approach of their businesses (“*From 1 (not at all) to 5 (totally), please indicate how willing you would be to adopt more sustainable management in your hotel*”), it is

worth noting that 44% of respondents claimed that they are completely in favour of achieving this objective.

Additionally, questions number 4 and 5 mostly focused on understanding if hotels in the province of Rimini are already adopting sustainable practices in order to increase environmental awareness of their guests and staff (*“In your hotel, are you already adopting practices/attitudes aimed at raising environmental awareness among customers and staff? If you answered YES, please indicate how”*). In this respect, 88% of hotel owners replied affirmatively. In particular, among the practices and initiatives adopted and mentioned by respondents, separate collection of waste on the floors, partial substitution of single-dose and plastic products, together with laundry reuse programs and laundry minimisation are the most frequently mentioned practices. However, it is also interesting to note the choice that some hoteliers made in raising customer awareness also by providing water-saving tips, or automatic dispensers and environmentally friendly detergents.

Concerning the identification of factors mostly perceived as an obstacle, question number 6 is particularly relevant for this purpose (*“From 1 (not at all) to 5 (totally), which factors do you consider to be the most hindering in adopting and implementing sustainable hotel management?”*). Therefore, a series of potential hindering determinants have been pointed out and the most influential factors identified by respondents as barriers to implement green hotels are: the lack of tax breaks and funds for hotels to implement sustainable measures (6 out of 16 entrepreneurs completely found this factor to be a hindrance); insufficient knowledge on how to adopt a sustainable management approach; the resulting lack of support and/or guidelines from related trade associations; difficulty in cooperating with staff and customers, and organisational changes needed to make hotel sustainable (9 out of 16 respondents stated that this factor significantly influences their choices as to whether or not to make their hotel sustainable). Furthermore, it is worth noting that one respondent personally added that a potential hindering factor may be the very high initial costs that do not help to encourage hoteliers to switch to a sustainable management approach.

From the opposite perspective, question 13 focused on identifying the driving factors that can positively influence entrepreneurs' decisions to make their hotel an eco-friendly hotel (*“From 1 (not at all) to 5 (totally), to what extent do these factors push you to adopt responsible and sustainable management of your hotel?”*). Firstly, according to 63% of total respondents, the potential result of increasing the environmental, social and services-provided quality thanks to a sustainable hotel management is perceived as a good reason to act towards environmental protection. Secondly, the

reduction of hotel environmental impacts and minimization of cost savings (e.g., reduction of energy and water consumption, waste disposal costs...), were perceived as further valid reasons for choosing to undertake sustainable measures and initiatives. Thirdly, the improvement and differentiation of the hotel's image were considered by the majority of respondents as a resulting benefit to be considered and which can significantly influence the decision in favour of sustainable hotel management.

On the extent to which hotels are aware of local initiatives or projects that promote sustainability in the hospitality sector, question number 7 (*"Are you aware of any activities, projects and initiatives to promote sustainability in the hospitality sector at local level?"*) showed that 75% of respondents are not aware if there are such initiatives in their community and, consequently, what they could be.

With regard to initiatives or services concerning green mobility, question number 9 and 10 tried to examine the current situation. The first one (*"Are you aware of any initiatives undertaken by your municipality aimed at implementing and promoting sustainable mobility (e.g., encouraging the use of public transport, providing bicycles, electric scooters, discounts on bus tickets, etc.....)?"*) investigated the level of hotels' awareness about the presence of sustainable mobility measures undertaken by the province of Rimini. 9 out of 6 respondents found themselves unaware of such initiatives; those replied affirmatively mentioned public bike-sharing, electric scooters or, in the case of the city of Rimini, the "Metromare", a new public transport system that implements connections between Rimini and the city of Riccione.

The second question (*"Does your hotel participate in initiatives that encourage sustainable mobility and/or provide its guests with bicycles or other environmentally friendly means of transport?"*) was about the initiatives and measures directly adopted by hotels in order to implement sustainable mobility. In particular, all 16 respondents claimed to participate in these kinds of initiatives: for instance, they mentioned the availability of free chargers for electric cars powered by photovoltaic energy as well as bicycles, scooters and e-bikes provided at no cost. Moreover, some of the respondents said to be particularly active in encouraging their customers to prefer the use of public transport.

With regard to the last three questions, an attempt was made to investigate hoteliers' perceptions on the prospective outcomes of sustainable management of their business. Therefore, by taking into account a long-term perspective, questions number 14 and 16 aim to investigate the extent

to which running a hotel sustainably can influence the success, preservation and competitiveness of the enterprise. Question 15, on the other hand, seeks to investigate the extent to which hoteliers believe that the degree of environmental awareness of new guests has been increasing.

In particular, by analysing the answers to question 14 (*“Considering Rimini as a mass tourism destination and the consequent impacts on the environment and on the natural resources of the area, from 1 (not at all) to 5 (totally), please indicate how much choosing to manage your hotel in a sustainable way can influence the success and continuation of your business in the future.”*), 50% of respondents claimed that the implementation of an eco-friendly hotel management can strongly contribute to the success and business continuity of their enterprises.

To question 15 (*“From 1 (not at all) to 5 (totally) how aware do you think today's tourist/customer is becoming in making more sustainable travel choices?”*), 44% of respondents affirmed that today's tourist is partially environmentally aware and just 6% believed that guests are fully committed to making more sustainable travel choices.

Finally, to question 16 (*“From 1 (not at all) to 5 (totally) how much do you think that sustainable management of your business can make your facility more competitive compared to others and to the demand of an ever-greener tourist?”*), 50% of hoteliers positively replied, claiming that an environmental management system can contribute in a very significant way to making companies more competitive and able to respond to the demand for greener tourism.

4.5.3 Obstacles and challenges to the development of sustainable tourism in Rimini

Based on the analysis of the results of the interview with the President of Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna, Giorgetti Alessandro, and the questionnaire administered to hoteliers in the province of Rimini, some interesting considerations and insights emerge. In particular, comparing the responses and information gathered, a number of factors perceived as obstacles can be identified from the perspective of both the trade association, in this case represented by Federalberghi, and hoteliers. As regards, it has been noted that the first hindering factor can be identified with the lack of tax breaks and funds aimed at financially supporting and encouraging hotel businesses to become more energy efficient and willing to adopt a management system in favour of environmental protection. Therefore, given that the majority of hoteliers in the province of Rimini perceived this aspect as an obstacle, it can be deduced not only that most hoteliers consider the financial incentives actually provided by

institutions to be insufficient, but also that the initial costs required to make the structure of hotels more sustainable are too high and difficult to cover independently, especially when it comes to small and medium-sized and family-run businesses.

Another aspect worth mentioning and offering further insights is the visible interest and willingness on the part of hoteliers to move towards an increasingly green management of their hotel. Contrary to what was asserted by President Giorgetti, data collected from the survey confirms that hoteliers tend to be more open and committed to sustainability within the hospitality industry, identifying sustainable management as a source of potential benefits. In particular, it can be seen that reducing environmental impacts, saving energy, increasing the environmental and social quality of their companies and their brand image, and improving competitiveness and business continuity are all perceived as positive aspects in favour of a more sustainable choice. This attitude towards a pro-environmental approach can be confirmed by the fact that all the hoteliers surveyed in the questionnaire had already decided to adopt some green practices without any kind of formal obligation on their part, which could also be supported by the fact that they did not perceive the lack of specific standards and national or international norms as hindering factors.

For this reason, it can be said that the choice of hotel entrepreneurs is a voluntary choice made in response to a need that can be driven, on the one hand, by the changing tourism demand and, on the other hand, by the increased sense of responsibility and awareness on sustainability issues within the hospitality sector. However, despite this reported inclination of hoteliers towards a greener management approach, two hindering factors that slow down the ecological transition process can be identified.

On the one hand, it can be observed that there is a knowledge gap between what hoteliers actually know and what they actually should and would know in order to improve their environmental competences and translate them into concrete practices. On the other hand, a communication gap can be identified as well. In particular, the previous knowledge gap could be filled by the sharing of specific guidelines and initiatives or projects aimed at spreading environmental knowledge and increasing environmental sensibility. However, the majority of hoteliers declared to be unaware of the implemented local initiatives concerning for instance green mobility or other eco-friendly practices; a communicative divergence that was also confirmed by President Giorgetti who, during his interview, insisted on the fact that the initiative aimed at spreading guidelines and that was designed as part of the strategy presented in the first convention on sustainable tourism in Rimini in 2001, was not able to generate a broad and successful response.

As a result, it was noted that communication strategies do not work efficiently, with the risk of leaving many initiatives or projects in the background and not taken into consideration. In order to eliminate the points of interference that would ensure a more fluid and straightforward implementation of sustainable measures, it is necessary to close these two gaps.

Finally, another hindering factor that can be identified thanks to the analysis of the interview with the President of Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna and the answers stemming from the questionnaires is the fact that the level of guest's awareness, contrary to what was expected, still seems not so high. In fact, since from the point of view of the hoteliers and the President Giorgetti guests seem to be only partially more environmentally aware, and this will not have as significant a boost as a more radical interest on their part might have. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasising that this does not mean that tourists are not interested in making more sustainable travel choices, but that their attitudes and habits are still in a process of transition in the direction of sustainability which has not been completed yet.

4.5.4 Individualization of factors leading to the development of sustainable policies and management of the touristic industry

Once the main factors acting as obstacles in the application of a sustainable management approach within the hospitality industry in the Rimini area have been identified, it is equally important to bear in mind that they should also be seen as a starting point on which to intervene in order to find effective alternatives and identify driving forces that can contribute to the achievement of environmentally-oriented goals, not only in this tourist destination but within a broader context as well.

Following this line of thought, the first aspect that needs to be addressed is the availability of funds and tax breaks from regional and national authorities. It has emerged that financial aids play a significant role in prompting individual hoteliers to choose to adopt a more sustainable approach and make their buildings more efficient in environmental and, consequently, energy and economic terms. In this way, directing a higher amount of financial resources towards the creation of funds and subsidies to support small and medium-sized tourist enterprises towards the ecological transition, by helping them to mainly cover the high start-up costs, is an important first challenge.

A second factor to be taken into account is the necessity to fill the knowledge and communication gap that have been mentioned in the previous paragraph. To this end, a more proactive engagement of trade associations could be identified as a driving force for the development and implementation of a sustainable management approach in the hospitality sector. Therefore, due to their typical nature as mediators, trade associations are seen as one of the most suitable actors to establish dialectical relations between Italian hoteliers and local, regional or national authorities.

Indeed, by representing the interests of hotel owners and involving all related stakeholders, trade associations should better communicate and promote effective initiatives and active projects aimed at sustainability and provide support and assistance to those businesses that want to become sustainable but do not know how. In this way, the knowledge and communication gap could be reduced, making the ecological transition process within the hotel industry easier to achieve and to implement effectively and simply.

While continuing to point out the elements on which direct action is needed, it is also worth mentioning the necessity of introducing further shared standards and well-defined objectives. Indeed, it is true that in the survey most hoteliers stated that the lack of specific standards was not seen as a hindering factor. However, their opinions can also be seen as an indication of distrust towards institutional authorities, a harmful phenomenon that it is important to counteract.

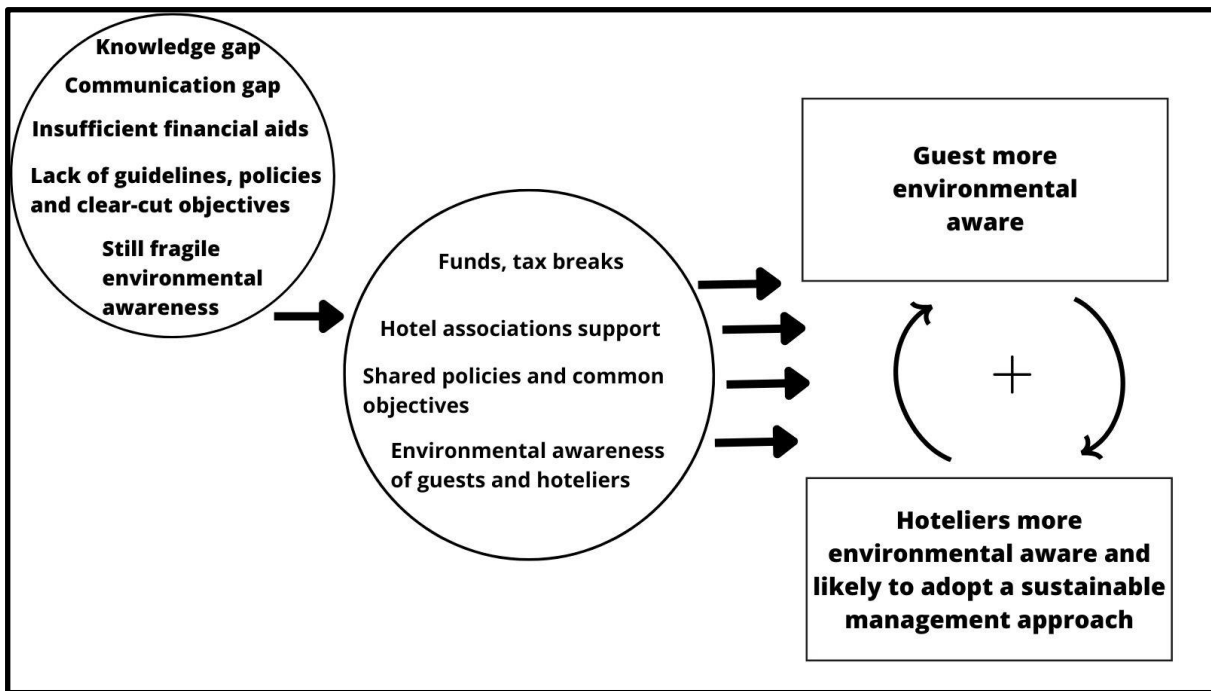
Therefore, by reinforcing a sense of trust in institutions through the creation of targeted and efficient common objectives and the implementation of specific environmental standards, consensus and compliance would be more likely to foster the dissemination of common guidelines and practices for the development of sustainable measures in the hospitality sector. Moreover, thanks to a clearer defined regulatory framework, the risk of incurring green washing strategies would decrease and, in the meanwhile, the knowledge and communication gap would be bridged.

Finally, a higher degree of environmental awareness on the part of both hoteliers and guests could be identified as a further driving force leading to the implementation of sustainable hotel policies and management. In particular, this is very crucial because it triggers a mechanism whereby actions and choices drive the different actors involved to collectively move towards a greener approach. Therefore, on the one hand, through a higher amount of funds, tax benefits, a greater support from trade associations and the establishment of shared, environmentally-oriented policies, an attempt is made to overcome fragmentation and provide a common pathway so as to make hoteliers more encouraged and stimulated to undertake the ecological transition.

In the meanwhile, moving in this direction can help to reduce the lack of knowledge which many hoteliers can suffer from and the communication gap between, on one side, the initiatives and guidelines already provided by local authorities or other organisations and what hoteliers can actually know; on the other side, between what and how hoteliers should communicate and what and how is actually communicated to their customers. Therefore, increasing awareness not only of hoteliers but also of their customers is particularly effective in green implementation since the hotel, by implementing a series of best practices, can recreate an educational and learning context able to influence and shape guests' habits, too.

Furthermore, it is also important to highlight the positive impacts that the mutual relation between the level of environmental awareness of guests and the one of hoteliers generates. In fact, the more aware tourists are, the more so are guests and consequently, in order to respond to the increasingly green customer demand, hoteliers are more likely to adopt sustainable practices.

Finally, the implementation of green funds or tax breaks; a higher level of involvement and support by Italian hotel associations; a set of environmental-oriented policies and guidelines as well as a direct intervention on communication strategies and the spread of knowledge concerning sustainability are interrelated and interdependent factors belonging to a positive loop. In particular, by intervening on the implementation of one of these components, a chain reaction can be generated so as to act on the other linked factors. In this way, a series of dynamics that lead to strengthening this loop and multiplying the adoption of actions in favour of a sustainable management approach in the hospitality sector can be generated and efficiently undertaken.



Source: own elaboration

4.5.5 Limits of the quantitative research

It can be observed that quantitative research presents some limitations. In particular, it is worth noting that the sample of 16 enterprises taken into consideration is small and cannot sufficiently represent the entire hotel sector in the Rimini province, which is composed of a larger number of hotels. Furthermore, the only channel through which the survey was conducted was by using paper format questionnaires administered during a single day. This did not contribute to satisfactorily reaching a higher number of respondents and did not allow to generalise in a precise way all data collected in the research. However, despite these limitations, the sample was useful to approximately get an idea of how hotel enterprises in the Rimini province are currently moving towards sustainability and identifying the main factors to be focused on.

4.6 Case history

In order to better understand to what extent the ecological transition process could be concretely undertaken in making tourist facilities sustainable, it has been decided to take into account in this paragraph the experience of an eco-hotel in the province of Rimini. More specifically, Stefano Poggi, one of the two director managers and owners of this hotel, has been directly interviewed so as to take a closer look at what, in this case, were the pushing and hindering factors in making his hotel sustainable.

Therefore, Stefano and Federico Poggi are the second generation that manages the Eco Family Hotel San Salvador in Bellaria Igea Marina, a small seaside village in the province of Rimini. Having always grown up with a farming culture and thanks to the passion for the countryside transmitted by their parents, they have always had a strong sensitivity towards environmental responsibility. For this reason, about ten years ago, the two brothers decided to pursue the direction of sustainability, responding to their belief in doing the right choice and transferring their sustainable way of life also into the way they manage and work within their hotel business. Today, the hotel is a member of Legambiente and since 2014 their active commitment to adopting and communicating sustainable measures has won them important awards from the Legambiente Turismo Association, the Emilia Romagna Region or from other international travel sites such as TripAdvisor¹³⁶.

In particular, among the main green practices and measures undertaken it can be mentioned separate waste collection; reduction in the use of plastic and single-dose products; adoption of accelerators and flow reducers; and thanks to the waste heat from the total recovery chiller, they can produce hot water, too. In addition, it can be pointed out the reduction of energy consumption through photovoltaic panels; photo-catalytic paint able to absorb and eliminate Co₂; use of organic products; promotion of public transport, with discounts for those coming by public means and of sustainable mobility by providing electric car recharging. Finally, they engage in effective communication through the promotion and dissemination of these green practices using printed information panels or digital material, such as videos for their guests concerning practical tips on eco-friendly habits.

However, the main objective of the interview with hotel manager Stefano Poggi has not strictly been to individualise the sustainable measures and initiatives that can be implemented, but rather to take his personal experience as a model to be inspired, identifying what have been the drivers and

¹³⁶ Hotel San Salvador, Eco Green Chic, *Vacanze eco-sostenibili*.

obstacles in making his hotel eco-friendly and consequently, to understand where to intervene so that other hotels can move towards sustainable management of their businesses.

In particular, the first two questions aimed at investigating the main factors that encouraged Stefano and his brother Federico Poggi to move towards sustainability within the hospitality sector (*“What stimulated your interest in environmental sustainability in the hospitality sector?”*; *“What were the main factors that prompted you to transform your business into an eco-friendly hotel?”*). As regards, Mr. Poggi began by replying that environmental awareness is a value he is very attached to and strongly believes in. He also stated how the hotel’s green identity leads to an increase in competitiveness and differentiation from the quite homogeneous offer of hotels in the area, and this is also observed in the continuous positive feedback from customers, who recognise the quality offered and encourage him to continue along this path.

At the same time, he emphasised that choosing environmentally friendly products is not always synonymous with unaffordable costs and that very often, the price difference is minimal but the environmental benefit is very high. In fact, he argued how environmental savings go hand in hand with economic savings, another factor that Mr. Poggi considered a good reason to make more conscious environmental choices.

The other two questions instead, were focused on analysing what were for him the hindering factors (*“Based on your experience, what have been and what are still those obstacles/or factors to implement that slow down the adoption of a greener management system in your hotel?”*; *“Which sustainable practices and measures are the most difficult to adopt and enforce?”*). It turned out that for Mr Poggi, structural changes involving the application of new green technologies are not always easy to implement, especially when the hotel structures are very old. Therefore, as they involve considerable investments, he affirmed that funds or financial incentives are still lacking and do not really support small and medium-sized enterprises to make their structures environmentally efficient.

Furthermore, he put emphasis on the fact that communication problems hinder the implementation of sustainable measures. In particular, he highlighted the difficulty of clearly communicating to his guests and staff the practices to be followed and making them understand the reason why they should comply with them.

Therefore, he explained how the risk of falling into misunderstandings with tourists is easy to encounter, a risk that, according to him, is also reinforced by green washing strategies that, on the one hand, do not contribute to providing transparency and reinforcing credibility and, on the other hand, do not correctly disseminate the right information and do not really educate guests towards a conscious respect of sustainable measures.

By going on with the interview, to questions regarding on which factors it is necessary to intervene (*“Do you believe that, at an institutional level, if there were more active policies and targeted regulations, it would be possible to make the Italian tourism sector, and in this case, the hotel sector, more sustainable?”*; *“Based on your experience, what other actors should intervene to provide guidelines and promote sustainable management. In what way?”*), Mr. Poggi emphasised the strong importance of implementing efficient communication. In particular, he argued that there is a need for more effective and clearer communication on the availability of guidelines that should be provided by trade associations. In fact, he pointed out that there is a growing number of entrepreneurs interested in making their hotels more environmentally friendly but very often they do not know how to go about it or who to ask for assistance.

For example, with regard to his personal experience, Mr. Poggi stated that the only clear guidelines he received were from his membership of Legambiente, which supported and directed him on all the steps to take to adopt sustainable measures in his hotel. For this reason and because there is still no standardised pathway towards the ecological transition of small and medium-sized hotels, Poggi insists on the importance of intervening in the communication channel, openly stating that *“communication must be at the centre, everything depends on knowledge and the right information”*.

In this research, it has also emerged that another important factor playing an influential role is represented by the degree of environmental awareness. In this way, the last two questions tried to investigate if for Mr. Poggi, the environmental awareness of both hoteliers and guests is growing (*“In your opinion, how much is the level of environmental awareness on the part of hoteliers increasing?”*; *“In your opinion, how much is the level of environmental awareness on the part of customers increasing?”*). According to him, environmental awareness of hotel owners is increasing even though in a less pace with respect to other Italian regions, such as Veneto or Trentino-Alto Adige. As far as guests are concerned, he confirmed that they are becoming more interested in environmental issues and likely to choose for eco-friendly holidays, too. In particular, by referring to his personal experience, he said that the majority of customers appreciate the “green mission” of the Eco Hotel San Salvador and recognise in this hotel a different opportunity to spend their holidays. However, Mr. Poggi highlighted that, despite this positive trend towards environmental awareness on the part of both hoteliers and guests, there is still much to be done. According to him, hotels should also implement efficient communication and leverage the strong educational impact they have on guests to help spread their environmental knowledge, as well as their internalisation of eco-friendly practices and, consequently, their environmental awareness.

4.7 Conclusions

This final chapter is opened with a general presentation of the Emilia - Romagna region. Afterwards, particular emphasis has been placed on the touristic sector of the Rimini province, by analysing how tourism in the area was born, how it has evolved and what are the main features that characterise this sector today. In the meanwhile, it has been observed that the considerable anthropic pressure of tourism in the Rimini area has generated significant negative impacts, mainly due to waste production and traffic congestion that are contributing to damaging the quality of the local natural environment. Because of the importance of this sector in environmental but also economic terms, it is considered necessary to intervene in the development of sustainable tourism. Indeed, it is important to bear in mind that natural resources are a source of attraction for the tourist destination and their protection can preserve this sector over the long run, not only from an environmental point of view, but also by making it a continuous economic source of income.

To understand the way to undertake this path without falling into broad and superficial generalisations, the territorial context of Rimini was analysed and attention was paid to a subcategory of the tourism sector, the hotel industry. In particular, the purpose was to analyse the extent to which the hospitality industry in the area is moving in this direction and to identify which factors hinder or encourage the adoption of policies and initiatives that make it possible to look at the tourism sector and especially the hospitality sector from a sustainability perspective. Following this line of thought, opinions of the main stakeholders involved were taken into consideration throughout the survey administered to hoteliers and a personal structured interview to the President of Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna. In addition, the case history on the experience shared by the hotel manager Stefano Poggi helped to provide a concrete example to be taken into analysis and further insights that in some respects confirmed what had emerged from previous research phases.

CONCLUSION

In light of what has been discussed so far, making the hospitality sector more environmentally aware is not simply a common tendency originated by the growing engagement of some international political actors. In fact, behind this logic there is an essential need for change aimed at protecting natural resources, reducing negative impacts on the environmental and human lives and, in the meanwhile, preserving the hospitality and tourism sector itself over the long run. Furthermore, shifting towards sustainability is an important opportunity for growth and improvement in both the quality and value of each single company from an environmental and economic perspective.

Therefore, the adoption of a green approach in hotel management, through the implementation of well-defined eco-friendly practices, policies and initiatives, makes it possible to respond to the growing demand of an increasingly environmentally aware traveller; to differentiate the hotel supply and its competitiveness in economic terms; and, finally, to actively contribute to the dissemination of greater environmental awareness in line with the urgent call to action designed in the UN Agenda 2030 with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Taking action to protect the environment is an imperative for the international community and to this end, it is important to look at and intervene on all sectors which world development is based on, such as tourism and the related hospitality industry. In particular, by applying sustainable development to the hospitality sector, environmental protection can go hand in hand with economic growth and become a viable and effective alternative for undertaking the ecological transition in the touristic sector. As regards, it can be said that at the international level there is a certain interest and commitment to identify and highlight which kind of policy tools, guidelines and measures are needed to successfully achieve sustainable tourism development. However, in order to ensure that sustainability in the tourism sector becomes an effective reality, it is necessary that the direction to be taken for achieving change should not only be indicated from the top but pursued by all stakeholders involved, including the local community actors belonging to the tourism destination as well.

Therefore, starting from a more local vision and analysing the different actors that come into play, particularly emphasis was put on the hospitality sector and the type of relationship existing between hotels and the environment. More specifically, if on the one hand the concept of “green hotel” (a hotel committed to respecting and implementing standards of environmental and social sustainability) was introduced, on the other hand, reference was made to those certifications or eco-labels that represent those sustainability criteria attesting the extent to which a company can be considered “green” or not. As regards, it has been observed that larger hotel companies are more likely

to take on the typical characteristics of green hotels, compared to small and medium-sized hotels, which very often find themselves lacking the economic resources and expertise needed to transform their facility into a green hotel.

In this thesis, the hospitality sector in Italy, a destination with a long and consolidated tourist tradition, has been taken as an object of study in order to investigate the current scenario and understand if and how this sector is moving towards sustainability. In particular, it has been noted that the majority of Italian enterprises are small and medium-sized hotels that, being independently managed, can represent the typical fragmented reality of the Italian context. To further explore this topic, the situation in the province of Rimini has been analysed, which presents similarities and shared patterns with the hospitality industry in Italy.

Empirical research conducted in the examined area has shown that stakeholders such as hoteliers, trade associations or guests are increasingly more concerned in concepts like sustainability and environmental awareness. In addition, on the basis of information gathered by the survey, the interview and the case history, it was possible to identify the main factors generally perceived as obstacles and, from these, to define the areas to intervene in, so as to improve the adoption of green practices, policies and initiatives for the development of a sustainable management approach in the hospitality sector.

Hindering factors include the insufficient incentives or tax breaks provided by national authorities; the organisational and structural changes needed to make the hotel energy efficient; the lack of clear guidelines and support, and a common strategic path to be implemented especially on the side of trade associations. In addition, a knowledge and communication gap have been identified which, on the one hand, means that the ecological transition process does not take place dynamically and immediately and, on the other hand, that there is a risk of misunderstandings, lack of transparency and falling into “greenwashing” practices.

However, the drivers for sustainability in hotel management were also analysed. In particular, this research showed that among the good reasons for adopting a sustainable approach in one’s hotel, there is the idea that not only the individual company can benefit in terms of increased competitiveness and cost savings, but that the environment can also benefit through the reduction of environmental negative impacts caused by the hotel and the growth of environmental awareness and dissemination of eco-friendly practices.

Nevertheless, there is still much to be done and targeted action is required on several fronts. In particular, there is a need for greater involvement and active support with trade associations, for implementing shared policies, common objectives and guidelines that can adapt to the variety and specificity of local dimensions. In the meanwhile, a call to action should be important for a more effective and clearer communication between all stakeholders in this sector, so as to look and act towards a more common and transparent direction. In this way, information can be disseminated among hoteliers, guests, hotel staff or trade associations and the level of environmental knowledge can be increased. As a result, environmental awareness will be strengthened and, starting from a small reality such as the hotel industry, a series of dynamics that will push multi-layered forces to focus on the adoption and implementation of policies, initiatives and practices that make the hospitality and tourism sector look at sustainability will be triggered.

Finally, it can be concluded that making the hospitality sector more sustainable is an urgent necessity for the preservation of the environment, human lives and one of the main world's economic drivers like the touristic sector. Indeed, greening the hospitality sector through a bottom-up approach, in synergy with institutional actors, can lead to multiple positive effects on hoteliers and consumers, while improving environmental and economic prospects over the long run. This would have a positive impact on the link between the tourism sector and the environment and, through a spill-over effect, could contribute to the spread of the green transition on all fronts. The path towards this goal has already begun, although it is still an evolving process: now is the time to act.

APPENDIX

1. Interview questions with the President of Federalberghi - Emilia Romagna

- 1) Al giorno d'oggi, prendendo in considerazione la provincia di Rimini come destinazione turistica, che tipo di politiche o iniziative vengono messe in atto per sostenere il processo di transizione ecologica delle piccole-medie imprese nel settore turistico? La Regione Emilia-Romagna ha previsto delle agevolazioni fiscali e fondi destinati alle strutture alberghiere per l'implementazione di misure sostenibili?
- 2) Secondo lei, è necessario un intervento/coinvolgimento maggiore da parte vostra per garantire che gli alberghi Riminesi adottino un approccio più sensibile al tema della sostenibilità? Se sì, su quali fattori bisognerebbe fare più leva?
- 3) Secondo lei, quali fattori invece agiscono più da ostacolo per le strutture ricettive alberghiere Riminesi nell'adozione di pratiche sostenibili?
- 4) Ritieni che ci sia un crescente interesse da parte degli albergatori a indirizzarsi verso un'ottica di sostenibilità? Nella provincia di Rimini sono presenti dei green hotel?
- 5) Allo stesso tempo, quanto ritieni che la domanda del turista/cliente più sensibile alle tematiche della sostenibilità vada ad influenzare il tipo di offerta?
- 6) Rimini ha organizzato la prima Conferenza Internazionale sul turismo sostenibile nel 2001 durante la quale è stata sottolineata l'urgenza di ripensare ai modelli di sviluppo territoriale e turistico in un'ottica di sostenibilità e di promuovere una serie di iniziative/raccomandazioni che sono poi state presentate nella Carta di Rimini. Crede che dopo 22 anni, Rimini sia riuscita a fornire un'alternativa efficace al turismo di massa in grado di guidare i diversi operatori turistici, ed in particolare gli alberghi, verso l'adozione di un modello che rispetta l'ambiente e le risorse naturali del luogo, indispensabili per la sopravvivenza dell'attività turistica stessa? Se sì, in che modo?
- 7) Per i prossimi anni, nel settore turistico, sono previste iniziative e/o progetti - a livello regionale e provinciale - volti a ridurre l'impatto ambientale?

2. Survey administered to hotel owners

LA SOSTENIBILITÀ NEL SETTORE DELL'HOSPITALITY

Mi chiamo Anna Rosa Rubinetti e sono una studentessa del Corso di Laurea Magistrale di Relazioni Internazionali Comparate, con indirizzo Global Studies, all'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia. Per contribuire alla mia tesi "A green perspective for the hospitality sector" supervisionata dal relatore Prof. Soriani Stefano, sto svolgendo una ricerca relativa alla sostenibilità ambientale nel settore dell'hospitality, con un particolare focus sulle attività ricettive alberghiere in provincia di Rimini. Vi chiederei gentilmente di compilare il questionario, le cui risposte e dati verranno trattati in forma anonima. Durerà solo 5 minuti! Grazie per la collaborazione.

1. Indicare la tipologia di hotel

- 1 stella
- 2 stelle
- 3 stelle
- 4 stelle
- 5 stelle
- Altro:

2. Di quante camere dispone la sua struttura?

.....

- 3.** La sostenibilità ambientale nel settore alberghiero sta diventando un concetto di crescente interesse generale, basato sul rispetto per l'ambiente e sull'idea di sviluppare un'attività turistica alberghiera che, consapevole dei potenziali impatti negativi ambientali, miri alla qualità del servizio anche attraverso la qualità ambientale che offre grazie ad atteggiamenti e pratiche sostenibili (Es: raccolta differenziata ai piani, utilizzo materiale biodegradabile, sostituzione prodotti monodose, sensibilizzare il cliente e il proprio staff attraverso una corretta comunicazione delle informazioni e dei comportamenti...).

Da **1 (per niente)** a **5 (totalmente)**, indichi quanto sarebbe disposto ad adottare una gestione più sostenibile nel suo albergo. (*Contrassegna con una x*)

*per niente
disposto*

*totalmente
disposto*

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

- 4.** Nel vostro albergo, state già adottando delle pratiche/atteggiamenti che mirano a sensibilizzare il cliente e il proprio personale al rispetto ambientale? *Contrassegna solo un ovale*
- SÌ
 - NO

5. Se ha risposto SÌ, indicare come:

.....
.....
.....
.....

6. Da 1 (per niente) a 5 (totalmente), quali sono i fattori che ritiene più di ostacolo nell'adottare e implementare una gestione dell'albergo in chiave sostenibile?

	<i>per niente di ostacolo</i>		<i>totalmente di ostacolo</i>		
	1	2	3	4	5
Mancanza di norme specifiche da parte delle istituzioni nazionali e internazionali	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mancanza di agevolazioni fiscali e fondi destinati alle strutture alberghiere per l'implementazione di misure sostenibili	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mancanza di supporto e/o linee guida da parte delle associazioni di categoria	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Scarsa conoscenza in merito a come poter adottare una gestione sostenibile del proprio hotel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficile collaborazione da parte del proprio personale e/o clienti	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cambiamenti organizzativi necessari per rendere il proprio albergo sostenibile	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Altro:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Risulta essere a conoscenza di attività, progetti e iniziative volte a promuovere la sostenibilità nel settore dell'hospitality a livello locale? *Contrassegna solo un ovale*

- SI
- NO

8. Se ha risposto SÌ, indicare come:

.....

.....

.....

9. Risulta essere a conoscenza di iniziative messe in campo dal suo comune volte ad implementare e promuovere la mobilità sostenibile (Es: incentivare l'utilizzo dei mezzi pubblici, mettere a disposizione bici, pattini elettrici, sconti sui biglietti del bus, ecc....)? *Contrassegna solo un ovale*

- SI
- NO

10. Se ha risposto SÌ, indicare come:

.....

11. Il suo hotel partecipa ad iniziative che incentivano la mobilità sostenibile e/o fornisce ai propri clienti biciclette o altri mezzi ecologicamente più sostenibili?

- SÌ
- NO

12. Se ha risposto SÌ, indicare come:

.....

13. Da 1 (per niente) a 5 (totalmente), quanto questi fattori la spingono ad adottare una gestione sostenibile del proprio hotel?

	<i>per niente influyente</i>					<i>totalmente influyente</i>	
	1	2	3	4	5		
Ridurre il proprio impatto negativo sull'ambiente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		
Risparmio economico (Es: riduzione dei consumi e quindi dei costi di energia, acqua, produzione e smaltimento rifiuti...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		
Sviluppo in termini di qualità (ambientale, sociale e dei servizi offerti) della propria struttura ricettiva	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		
Potenziare e differenziare l'immagine del proprio hotel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		
Altro:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		

14. Prendendo in considerazione Rimini come destinazione turistica di massa e i conseguenti impatti sull'ambiente e sulle risorse naturali della zona, **da 1 (per niente) a 5 (totalmente)**, indichi quanto scegliere di gestire il proprio hotel in maniera sostenibile possa influire nel garantire, anche in futuro, il successo e continuazione della sua attività. (*Contrassegna con una x*)

<i>per niente</i>					<i>totalmente</i>
1	2	3	4	5	

15. Da **1 (per niente) a 5 (totalmente)** quanto ritiene che il turista/cliente di oggi stia diventando più consapevole nel fare scelte di viaggio più sostenibili? (*Contrassegna con una x*)

<i>per niente consapevole</i>					<i>totalmente consapevole</i>
1	2	3	4	5	

16. Da **1 (per niente) a 5 (totalmente)** quanto ritiene che una gestione sostenibile della propria attività possa rendere la sua struttura più competitiva rispetto ad altre e alla domanda di un turista sempre più green?

<i>per niente</i>					<i>totalmente</i>
1	2	3	4	5	

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