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ECONOMIA E DIRITTO DELLE IMPRESE

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COLLANA DI STUDI DI MANAGEMENT
ECONOMIA E DIRITTO DELLE IMPRESE



ad honorem della professoressa Isabella Marchini

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Paola M. A. Paniccia, Silvia Baiocco

**Developing Sustainable Tourism through
Co-evolution of tourism firms
and destinations**

Hospitality models, determinants
and key management tools





Aracne editrice

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Gioacchino Onorati editore S.r.l. – unipersonale

www.gioacchinoonoratieditore.it

info@gioacchinoonoratieditore.it

via Vittorio Veneto, 20

00020 Canterano (RM)

(06) 45551463

ISBN 978-88-255-3769-7

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I edizione: ottobre 2020

To Roberto Cafferata
whose thought has brightened
this book.

Paola and Silvia

Tourism destinations can maintain a competitive advantage only if they orient themselves towards sustainability.

J. R. Brent Ritchie and Geoffrey Ian
Crouch

Pioneers of the destination competitiveness studies

“Sustainability must no longer be a niche part of tourism but must be the new norm for every part of our sector. [...] It is in our hands to transform tourism and that emerging from Covid-19 becomes a turning point for sustainability”.

Zurab Pololikashvili
Secretary-General of the UNWTO

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*To all researchers, students and practitioners
interested in improving the “quality of life”*

Introduction

The world of tourism organizations and that of tourists are increasingly playing a key role in the development of many countries worldwide due to their strong dependence on natural and cultural resources. It is significant that in the face of the current unprecedented emergency caused by Covid-19, the World Tourism Organization, while forecasting the worst results of the tourism sector since 1950, states that tourism is uniquely placed to lead future recovery by promoting solidarity and trust (UNWTO, 2020a). Also in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) the strategic role of the tourism sector in fostering prosperity and human well-being is repeatedly stressed. Indeed, over the past half century, the tourism sector has become one of the largest worldwide, contributing to 10.3% of global GDP and 10% of employment, mainly thanks to a multitude of small and micro enterprises (80% of the sector). These data are relevant especially in the current global society affected by the growing environmental fragility. In this regard, it is worth noting that the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* clearly frames the human development issue within a reactive natural environment.

In parallel, sustainable tourism has become increasingly popular as field of research since the late 1980s, closely linked to the — ever-current — issue of sustainable development (Bramwell et al., 2017). Attention has been given to elaborating conceptualizations, perspectives and methodologies together with case studies which explore ways of applying sustainable principles to practice.

To date, the meaning of tourism as a factor of sustainable development has seemingly reached consensus among scholars (Liu, 2003; Zolfani et al., 2015). However, despite there are numerous studies that emphasize the aforesaid link, the focus of these studies remains primarily on the role of policy makers in stimulating sustainable tourism paths through policies and measures. Moreover, the role of tourism firms in promoting social change within a destination using their skills, interacting with the host community and local institutions,

modifying their business sector has been recently analysed, but only by a limited number of scholars.

Therefore, very few efforts have been aimed at linking tourism to sustainable development. Indeed, it seems that the meaning and implications of sustainable tourism development have not received appropriate attention in literature. While the positive consequences have been highlighted, its driving processes have been neglected. In this regard, Bramwell and Lane (2014) — the founder editors of the highly influential *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* — clearly highlight a recent growing interest in theoretical perspectives for an exhaustive understanding of the complex interconnections underlying sustainable tourism paths.

This introduced, the main contribution of the book, as stated in the title, is to increase our understanding of how sustainable tourism paths take place within a destination looking at key actors and driving processes (i.e., temporal dynamics and determinants). In order to do so, we illustrate a co-evolutionary framework developed in our previous theoretical and empirical researches to explain the intertwined dynamics underlying sustainable hospitality models and their determinants, thus their driving processes. In this book, the framework is applied to a significant number of hospitality models from our researches. These models are jointly analyzed as a type of sustainable tourism path focusing on its temporal dynamics and determinants. Consequently, a conceptualization of sustainable tourism is offered.

On the basis of a critical review of the *state-of-the-art* regarding sustainable tourism literature, the authors argue that an understanding of the nature and dynamic of tourism firms-destination relationship allows to examine, in depth, the implications of sustainable tourism, thus to appropriately conceptualize it. Indeed, these implications arise from the dynamic interaction between society, environment and economy, both at the macro, meso and micro levels (Norgaard, 1994; Liu, 2003; Panicia and Baiocco, 2020). Therefore, sustainable tourism paths cannot be exhaustively analyzed by considering destinations, tourism firms and their environments as separate and fixed units of analysis.

In this book co-evolution is considered a useful research perspective to improve the impacts of sustainable tourism. In fact, through this lens the relationship between the two main tourism organizations (i.e., firms and destinations) is conceived as circular (Weick, 1969) with mutual

influence and dialectical (Benson, 1977; Cafferata, 2016). In addition, it is maintained that some well-known key management tools are an indispensable support to solve common problems to tourism organizations in their continuous adaptation to evolving environments, external and internal (Paniccia and Basciano, 2014).

The book brings together the results of previous theoretical and empirical researches, and reflections from teaching activity carried out by the authors in the field of tourism. It is articulated in the following four chapters.

Chapter 1 “*On the tourism phenomenon and its protagonists*” provides insights on the main phases of evolution of the phenomenon looking at tourism firms and destinations as interdependent systemic organizations, and tourists as participants of both, in the attempt of providing refined definitions of them. From this chapter, some important implications for the following analyses derive.

Chapter 2 “*A co-evolutionary understanding of tourism firms and destinations’ change towards sustainability: Theoretical background*” critically reviews the *state-of-the-art* regarding sustainable tourism research from which some weaknesses on the link between sustainable tourism and sustainable development concepts emerge. This leads to argue that the co-evolution concept can constitute an effective research perspective to address the sustainable tourism issue by looking at key actors and driving processes. The chapter, thus, provides the main theoretical foundations of the next two ones.

Chapter 3 “*The interplay of hospitality models with sustainable tourism: Evidence from Italian tourism firms*” attempts to find if the link between sustainable tourism and sustainable development exists in the real life of tourism organizations. To do so, the processes underlying sustainable tourism paths are analyzed through a longitudinal collective multiple-cases study of a significant number of sustainable hospitality models. From this analysis we derive some implications for managing tourism firms and destinations.

Chapter 4 “*Key management tools for strengthening the synergy between tourism firms and destinations*” offers a sufficiently exhaustive overview of some key management tools selected by the authors on the basis of the implications deriving from the previous two chapters. These tools — well known in business and management literature — are illustrated shedding light on their usefulness for tourism firms, but also

for destinations in order to solve common problems in their continuous adaptation to environmental evolutions.

Overall, the book contributes to the research and practice about sustainable tourism adding new elements to the promising, yet still scarce, co-evolutionary studies in this field. In fact, through a co-evolutionary lens, it proposes a possible conceptualization of sustainable tourism consistent with the holistic and dynamic vision of sustainable development. This conceptualization attempts to respond to the need widely felt in literature of strengthening the link between tourism and development. In addition, our study feeds the debate on the issue by verifying this link in the real life of tourism organizations and providing some key management tools useful in supporting firms and destinations in their adaptation.

The book is intended not only for academics in particular, but also for decision makers and policy makers, to appropriately address the multiple problems associated to sustainable tourism, and thus to the progress towards sustainability. Moreover, it can result interesting for students to learn how tourism organizations can lead social and cultural progress, especially in the current scenario severely damaged by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Of course, this book does not have the ambition to be conclusive or exhaustive considering the complexity and breadth of the issues dealt with. Rather, it aims to contribute to the evolving multidisciplinary debate on the topic of sustainable tourism shedding light on the role of tourism firms in the evolutionary change.

On the tourism phenomenon and its protagonists

SILVIA BAIOTTO *

Overview of the chapter

The tourism phenomenon is continuously evolving and well reflects the changes in society, signalling opportunities and challenges related to the progress towards sustainability.

Over time, academic attention towards tourism issues and its multidimensional impact has constantly grown in tandem with the worldwide increasing environmental fragility and scarcity of natural resources on which it depends. Great efforts have been devoted to analyse the sustainability of destinations mainly highlighting the positive consequence of sustainable tourism paths. However, scant attention has been paid to the effects of the interactions among tourism firms, destinations and tourists. Indeed, these entities are here considered the main protagonists of the phenomenon and of its evolution. In particular, while the role of local institutions and polices has been widely analyzed, that of tourism firms in promoting social changes within a destination reinforcing its competitiveness has been recently addressed but only by a limited number of scholars.

What emerges is a general recognition of tourism as a considerable promise to progress towards sustainability. However, the literature is fragmented, often disjointed and lacking a holistic and dynamic vision of the phenomenon. As result, the concepts of tourism firm, destination and tourist remain ambiguous and their role in developing sustainable tourism paths is poorly understood. Clearly, this reduces the possibilities of extending the positive highlighted consequences.

Therefore, the objective of this chapter is twofold. *First*, it provides insights on the main phases of evolution of the phenomenon shedding light on the related implications for tourism firms, destinations and tourists.

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