

## Chapter 37

# Modeling Attitudes to Nature, Tourism, and Sustainable Development in National Parks: A Survey of Visitors in the Vesuvius National Park

**Ilaria Marotta**

*University of Naples Federico II, Italy*

**Fabio Corbisiero**

*University of Naples Federico II, Italy*

**Luigi Delle Cave**

*University of Naples Federico II, Italy*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The chapter, part of the broader debate about the concept of sustainable tourism, pays particular attention to the characteristics and environmental, social, and economic effects of tourist flows in protected natural areas. The concept of sustainable tourism includes all those forms of tourism that are neither invasive nor destructive in relation to natural and cultural resources. The combination of tourism, protected areas, and sustainability is, in fact, a central lever in the analysis of local development processes. Based on the results of the survey, they identify several aspects that make up the profile of users, develop a sustainability index, assess the local impact of tourist flows, and reflect on socio-economic development processes in light of the consequences of the pandemic.*

## INTRODUCTION

The chapter, part of the broader debate about the concept of sustainable tourism, pays particular attention to the characteristics and environmental, social and economic effects of tourist flows in protected natural areas. The concept of sustainable tourism includes all those forms of tourism that are neither invasive nor destructive in relation to natural and cultural resources. As early as 1988, the World Tourism Organization defined “sustainable” tourist activities as those “(...) that develop in such a way as to remain active in a tourist area for an unlimited time, that do not modify the environment (natural, social and cultural) and do not prevent or inhibit the development of other social and economic activities”. The concept of sustainable tourism is thus based on the possibility of imagining and implementing tourist development in an area while safeguarding its ecological and social characteristics through processes that support the preservation of local environmental and cultural resources.

Although several scholars have stressed that tourism (like other sectors of the economy) can produce environmental imbalances and “wear out” the places in which tourist flows are anchored (Gossling, 2000), more recent studies on the relationship between tourism and the environment have proposed an analytical prospective that moves beyond the pessimistic paradigm of a tourist resort’s “life cycle” (Holden, 2000). Indeed, the economic growth linked to the intensification of tourist flows does not necessarily generate negative effects on the environment. On the contrary, as Holden states: “It is certain that the long-term economic success of tourism is often dependent upon maintaining a level of quality in the natural environment, which will satisfy the demands of tourism” (p. 70). In other words, given the many links between the economic importance of tourism phenomena and sustainability concerns, the sector’s long-term economic growth appears to depend on tourist satisfaction, and quite often such satisfaction depends in turn on environmental (both natural and social) quality. Therefore, the economic impact of tourism and the ability of these processes to continue over time seem to be intrinsically anchored to sustainability.

This connection is even more evident in light of the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on the tourism sector, a sector that constitutes a pillar of the world economy. The growth of tourism has been one of the drivers of the world economy since the ‘50s. There were 1.4 million international tourist arrivals in 2018, leading the United Nations to estimate that tourism around the world accounts for \$1.7 trillion in turnover and 7% of the value of global goods and services (UNWTO, 2020). The most recent data confirm that tourism is also a driving force for the Italian economy, with a total value of 232.2 billion euros (about 13% of the national GDP). In addition, it has a decline in employment terms of 3.5 million workers (14.9% of total employment) (ENIT, 2018). Behind this data lies a long process of growth in the tourist industry. Over the years, a heterogeneous and diversified array of tourism forms have developed and come to coexist. They have affected (directly or indirectly) the development of policies implemented at the local level to reinforce the appeal of local areas. On a global scale, such policies are necessary to intensify the growth of tourist flows. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic represent a breaking point in this process.

Depending on the duration of the crisis, UNWTO hypothesizes that, due to the decline of the international tourist economy, there could be a dramatic drop of from 60% to 80% in 2020 as compared to 2019. The sector is losing over 60% of its customers and more than 80 billion dollars, with losses three times greater than those experienced during the 2009 economic crisis (UNWTO, 2020).

In this scenario, any attempt to recover tourist flows must involve implementing models that are substantially different from those adopted in the past, models inspired by principles of sustainability. It will no longer be sufficient to maintain a wide network of tourist services and infrastructures; it will also be

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