

Safeguarding Tourism Management through Circular Economy Service Policies: A Path to Sustainable Tourism

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DESCRIPTION

Tourism, one of the largest and fastest-growing global industries, plays a pivotal role in driving economic growth, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and supporting local livelihoods. However, it also contributes significantly to environmental degradation through waste generation, overuse of natural resources, and greenhouse gas emissions. As sustainability takes center stage in global discourse, the tourism sector must transition from a linear to a circular economic model. This shift not only ensures the longevity of destinations but also invites tourists to actively contribute to sustainability through circular economy service policies. Paying for such services-like waste segregation, carbon offsetting, and eco-friendly accommodations-can safeguard tourism management and create a resilient industry aligned with the needs of people and the planet.

The circular economy: A new paradigm for tourism

Unlike the traditional “take-make-dispose” model, the circular economy emphasizes resource efficiency, waste minimization, and regenerative systems. In tourism, this involves designing experiences, services, and infrastructure that reduce environmental impacts and promote reuse, recycling, and responsible consumption.

Key components of circular tourism include:

- Reuse of materials in construction and decor (e.g., recycled wood or upcycled furnishings in eco-lodges).
- Sustainable food sourcing and composting in restaurants and resorts.
- Renewable energy use in transportation and accommodations.
- Water-saving and waste-management systems.
- Plastic-free policies and refillable toiletry programs.

By integrating these practices, tourism operators can lower their ecological footprint while offering environmentally conscious experiences to travelers.

Tourists as contributors to circular solutions

Tourists today are increasingly aware of their impact on the environment and seek ways to travel more responsibly. This awareness creates a unique opportunity to involve them directly in circular economy policies. Instead of being passive consumers, tourists can become active contributors by paying for services that support sustainability goals.

These paid services might include:

- A sustainability fee at hotels that funds local environmental initiatives.
- Optional carbon offset packages during booking (e.g., investing in renewable energy projects).
- Charges for waste processing and recycling services.
- Fees to support community-based conservation efforts.
- Incentives for using green transportation options like e-bikes or solar-powered boats.

When these services are transparently communicated and provide tangible benefits, many tourists are willing to pay extra, knowing their money contributes to preserving the destinations they love.

Strengthening tourism management through circular policies

Tourism management bodies must develop policy frameworks that institutionalize circular practices and integrate them into tourism planning, certification, and regulation. These policies should include:

- Mandating waste segregation and recycling infrastructure at tourist sites.
- Requiring hotels and resorts to report energy and water usage.
- Supporting circular innovations in local SMEs (e.g., upcycled souvenirs).

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- Establishing tourism taxes or fees earmarked for circular economy initiatives.
- Promoting circular training for tourism professionals and service providers.

The introduction of these policies protects the tourism system by ensuring that growth does not come at the cost of environmental degradation. It also allows destination managers to better plan for long-term sustainability, taking into account carrying capacities, resource availability, and community wellbeing.

Economic and social co-benefits

Integrating circular economy services into tourism has broader economic and social implications. It stimulates green innovation and creates new job opportunities, especially in waste management, sustainable construction, renewable energy, and eco-tourism. It also supports local artisans and farmers who use traditional, low-impact methods, promoting cultural preservation and economic inclusivity.

Furthermore, when tourists see local communities benefiting directly from their spending on circular services, it enhances their overall experience and fosters a deeper emotional connection with the destination. This connection encourages repeat visits, word-of-mouth promotion, and responsible behavior during their stay.

Challenges and considerations

Despite its benefits, the implementation of circular economy service policies in tourism faces challenges:

- Resistance from businesses fearing increased costs or complexity.
- Tourists' reluctance to pay more in regions where environmental awareness is low.
- Lack of standardization in circular practices and green certifications.
- Insufficient government support or regulatory enforcement.

To overcome these barriers, tourism stakeholders must invest in education, clear communication, and collaboration. Campaigns that highlight the visible impact of sustainable contributions can shift perceptions and normalize paying for circular services.

CONCLUSION

Safeguarding the future of tourism demands a shift toward sustainable, circular practices supported by both providers and consumers. Tourists paying for circular economy services is not just an economic transaction—it is an investment in preserving the landscapes, cultures, and communities that define the travel experience. For tourism to thrive in a climate-conscious, resource-scarce world, this co-responsibility must become standard. Through smart policies, inclusive planning, and transparent implementation, tourism can lead the way in transforming the circular economy from concept to reality—making sustainability not a luxury, but a shared responsibility.