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## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM, ENVIRONMENT AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism management at all levels must be oriented toward economic, social, and environmental sustainability, even more after the effects generated by COVID-19, since the climate plays a special role within the tourism system, acting as a factor of a tourist location, a tourist resource, and a tourist attraction. Precisely for this reason, the location of the tourist activity in a territory with a high risk of suffering natural disasters or in territories affected by these episodes may require measures to deal with emergency situations (for insurance, evacuation plans and storage of supplies), for instance; which does not exclude that the promotion of tourism in such areas may represent an economic activity with the potential to contribute to the revitalization of the territory, local economic growth and social and environmental sustainability. Hence, the development of tourist offers that are respectful of the environment, the well-being of the community and the integrity of the territory become a key element for the future of these territories and an essential factor to take into consideration when programming the reconstruction of cities, accommodation structures, etc., as well as when creating tourist packages and products and negotiating contracts.

However, tourism is presented, on the one hand, as a modifier of climatic conditions, as an economic activity that responds to the general energy consumption model of the industrial revolution. For this reason, the tourism industry must recognize its role as part of the problem and take charge of the emissions it generates. While, on the other hand, climatic changes are determining modifications in the tourist systems, since when the climatic conditions in the destinations change, the tourist flows are also affected. For this reason, the research aims to analyze the responses that the tourism sector is offering to climate change and what are the challenges that the fight against climate change poses for tourism activity, and its impact on tourism supply, demand and touristic hiring, above all in rural zones affected by natural disasters.

### 1. RESPONSES OF TOURISM TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The tourism sector is developing two types of strategies: adaptation and mitigation, to deal with the impact of climate change on tourism. **In the transformation field**, tourism has had to adapt to the new reality to maintain competitiveness. A process must be implemented at different scales: individual, company, destination-local, regional and global. **In the mitigation field**, the basic strategies are managed on 3 main fronts: use of less energy, improvement of energy efficiency, and greater use of renewable energies.

### 2. CHALLENGES FOR TOURISM IN CONFRONTING CLIMATE CHANGE

The tourism sector has been forced to implement mitigation actions combining various strategies aimed at different groups (tourists, tour operators, businessmen). There are multiple instruments such as: soft law (Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, among recommendations, codes of conducts, and good practices guides), binding regulatory instruments (for example, the Convention on Tourism Ethics, adopted on September 15h, 2017, which qualifies tourism as a functional instrument to a sustainable economic activity in respect of the human rights of present and future), and economic instruments (rates or eco-taxes). **However, the application of these regulatory or economic instruments commonly translates into an increase in the cost of production and services (transport, lodging, etc.) that are often transferred to the tourist offer, affecting the purchase decision of the tourist or traveler.**



### 3. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

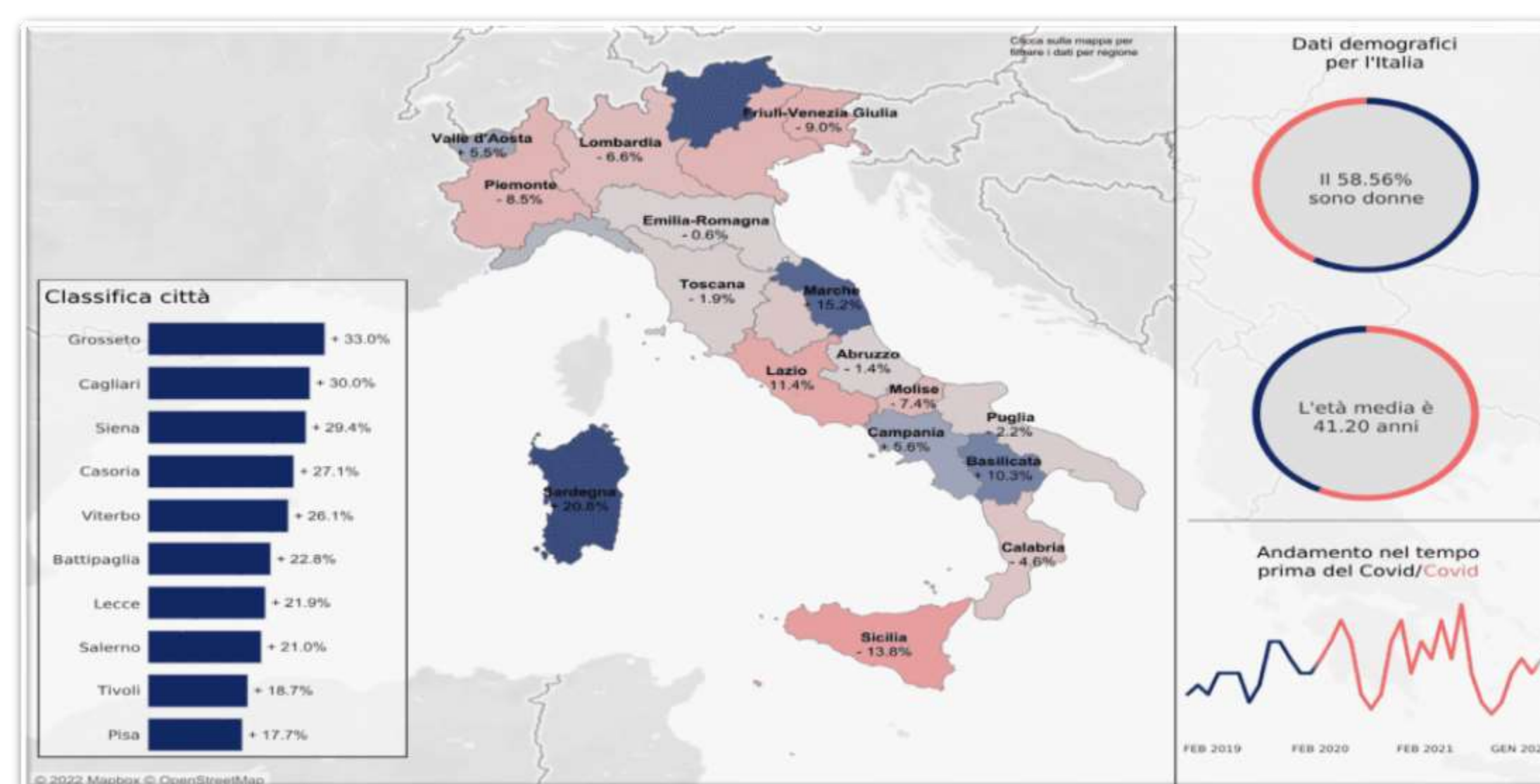
Environmental factors play an increasingly important role in shaping the offer of destinations since they influence tourists' motivations, in planning vacations and choosing destinations. Travelers with an increasing frequency show concern for the quality of life, which translates, in the field of tourism, into more authentic and respectful experiences of the environment, seeking a deeper enjoyment of the attributions of the destination, including its gastronomy, its environment, culture, customs and interaction with the local population. For this reason, rural areas have excellent potential that can be taken advantage of by the hand of slow tourism, which should, on the one hand, mitigate negative environmental and social impacts and, on the other, promote the rational use of local resources. This situation could contribute to a more significant economic impact and higher levels of well-being at the local level, creating work jobs and mitigating emigration, contributing to the conservation and recovery of cultural heritage.



### 4. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA: THE CASE OF ITALY

The UNWTO Global Guidelines call for the sustainable and inclusive recovery of the tourism sector in the post-pandemic era, taking advantage of the effects of the health crisis to make innovation and sustainability the new normal. For this reason, the **National Plan for Recovery and resilience** (PNRR, for its acronym in Italian) prioritizes investments that have the dual objective of increasing companies' competitive capacity and promoting tourism based on environmental sustainability, innovation, and the digitization of services.

In Italy, the interest in sustainable tourism has doubled after the pandemic. **In fact, 3.7 million Italians have expressed an interest in the subject, according to surveys carried out in 2022\***. As you can see on the map, the Italian regions are identified with the colors red, beige, and blue. The areas in blue have a greater interest in sustainable tourism.



\*By Omio.it

You can see the studies by Omio.it at the follow link:

### CONCLUSIONS:

- In short, the greatest challenge is to ensure that sustainable tourism becomes a tool for sustainable development that enhances competitiveness, producing economic benefits (local prosperity, job quality, social equity, visitor satisfaction) and environmental benefits (land management, energy, carbon residues, biodiversity conservation, etc.) and for the local community (contribution to local development, community well-being, cultural offerings, and heritage protection).
- The need to combat climate change from the tourism sector poses the challenge of applying mitigation strategies that do not reduce the competitiveness of either destinations or tourism companies.
- Likewise, it is necessary to promote contractual solidarity as a value that responds not only to the mere private interests of tourists but also to the protection of the environment, the territory, and critical and rational consumption, based on sustainable tourism production.
- In Italy, in addition, work must be done to increase the offer of green tourist services, reduce the current prices that limit access to them and increase consumer information about it.

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