



FOCUS GROUP DESIGN FOR INFORMATION GATHERING: AN APPLICATION FOR CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN TOURISM

De Miguel-Molina, María ¹; Santamarina-Campos, Virginia ²; Segarra-Oña, Marival ³; De Miguel-Molina, Blanca ⁴; Peiró-Signes, Ángel ⁵ and Catalá-Pérez, Daniel ⁶

¹Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain (mademi@omp.upv.es)

²Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain (virsanca@upv.es)

³Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain (maseo@omp.upv.es)

⁴Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain (bdemigu@omp.upv.es)

⁵Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain (anpeisig@omp.upv.es)

⁶Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain (dacapre@ade.upv.es)

ABSTRACT: The Circular Economy opens a scenario of key business opportunities to improve tourism firms' competitiveness now and in the future. InnoEcoTur is a research project promoting models and strategies based on the Circular Economy in the tourism sector by the creation of a network in the area of hotels and restaurants. Members of the network will analyze first and later propose the implementation of a Circular Economy Strategy for the Tourist Sector of the Valencian Community, transferring also the results to companies of the industry. In the first stage of the project, we performed an audit of the industry needs and detected the potential improvements through the participation of the different stakeholders involved using focus groups. In this paper, we justify the design of the focus groups parameters such as size, location, or type of stakeholder to gather meaningful information for analysis. The methodology reveals to be adequate to draw a rough picture of the situation of Circular Economy in hotels and restaurants in the Valencian Community.

KEYWORDS: *Circular economy; Tourism; Focus group; Qualitative methods and tools*

How to cite: De Miguel-Molina, María; Santamarina-Campos, Virginia; Segarra-Oña, Marival; De Miguel-Molina, Blanca; Peiró-Signes, Ángel and Catalá-Pérez, Daniel. 2022. Focus group design for information gathering: an application for circular economy in tourism. In Proc.: 4th International Conference Business Meets Technology. Ansbach, 7th – 9th July 2022. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.4995/BMT2022.2022.15545>



1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

The Circular Economy opens a scenario of key business opportunities to improve tourism firms' competitiveness now and in the future. InnoEcoTur is a research project promoting models and strategies based on the Circular Economy. InnoEcoTur is a research project promoting models and strategies based on the Circular Economy. The focus of the project is the tourism sector, for which it is proposed the creation of a Network in the area of hotels and restaurants. Members of the Network will analyze first and later propose the implementation of a Circular Economy Strategy for the Tourist Sector of the Valencian Community, also transferring the results to companies in the industry. To achieve this, in the first stage of the project, we need to carry out different activities with key agents in the Valencian Community. Particularly, we look to perform an audit of the industry needs and detect the potential improvement from the sustainable point of view through the participation of the different stakeholders involved and analyze the results to connect them with the R&D&i activity, which will allow the development and incorporation of eco-innovative technologies and methodologies in those fields of improvement.

2. RELATED WORK

Circular economy relates to processes that are restorative and regenerative by design aiming to maintain the elements in use at all times (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2016). The MacArthur Foundation, one of the most prominent organizations in the dissemination of the circular economy, uses three principles and seven "Rs" as support for the transition to the circular economy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021). The three principles on which circularity is based are:

- a) eliminate waste and contamination,
- b) circulate the products and materials and
- c) regenerate nature

The seven "Rs" (figure 1) reflect some of the options that can be used to promote the circular economy.

Figure 1. The seven R's of circular economy

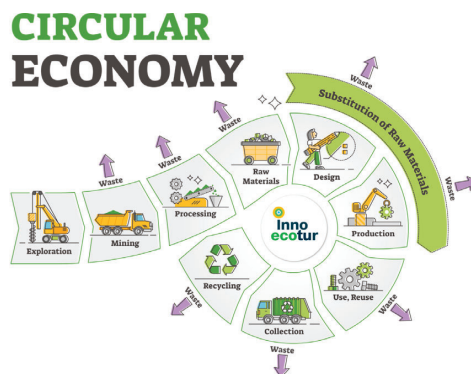


Table 1 shows the meaning of each "Rs".

Table 1. Circular Economy R's

R	Description
Reduce	Reduce the use of raw materials and design the products so that are more durable, repairable and recyclable
Re-use	Sharing, renting, leasing of products and buy products second-hand, to encourage their reuse and keep them in use for a longer time
Redesign	Design products in such a way what can they be Remanufactured
Repair/ Rehabilitate	Partially repair/renovate goods instead of discarding them.
Recondition/ Rework	Restore the products to their native functionality
Return / recovery	Return / recovery of products, materials and packaging
Recycle	Recycle materials or return them to return to production cycle

It differentiates from linear economy in that there is little generation of waste because waste becomes a resources in another process creating a close loop (Wysokinska, 2016). Then in a circular economy, the value of products and materials is maintained for as long as possible; waste and resource use are minimised, and resources are kept within the economy. When a product has reached the end of its life it is used again to create further value (European Commission, 2015).

In this context, circular economy becomes crucial in those industries that are among the most pollutant. Particularly, tourism industry has been pointed as one of the target industries in which more efforts have to be taken.

3. METHODOLOGY

To achieve our goal, we decided to start by using focus group methodology. Focus group is an information gathering technique that seeks to know what the participants think about an idea (Krueger and Casey, 2015). In our case, we aimed to obtain information to identify challenges and needs of the tourism industry companies (hotels and restaurants) located in the Valencian Community in the transition to circular economy. Additionally, this methodology allows to integrate companies from the beginning to our project. Participants in a focus group form a small group of people, typically around six, with a specific profile, who will discuss on a topic of interest guided by a person who moderates the session. The design of the focus group session it is a very important stage to succeed in meeting the goals of the session. The design included decisions about the number of participants, their profile, the script of the dynamic, who will moderate, how the session will be recorded and how the transcription will be done, and how the information will be analyzed.

The number of participants in each focus group was established in six people, with a time limit estimated in no more than an hour and a half for each focus, following the suggested values for the technique and our previous experiences in its application. The selection of participants is crucial to collect valuable information to reach the objective of the activity. In this first stage of the project, it is necessary that the participants are experts in the tourism industry, to ensure they have experience in the transition to the circular

economy. Thus, the participant profile would be a high-level executive, with decision-making capacity about the transition of their companies to circular economy. We included participants from different activities, combining profiles from hotels, restaurants, and hotel and restaurant suppliers. We also took into account the range of age of the participants to ensure a that they frequently use new technologies. In this first dynamic we avoided small companies ensuring that they have experience in transition to the circular economy. We considered hotels with a minimum of four stars and restaurants with recognition, such as been included in a ranking or that have received a gastronomy award.

One other important issue is the number of focus group sessions to perform. In the context of the project, the tourism sector in the Valencian Community there were some limitations and external conditions to consider. First, tourism represents an important part of the economy globally in the area, but the weight of the tourism, the type of tourism in the three regions and the other industries in each of the three regional areas, Castellón, Valencia and Alicante, are completely different. Thus, we decided to cope with these conditions performing one session in each of the three regions with participants from the region. Second, the tourism ecosystem is also comprised or interrelated by many other industries, such as the art industry or passenger transport, which widens the spectrum of companies that could be included or that are affecting the tourism activities. Therefore, we decided to narrow down the spectrum of the study to hotels and restaurants really understand the two most representative areas in the industry.

Table 2. Focus group profiles

Location	Alicante	Castellón	Valencia
Participants (experts)	6	6	6
Age range	30-50	30-50	30-50
Hotel industry áreas:			
Hotels	2	2	2
Restaurants	2	2	2
Hotel supplier	1	1	1
Restaurant supplier	1	1	1

We elaborated a guide of topics or thematic aspects for the dynamic that served as guidance in discussion. We considered as topics of interest the following: BARRIERS and SUPPORT in the transition to the circular economy; PRACTICES in circular economy and industrial symbiosis; DIGITAL TOOLS to measure the circularity of a company; Eco-innovative RESULTS; CHANGE INITIATIVES in the environmental care; and USERS awareness to know and value initiatives. However, the script does not have a sequential order, it serves as support to the moderator to control the session, and it is adapted to the dynamic created by the participants in each focus group.

For the content analysis of the transcripts, we proposed QDAMiner 5 qualitative analysis software. This software allows to code the opinions of the participants on each one of the six topics indicated in the script and to assign them codes, which can be grouped by related themes. In some cases, the groups overcome the initial designed groups, enriching and uncovering interesting areas that should be considered.

4. FINDINGS

The results of this methodology to gather information reveal to be adequate. The three groups were balanced, with 6 participants in each group (18 in total), 2 from hotels, 2 from restaurants, 1 hotel supplier and 1 restaurant supplier. We generated 174 codes of related opinions which were classified into barriers, measures, incentives, supplier selection, information and communication and wastes, drawing a rough picture of the situation of Circular Economy in hotels and restaurants in the Valencian Community.

5. ORIGINALITY

This is the first study of this kind related to circular economy in the tourism industry in a geographical area where we have a special combination of different types of tourism, rural, sun&beach and urban, and a high dependency of the local economy on the tourism activities. This study justifies the selection of the focus group members for a useful prospection in a research study in its infancy state. Selecting front runners in a topic which is undeveloped in an industry such as, tourism, gives a good amount of valuable information about the needs and barriers that need to be worked from several areas such as, public administrations, to make companies in the industry to involve in these kind of practices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (remove for the review process)

We will like to thank the Valencia Innovation Agency (AVI) for financing InnoEcoTur project.

REFERENCES

- European Commission. (2015). Circular economy package: Questions & answers: MEMO/15/6204.
- MacArthur, E. (2015). Towards a circular economy: business rationale for an accelerated transition.
- Wysokińska, Z. (2016). The "new" environmental policy of the European Union: A path to development of a circular economy and mitigation of the negative effects of climate change. *Comparative Economic Research*, 19(2), 57-73.