

## TOURISM AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

by Claire Brightley



Claire Brightley is an Educationalist and Programme Manager with a research interest in sustainable energy, growing communities and ending food waste. She has a varied background working mainly in further education and local charities and is currently a lecturer in teacher education affiliated to Huddersfield University and the University of Central Lancashire. She is also on the board of directors for Incredible Edible, an urban food growing project, involving local businesses, schools, framers and the community with the aim to increase the amount of local food grown and eaten in a particular territory.

She has worked in Indonesia under the auspices of VSO managing educational projects and organised training conferences. She has a bachelor's degree in Agricultural and Environmental Science from the University of Newcastle and is currently completing a Master's in Sustainability and Consultancy at the University of Leeds.

A circular economy is one in which resources are used efficiently to gain the most value from them. What is left over at the end of their life is recycled or reused so as to reduce waste. The aim is to try to combat some of the problems linked to over consumption, continuous growth and resource depletion. It differs from the traditional linear economy whereby things are used, worn out and thrown away in that it instead encourages the reuse and repair of products, and promotes energy savings. The overall goal is to achieve a better balance between people, planet and economic growth<sup>1</sup>.

The circular economy links to the UN's Sustainable Development Goal number twelve - sustainable consumption and production. This goal is aimed at reducing resource use and pollution and looks at the use of goods along their whole life cycle<sup>2</sup>. For this goal to be successfully achieved there will need to be cooperation between a whole range of stakeholders from businesses to consumers and scientists to designers and policy makers. This can help lead to the enhanced development of the collection and treatment of waste and improved disposal of products at the end of their life, ensuring materials are no longer leaked out of the system and a circular economy is maintained.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wrap.org.uk/about-us/about/wrap-and-circular-economy> (Accessed 07/04/17)

<sup>2</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg12> (Accessed 11/04/17)

The concept of the circular economy is still in its early stages worldwide although it does seem to be well developed as an idea in China. However, its importance is being recognised now in the European Union (EU). In 2014 the EU set up ambitious targets for waste management aimed at promoting a more circular approach to the economy. The goal was to get businesses to see waste as a resource that could be recycled and reused. Some of these measures have recently been revised but there are still some important goals being set to be achieved by 2020<sup>3</sup>. There are key pieces of legislation around packaging and landfill to try to improve the way businesses control and manage waste. There are also eco-design regulations in place to aid in the recycling of newly designed products.



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Developing a circular tourism economy could help to bring about the sustainable use of resources, enhance the efficiency of the tourism industry and achieve the sustainable development of tourism. However, it is difficult to accomplish without the relevant legislation and policies needed to support it. The traditional model of tourism management needs to change and there will need to be a collaboration between technology and business for it to be successfully implemented. For example, the improved durability of products, through eco-design, could bring substantial benefits to businesses through longer lasting linen and furniture. This would help reduce waste and mitigate against some of the environmental burdens of tourism and it would position the tourism sector to better address future resource scarcity issues.

One way that tourism could make a real difference is through more efficient waste management. Rather than sending discarded items to landfill they could be reused or at least separated out to be more effectively recycled. There are already a host of innovative ways that recycling is taking place such as furniture and mattress recycling organisations which either redistribute items to those in need or strip down the furniture into its constituent parts so they can be recovered<sup>5</sup>. This

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.edie.net/library/Circular-Economy-Package--Everything-you-need-to-know/6755> (Accessed 07/04/17)

<sup>4</sup> <https://gfoss.eu/?s=circular+economy> (Accessed 08/04/17)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.greenhotelier.org/our-themes/waste/talking-point-hotels-shouldnt-roll-over-on-mattress-recycling/> (Accessed 11/04/17)

provides a sustainable and affordable solution to furniture disposal which helps organisations improve their carbon footprint. The key is to raise awareness of these initiatives across regions.

There are also lots of inventive ideas about managing waste coming out of the hospitality and tourism sectors such as coffee grinds being used as a medium for growing mushrooms and even providing a fuel source to heat houses in London. This is a win-win situation as not only is the waste being re-used but businesses are not having to pay for disposal costs. Looking at ways to deal with food waste is of utmost importance as currently a third of all food grown globally<sup>6</sup> is thrown away, which then emits carbon dioxide in landfill sites. Hotels and restaurants need to monitor and measure their food waste to establish where waste is occurring. It is estimated that more than 60% of food waste in the hospitality industry is avoidable<sup>7</sup> so if this could be reduced it would massively cut costs. There are several organisations which have created monitoring processes to help with this from simple tracking sheets to new technologies.

The best way to stop food becoming waste is for it to be eaten but even the most efficient kitchens will produce some waste. How this is disposed of will depend to some extent on the legislation in place within the country and facilities available at a local level such as the possibility to donate to food banks, feed animals, or to contribute to anaerobic digestion and composting. The key is to make sure that staff get on board with recycling, the right bins are used and that organisations have the right waste management contractors in place. If restaurants and hotels worked together to seek ways to more effectively dispose of their waste food it could pay dividends, not only for the environment but also in reducing over-heads due to economies of scale. However, there will need to be a concerted collaborative effort for it to be successful yet, with more and more people becoming aware of the importance of sustainability, this idea can only be good news for the bottom line.

Another approach to circular tourism management could be to make resorts into 'circular resorts'. Measures would involve optimising the energy efficiency of buildings and making them self-reliant for water supply and waste management, using green energy sources and setting strict targets for waste disposal and landfill. This would mean moving away from a linear system to a more cyclical and regenerative one which was integrated to connect inputs and outputs<sup>8</sup>. Through regulation, incentives and infrastructure developments the shift could be made to a resilient tourism industry that promotes energy efficiency and recycling to reduce pollution and waste.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.greenhotelier.org/know-how-guides/reducing-and-managing-food-waste-in-hotels/> (Accessed 10/04/17)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.greenhotelier.org/know-how-guides/reducing-and-managing-food-waste-in-hotels/> (Accessed 10/04/17)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.circulareconomyclub.com/> (Accessed 10/04/17)

As climate change continues to have an adverse impact across the globe, applying circular thinking will become essential for the survival and evolution of the tourism industry. To bring about a comprehensive circular approach to the growing problems of resource scarcity and pollution, there will need to be a new way of looking at tourism management. The concept of more efficient resource use must be driven forward with great commitment to ensure a sustainable circular industry is developed.

IGCAT is exploring and collecting information on initiatives in different regions that are contributing to circular economies. If you know of such initiatives we need to hear from you. Please send information about case studies to [info@igcat.org](mailto:info@igcat.org).

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This paper was written in 2017 .

IGCAT's mission is to empower and facility local communities to realise the potential of their distinct food, culture, arts and sustainable tourism and local resources.

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