



ASSI 2026 CONFERENCE
UNIVERSITY OF PALERMO, 13–14 NOVEMBER

***TOURISM, BUSINESS AND TERRITORIES: HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES
AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT***

Call for papers

The relationship between business and the local area is particularly significant in the tourism industry. In tourism, economic value does not arise solely within individual businesses but takes shape through a combination of tangible and intangible resources: landscapes, cultural heritage, infrastructure, professional skills, place reputations, service networks, relationships with local communities, and the governance capacity of destinations. Tourism competitiveness is therefore the result of a territorial co-production involving accommodation providers, catering, transport, intermediaries, cultural and creative services, destination management organizations, public institutions, digital enterprises, associations, and residents. The classic categories of external economies and territorial proximity, from Marshall onwards, remain useful tools for understanding local tourism supply chains today. At the same time, the concepts of *embeddedness*, social capital, *social capabilities*, and ecosystem allow us to view tourism as a field of relationships in which cooperation and competition, local roots and international openness, local heritage and global markets are constantly intertwined. In destinations, the success of an individual business often depends on the quality of the local system as a whole; conversely, the local area is transformed by business decisions, investments, consumption patterns, and tourism development policies.

In recent years, the tourism industry has undergone profound transformations: the digitalisation of distribution channels, online platforms, *data-driven destination management*, artificial intelligence, new forms of hospitality, changes in mobility, the reconfiguration of value chains, the centrality of the experience, seasonal work and new skills, pressure on natural and cultural resources, climate crises, over-tourism, seasonality reduction and a growing demand for sustainability, authenticity, accessibility and inclusion. These phenomena require us to rethink the relationship between tourism businesses, local communities, and regional policies. The ASSI 2026 conference aims to discuss the role of the tourism industry in the processes of growth, transformation, and competitiveness of territories, with a particular focus on businesses and destination ecosystems. Contributions from historical, economic, business, sociological, geographical, and interdisciplinary perspectives are welcome, analysing tourism as an industry rooted in specific

places yet simultaneously connected to global markets, flows and platforms. The venue in Palermo, with its rich cultural, economic, and landscape heritage, offers a particularly significant setting for exploring the relationships between heritage, hospitality, entrepreneurship and local development.

Conference objectives

The conference aims to promote a discussion on tourism as a complex territorial industry, capable of generating economic value but also of impacting landscapes, communities, employment, infrastructure, local identities and models of sustainability. The aim is to bring together research that places businesses, destinations and institutional contexts, investigating historical continuities, recent transformations and future prospects of the tourism economy.

Themes and research areas

By way of example and without limitation, contributions on the following themes will be particularly welcome:

- History of tourism enterprises, local roots, local networks and internationalisation processes;
- History of hospitality, hotel and non-hotel accommodation, catering, events and new service models;
- History of cultural, landscape, seaside, spa, food and wine, conference, cruise, religious and inland tourism;
- History and management of cultural and natural heritage, place enhancement, authenticity, heritage management and place branding;
- History of tourism employment (skills, training, seasonality, gender, inclusion and quality of employment);
- History of infrastructure
- resilience of destinations in the face of health, climate, geopolitical and economic crises;
- finance, property, hotel chains, family businesses, property investment and urban regeneration;
- History of tourism, long-term trajectories of destinations and transformations in travel practices;
- resident communities, conflicts of use, participation, social acceptability and the distribution of tourism benefits from a historical perspective.

Expected approaches and contributions

We welcome theoretical, empirical, comparative, historical and methodological contributions based on case studies, quantitative analyses, business archives, statistical sources, qualitative surveys, territorial mapping, network analysis and interdisciplinary research. The conference also encourages session proposals that

foster dialogue between scholars of business history, economics, management, sociology, geography, urban studies, heritage studies and *tourism studies*.

Keywords

tourism industry; hospitality; destinations; *destination management*; territorial competitiveness; sustainability; digital transformation; *smart tourism*; cultural heritage; entrepreneurship; territorial ecosystems; local communities; innovation; tourism employment; resilience.

Conference languages

The conference will be held in Italian and English.

How to submit proposals

Proposals for individual presentations, consisting of an abstract of approximately 2,000 characters and a CV, or proposals for sessions, consisting of the session title, names, CVs and abstracts of the participants, must be submitted by 1 September 2026 to the following address: segreteria@assi-web.it. The Organising and Scientific Committee will consider session proposals that include no fewer than three and no more than four speakers. Decisions will be communicated by 15 September 2026.

Speakers of accepted papers must submit a paper of 40,000–50,000 characters or a long abstract of 8,000–10,000 characters by 30 October 2026.

Participation

Attendance at the conference is free for ASSI members who have paid their membership fee for 2026. For non-members, the registration fee is €50.

Organising and Scientific Committee

Luciano Segreto (chair), Patrizia Battilani, Marco Bertilorenzi, Veronica Binda (secretary), Valerio Cerretano, Mario Perugini (secretary), Roberto Rossi, Marcantonio Ruisi, Fernando Salsano, Donatella Strangio.