

Citation:

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Abstract:

The European Union's goal to achieve Net-Zero by 2050 places sustainability pressures on sectors like tourism. Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a critical role in aligning tourism education with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). However, the extent to which European tourism HEIs embed sustainability into curricula remains unclear.

This study introduces a multi-dimensional framework to assess how tourism degree directors across European HEIs implement and report the integration of (1) UNSDGs, (2) sustainability literacy, and (3) decarbonisation-related content. An exploratory survey was conducted among course directors in five EU countries through the EU-Green Alliance network, focusing on curricular practices and reported content inclusion rather than attitudinal perceptions.

Findings show that although most curricula reference the UNSDGs, coverage is uneven. Sustainability literacy is generally addressed, but gaps remain in climate-specific competencies. Critically, decarbonisation and emissions-related education are largely absent, highlighting the need for targeted curriculum enhancements. While HEIs are progressing toward sustainability, deeper curricular integration is needed to support Net-Zero ambitions.

Research limitation

Focus is limited to European HEIs and may not reflect global trends.

Theoretical implications

Offers a conceptual model incorporating climate-specific competencies, advancing how tourism education can accelerate decarbonisation.

Practical implications

Urgent strategic alignment with UNSDGs and Net-Zero goals requires curriculum audits, faculty training, and stronger industry collaboration.

Social implications

Embedding sustainability and decarbonisation can drive social innovation and produce environmentally conscious graduates, supporting a broader sustainable tourism culture.

Keywords: Sustainability literacy; Decarbonisation; Net-Zero; European higher education institutions; Sustainable tourism development; UNSDGs

Full-text: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652625023960#abs0010>