

CIRCULAR SKILLCATION: A PROPOSAL FOR REGENERATIVE TOURISM, SKILL DEVELOPMENT, AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

SKILLCATION CIRCULAR: UMA PROPOSTA DE TURISMO REGENERATIVO, DESENVOLVIMENTO DE HABILIDADES E IMPACTO COMUNITÁRIO

SKILLCATION CIRCULAR: UNA PROPUESTA DE TURISMO REGENERATIVO, DESARROLLO DE HABILIDADES E IMPACTO COMUNITARIO

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This paper proposes the concept of Circular Skillcation as an emerging tourism approach integrating regenerative tourism, circular economy principles, tourists' skill development, and positive community impact. The study discusses how tourism experiences can evolve from passive consumption activities into mechanisms for experiential learning, local development, and collaborative value creation among tourists, destinations, and communities in the sustainability frame.

Findings – Tourism demand is increasingly oriented toward meaningful and transformative experiences. The findings suggest that integrating circular economy principles and the 5Rs framework into skill-based tourism experiences may simultaneously generate environmental, social, economic, and educational benefits, particularly for small tourism businesses and local communities.

Research limitations/implications – This study adopts a conceptual and theoretical essay approach. The paper contributes to the literature on regenerative tourism, transformative tourism, and circular economy by proposing the concept of Circular Skillcation as a new analytical framework for future empirical studies.

Practical implications – The proposed framework may support tourism operators, policymakers, destination managers, and small tourism enterprises in designing tourism experiences focused on sustainability, enhancing local engagement, innovation, and capability development.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to an emerging research area by integrating skill-based tourism experiences with regenerative tourism and circular economy perspectives, an intersection still scarcely explored in tourism literature.

Keywords: Skillcation; Circular Economy; regenerative tourism; small business enterprises; local communities.

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RESUMO

Objetivo – Este artigo propõe o conceito de Skillcation Circular como uma abordagem emergente do turismo que integra turismo regenerativo, princípios da economia circular, desenvolvimento de habilidades dos turistas e impacto positivo nas comunidades locais. O estudo discute como as experiências turísticas podem evoluir de atividades de consumo passivo para mecanismos de aprendizagem experiencial, desenvolvimento local e criação colaborativa de valor entre turistas, destinos e comunidades no contexto da sustentabilidade.

Resultados – A demanda turística está cada vez mais orientada para experiências significativas e transformadoras. Os resultados sugerem que a integração dos princípios da economia circular e da estrutura dos 5Rs em experiências turísticas baseadas em aprendizagem pode gerar simultaneamente benefícios ambientais, sociais, econômicos e educacionais, especialmente para pequenos negócios turísticos e comunidades locais.

Limitações/implicações da pesquisa – Este estudo adota uma abordagem teórica e conceitual. O artigo contribui para a literatura sobre turismo regenerativo, turismo transformativo e economia circular ao propor o conceito de Skillcation Circular como uma nova estrutura analítica para futuras pesquisas empíricas.

Implicações práticas – O framework proposto pode auxiliar operadores turísticos, formuladores de políticas públicas, gestores de destinos e pequenos negócios turísticos no desenvolvimento de experiências voltadas à sustentabilidade, aprimorando engajamento local, inovação e desenvolvimento de capacidades.

Originalidade/valor – Este artigo contribui para um campo emergente de pesquisa ao integrar experiências turísticas baseadas em habilidades com perspectivas do turismo regenerativo e da economia circular, interseção ainda pouco explorada na literatura em turismo.

Palavras-chave: Skillcation; Economia Circular; turismo regenerativo; experiências turísticas; comunidades locais.

RESUMEN

Objetivo – Este artículo propone el concepto de Skillcation Circular como un enfoque emergente del turismo que integra turismo regenerativo, principios de economía circular, desarrollo de habilidades de los turistas e impacto positivo en las comunidades locales. El estudio analiza cómo las experiencias turísticas pueden evolucionar de actividades de consumo pasivo hacia mecanismos de aprendizaje experiencial, desarrollo local y creación colaborativa de valor entre turistas, destinos y comunidades en el contexto de la sostenibilidad.

Hallazgos – La demanda turística está cada vez más orientada hacia experiencias significativas y transformadoras. Los hallazgos sugieren que la integración de principios de economía circular y del marco de las 5Rs en experiencias turísticas basadas en el aprendizaje puede generar simultáneamente beneficios ambientales, sociales, económicos y educativos, especialmente para pequeños negocios turísticos y comunidades locales.

Limitaciones/implicaciones de la investigación – Este estudio adopta un enfoque teórico y conceptual. El artículo contribuye a la literatura sobre turismo regenerativo, turismo transformativo y economía circular al proponer el concepto de Skillcation Circular como un nuevo marco analítico para futuras investigaciones empíricas.

Implicaciones prácticas – El marco propuesto puede ayudar a operadores turísticos, formuladores de políticas públicas, gestores de destinos y pequeños negocios turísticos en el desarrollo de experiencias orientadas a la sostenibilidad, mejorando el compromiso local, la innovación y el desarrollo de capacidades.

Originalidad/valor – Este artículo contribuye a un área emergente de investigación al integrar experiencias turísticas basadas en habilidades con perspectivas del turismo regenerativo y la economía circular, una intersección todavía poco explorada en la literatura turística.

Palabras clave: Skillcation; Economía Circular; turismo regenerativo; experiencias turísticas; comunidades locales.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has undergone profound transformations in recent years, particularly regarding travelers' expectations and consumption patterns (Tourism Today, 2024; Christou, 2026). Traditional tourism models centered on passive leisure and standardized experiences are increasingly being replaced by more immersive, authentic, and transformative experiences (Richards, 2011; Amaro et al., 2023; Neuhofer, 2024). In this context, the concept of 'skillcation' – a combination of "skill" and "vacation" – has emerged as a growing tourism trend and buzz in 2025 and 2026 in which travelers seek not only rest and entertainment, but also opportunities to acquire new competencies, practical abilities, and meaningful learning experiences during their trips (Bologna, 2024; Hilton, 2025; Loweth, 2025; Forbes, 2026; Soul of Hospitality, 2026; Ledsom, 2026). This shift reflects a broader movement toward personal growth and lifelong learning as core components of the travel experience (HuffPost, 2024; Bologna, 2024; Robinson, 2025).

Simultaneously, sustainability discussions have become central to tourism research and destination management (Stripoli et al., 2024; UN Tourism, 2025). Among these discussions, the Circular Economy (CE) has emerged as a regenerative

approach that promotes resource optimization, waste reduction, local resilience, and sustainable development (Stahel, 2016; Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Ferasso et al., 2020; Einarsson & Sorin, 2020; Kirchherr et al., 2023; Kirchherr et al., 2023; UN Tourism, 2025; Cheng et al., 2026). Circular Economy principles are frequently operationalized through the 5Rs framework – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover, and Regenerate – which seeks to minimize environmental impacts and to create restorative and regenerative systems (Stahel, 2016; Kirchherr et al., 2023; Meshram, 2024). In tourism, these principles encourage destinations and tourism operators to move beyond minimizing negative externalities toward generating positive environmental, social, cultural, and economic outcomes (Tuyen, 2025; Das & Mishra, 2026).

This perspective becomes particularly relevant for small tourism businesses, which frequently face resource constraints, operational vulnerabilities, seasonality, and intensifying market competition (Strippoli et al., 2024; Tami-Barrera et al., 2024). Previous studies demonstrate that CE practices may strengthen innovation capabilities, stakeholder collaboration, and long-term value creation among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Ferasso et al., 2020; Calisto et al., 2023; Ferasso et al., 2023; Mpanza & Ngwenya, 2026). Furthermore, tourism studies emphasize that sustainable tourism competitiveness increasingly depends on collaborative governance, innovation ecosystems, and local stakeholder engagement (Calisto et al., 2023; Boldo et al., 2024; Cardoso et al., 2024; Mpanza & Ngwenya, 2026). These collaborative frameworks allow small-scale operators to overcome individual limitations by leveraging shared resources and collective knowledge within a regenerative tourism model (Badenas-Boldó et al., 2025).

Despite growing debates surrounding regenerative and circular tourism, limited attention has been paid to integrating tourists' skill development and CE practices into tourism experiences (Fernández-Villarán et al., 2024; Syafruddin et al., 2025). Most studies analyze tourism sustainability and experiential tourism in isolation, without examining the intersection of tourists' learning processes, regenerative territorial dynamics, and circular tourism ecosystems (Rodríguez et al., 2020; Sørensen & Bærenholdt, 2020; Einarsson & Sorin, 2020). This lack of integration represents a significant research gap, as the potential for tourists to act as active agents of regeneration through skill acquisition remains largely unexplored in current CE frameworks (Guerreschi et al., 2023; Kirchherr et al., 2023; Zhao, 2025; Iddawala & Lee, 2026). Bridging this gap is essential for developing a more holistic understanding of how "skillcation" can contribute to the long-term resilience and vitality of tourism destinations (Manniche et al., 2021; Loweth, 2025; Success, 2026; Cheng et al., 2026).

This paper argues that tourism experiences can serve as platforms for mutual value creation among tourists, destinations, and local communities through what this study conceptualizes as Circular Skillcation. In this model, tourists develop practical, environmental, cultural, or creative skills while simultaneously contributing to local circular systems, community empowerment, and regenerative tourism dynamics. Examples may include purposely learning traditional crafts with recycled materials, participating in regenerative agriculture, engaging in marine conservation initiatives, or developing sustainable gastronomy competencies grounded in local production systems (Lo et al., 2021; Bardolet-Puigdollers & Fusté-Forné, 2023).

Therefore, this paper seeks to answer the following research question: How can Circular Skillcation contribute to regenerative tourism through tourists' skill development, Circular Economy practices, and positive community impact?

The relevance of this discussion lies in both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the paper contributes to emerging debates on regenerative tourism, transformative tourism, and the CE by proposing a conceptual integration among these perspectives (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Zhao, 2025). Practically, the study contributes to tourism operators, destination managers, policymakers, and small tourism businesses interested in developing tourism models that generate learning experiences, sustainability outcomes, territorial resilience, and local economic development.

PROPOSITIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Circular Skillcation as a New Regenerative Tourism Model

The concept of Circular Skillcation is grounded in the assumption that tourism should not be restricted to temporary entertainment or destination consumption (Sørensen & Bærenholdt, 2020; Dredge, 2022; Iddawala & Lee, 2026). Instead, tourism may function as a platform for experiential learning, collaborative value creation, and regenerative interaction between visitors and destinations (Everingham et al., 2023; Cardoso et al., 2024; Future Thinking, 2024; Bellato & Pollock, 2025). In this perspective, Circular Skillcation proposes a transition from "consuming destinations" toward "co-creating sustainable value with destinations" (Richards, 2011; Ferasso et al., 2020; Font et al., 2021; Melenez-Roman et al., 2025; Ledsom, 2026). This paradigm shift aligns with broader regenerative tourism goals that emphasize planetary wellbeing and the active stewardship of local ecosystems through educational and participatory experiences (National Park Stewardship, 2024; Ferasso, 2025; Digital Technologies, 2026).

One of the core dimensions of Circular Skillcation is tourists' skill development (Vinodan & Meera, 2019; Maosul et al., 2025). Contemporary travelers increasingly seek transformative experiences capable of generating personal growth, emotional fulfillment, and practical learning (Pung et al., 2020; Amaro et al., 2023; Bologna, 2024; Zhuo et al., 2025; Loweth, 2025; Ledsom, 2026). Tourism activities involving gastronomy, artisanal production, sustainable agriculture, environmental restoration, marine conservation, and creative industries may become spaces for experiential education and capability development (Richards, 2011; Ratten et al., 2019; Lo et al., 2021; Sayatovic, 2023; Bardolet-Puigdollers & Fusté-Forné, 2023; Everingham et al., 2023). This perspective aligns with transformative tourism approaches, in which experiences are valued for both entertainment and their potential to produce long-term behavioral transformation, i.e., so-called pro-environmental behavior (Pung et al., 2020; Everingham et al., 2023; Bai et al., 2025; Zhao, 2025; Tran, 2026). By integrating these learning processes into circular tourism ecosystems, destinations can foster deeper connections between visitors and local regenerative practices (Ferasso et al., 2020; Cardoso et al., 2024).

A second dimension involves local community engagement and empowerment (Calisto et al., 2023; Strippoli et al., 2024; UN Tourism, 2025). Unlike conventional tourism models that often lead to economic leakage and superficial tourist-host interactions, Circular Skillcation fosters deeper collaboration between tourists and local actors (Chaitanya & Swain, 2024; Tami-Barrera et al., 2024). Local communities become active facilitators of knowledge exchange, cultural preservation, and sustainability practices (Bogatinoska et al., 2024). Such interactions may contribute to income diversification, reinforcement of territorial identity, preservation of traditional knowledge, and social capital development within destinations (Ferasso et al., 2020; Bardolet-Puigdollers & Fusté-Forné, 2023; Boldo et al., 2024; Cardoso et al., 2024). By fostering these symbiotic relationships, Circular Skillcation empowers local voices and ensures that tourism benefits are restorative for both the community and the environment (Mishulina, 2023; Strippoli et al., 2024).

The third dimension concerns the incorporation of CE principles into tourism experiences (Stahel, 2016; Einarsson & Sorin, 2020; Lo et al., 2021; Strippoli et al., 2024; UN Tourism, 2025; Cheng et al., 2026; Mpanza & Ngwenya, 2026). Circular Skillcation integrates practices such as resource reuse, local sourcing, waste reduction, regenerative environmental activities, and collaborative production systems. Previous studies indicate that CE approaches may strengthen innovation ecosystems and competitive advantages among small tourism businesses (Ferasso et al., 2020; Kipinski et al., 2026). For local tourism enterprises, Circular Skillcation may create opportunities for differentiation through authentic learning experiences, sustainable gastronomy, local artisanal production, and community-based tourism initiatives (Sims, 2009; Rodríguez et al., 2020; Walter, 2025). By embedding these circular practices into the tourist approach, businesses can enhance their resilience while contributing to the overall sustainability of the destination (Ferasso et al., 2023; Kipinski et al., 2026).

Circular Economy and the 5Rs in Circular Skillcation: A primer

A central contribution of Circular Skillcation lies in integrating regenerative tourism with the practical application of the 5Rs framework: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover, and Regenerate (Stahel, 2016; Kirchherr et al., 2023; Meshram, 2024). While CE approaches are frequently associated with industrial systems, tourism experiences also offer opportunities to operationalize regenerative and circular principles within local ecosystems and experiential consumption dynamics (Bellato & Pollock, 2025; Tanveer et al., 2025). By positioning the tourist as a "co-producer of the tourist experience," Circular Skillcation allows for the direct implementation of these principles through hands-on activities that restore and enhance the destination's natural and social capital (Das & Mishra, 2026). This operationalization transforms the 5Rs from abstract concepts into tangible practices that define the regenerative value of the tourism journey (Ferasso et al., 2020; Kipinski et al., 2026).

The first principle, Reduce, refers to minimizing excessive consumption, waste generation, and environmental pressure caused by tourism activities. Within Circular Skillcation, tourists are encouraged to learn and adopt conscious consumption practices, including low-impact mobility, reduced water and energy use, preference for local products, and participation in small-scale tourism experiences.

The second principle, Reuse, involves extending the life cycle of materials, products, infrastructure, and cultural assets through creative and sustainable practices. Circular Skillcation experiences may include workshops focused on artisanal reuse, adaptive reuse of tourism spaces, creative upcycling, sustainable gastronomy, and local handicraft production using reclaimed materials.

The third principle, Recycle, emphasizes transforming waste into new value-generating resources. Tourism activities involving community recycling programs, marine waste recovery, composting initiatives, sustainable gastronomy systems, and educational environmental workshops may actively engage tourists in circular practices while generating environmental awareness and practical competencies.

The fourth principle, Recover, refers to recovering ecosystems, cultural heritage, biodiversity, local (almost lost) traditions, and social value previously degraded by unsustainable tourism models. Circular Skillcation may include experiences related to ecosystem restoration, regenerative agriculture, biodiversity recovery, and preservation of traditional knowledge.

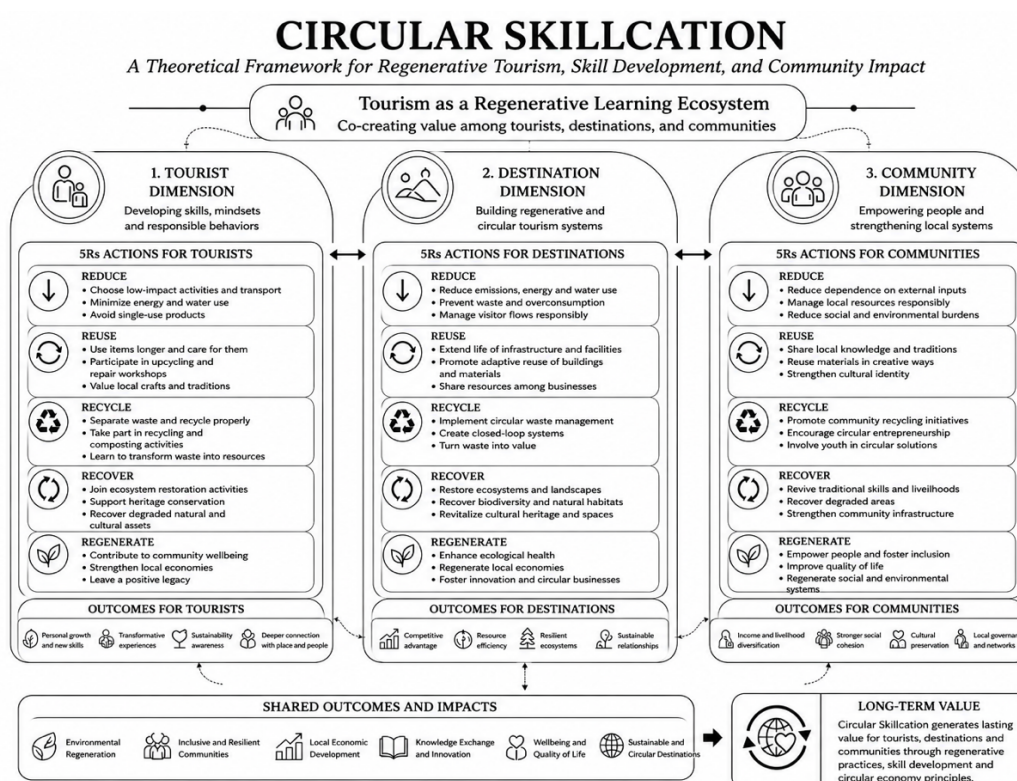
Finally, the fifth principle, Regenerate, represents the most advanced dimension of both CE and regenerative tourism. Regenerative tourism seeks to create net positive outcomes for ecosystems, communities, and local economies. In Circular Skillcation, tourists become temporary contributors to local regenerative systems by participating in collaborative sustainability initiatives, engaging in environmental stewardship, and engaging with cultural exchange and local innovation ecosystems.

For small tourism businesses, the incorporation of the 5Rs may generate important competitive advantages (Villegas et al., 2026). Previous studies indicate that CE practices contribute to sustainability-oriented innovation, resilience, stakeholder collaboration, and business model transformation among SMEs (Ferasso et al., 2020; Ferasso et al., 2023; Schmitt & Florian, 2024). Consequently, Circular Skillcation may support small tourism enterprises in developing differentiated tourism experiences capable of simultaneously generating economic, social, environmental, and educational value (Perramon et al., 2024). By leveraging these circular pathways, SMEs can enhance their organizational performance while fostering community resilience and long-term territorial vitality.

Additionally, studies on tourism governance and open innovation demonstrate that sustainable tourism increasingly depends on a collaborative ecosystem of actors, including tourists, local communities, institutions, and tourism operators (Boldo et al., 2024; Cardoso et al., 2024; Paddison & Hall, 2024). Therefore, Circular Skillcation may strengthen local co-operation networks while positioning tourists as consumers and as active contributors to destination sustainability and regeneration (Bellato & Pollock, 2025; Papadopoulos & Pitoska, 2025). This collaborative perspective adds value by transforming social-ecological systems and helping stakeholders transition toward a more resilient and future-proof tourism model (Ferasso et al., 2020; Dredge, 2022; Regalado-Pezúa & Christofle, 2026; Kipinski et al., 2026). By fostering these open innovation ecosystems, destinations can harness collective intelligence to address complex sustainability challenges while enhancing the overall tourist experience (Ferasso et al., 2023; Cardoso et al., 2024).

Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework of Circular Skillcation. The framework integrates the three core dimensions of the model – Tourist Dimension, Destination Dimension, and Community Dimension – with the operational logic of the 5Rs of CE. The model proposes that tourism experiences may simultaneously foster tourists' skill development, destination regeneration, and local community empowerment through regenerative and circular practices.

Figure 1. Circular Skillcation integrating the 5Rs of CE within three interconnected dimensions



Source: Own elaboration.

CONCLUSIONS

This short paper proposes the concept of Circular Skillcation as an emerging tourism approach integrating regenerative tourism, circular economy principles, tourists' skill development, and local community engagement. By incorporating the 5Rs framework — Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover, and Regenerate — the study argues that tourism experiences may evolve beyond passive consumption models toward transformative, regenerative systems that generate multidimensional value for tourists, destinations, local populations, and small tourism businesses.

Theoretical contributions include the conceptual integration of skill-based tourism experiences with CE and regenerative tourism perspectives, an intersection that remains underexplored in the tourism literature. The paper also contributes to debates surrounding transformative tourism, experiential learning, tourism governance, and sustainable tourism innovation.

From a practical perspective, Circular Skillcation may inspire tourism operators, destination managers, policymakers, and small tourism enterprises to develop tourism experiences that foster sustainability, territorial resilience, local engagement, collaborative value creation, and environmental regeneration. The approach may also support the diversification of tourism products while strengthening cultural preservation, environmental awareness, and local innovation ecosystems.

Future studies may empirically investigate tourists' motivations, behavioral transformations, and perceived value associated with Circular Skillcation experiences. Additional research may also examine the economic, environmental, and social impacts of such tourism models in different territorial contexts, particularly among small tourism businesses and community-based tourism initiatives.

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Conceptualization and Writing – original draft.