



# Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society

Conference Proceedings

**Short Papers** 

Parma (Italy)

13-14 June 2024

Sinergie-SIMA Management Conference Proceedings  Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society 13-14 June 2024  University of Parma - Italy
ISBN 978-88-94-7136-5-7

The Conference Proceedings are published online on https://www.sijmsima.it

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## Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society

13-14 June 2024

## Conference Proceedings

**Short Papers** 

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To the reader,

this volume contains the long papers of the Sinergie-SIMA 2024 Management Conference, hosted by the University of Parma on June 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 2024.

Theory and practice in the field of management have been challenged by the emergence of sustainability and well-being as major global policy priorities. Both sustainability and well-being are complex, value-laden, and strongly interconnected; however, they tend to exist in separate realms.

Sustainability literature has recorded an evolution in the way the concept of sustainable development is understood, leading to the articulation of sustainable development as human "wellbeing" and "flourishing", rather than "needs". Nevertheless, some scholars have pointed out a lack of clarity in the conceptualization, which causes some ambiguity in terms of definition (Ronen & Kerret, 2020). Kjell (2011) observed that human needs and well-being are poorly understood, characterized, and developed by sustainability research. Along the same vein, Helne & Hirvilammi (2015) observed that the overarching goal of sustainable development (i.e., well-being) has often been narrowly interpreted, mainly in economic terms, while connections between the natural environment and human flourishing have been overlooked. More recently, O'Mahony (2022) remarked that the literature conceptualizing human well-being continues to exist largely outside sustainable development. Hence, placing well-being more clearly within the sustainability framework could be highly beneficial to sustainability.

Concurrently, the literature on well-being is almost entirely dissociated from the contributions of nature or the relationships with ecological and planetary systems (Roberts et al., 2015), and the importance of social dimensions is an emergent conclusion. Therefore, the rationale of contextual systems inherent to sustainability research (incorporating views of times, society, and biosphere) could significantly enrich well-being research, fostering a more holistic perspective on well-being and an increased awareness of the limits of individual well-being pursuits (Kjell, 2011).

In brief, though well-being has major implications for sustainable development and vice versa, the body of literature that effectively integrates sustainability and well-being remains in an embryonic stage.

The above considerations aim to act as catalysts for an interdisciplinary debate within the field of management. Enriching the conception of flourishing well-being in sustainability and the contribution of nature to well-being can produce impactful scientific research, as O'Mahony (2022) points out. Equally important is the analysis of the links between sustainability and well-being, encompassing synergies and trade-offs at the organizational level, in value chains, and in interactions with stakeholders across various industries.

The Sinergie-SIMA 2024 Management Conference welcomed contributions based on different theories, methodological approaches, and units of analysis with the potential to empower a transformation for flourishing individuals, society, and the natural world alike. More precisely, the Conference was a great occasion to discuss the research efforts of our research community within tracks related to the:

- Conference theme (Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society),
- SIMA thematic groups (Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology Management, Intelligenza manageriale nel management, International Business, Marketing, Purpose-driven Businesses, Retailing & Service Management, Small & Family Business, Strategic Communication, Strategy & Governance, Supply Chain Management, Logistics & Operations, Sustainability, and Tourism & Culture Management),
- special tracks (Examining the social and environmental relevance of sustainable digital business models: Impact on business practices and consumers, Growing resilient Italian SMEs, and Perspectives on grand challenges in international business and implications for companies),
- Management Case Studies.

The Conference call for papers gave the opportunity to submit either short and long papers. Overall, the editorial staff received 277 submissions of which 215 short papers and 62 long papers.

For the *short and long papers*, the evaluation followed the peer review process, with a double-blind review performed by, respectively, one or two referees - university lecturers and experts about the topic - selected among SIMA and the community of Sinergie members.

In detail, the referees applied the following criteria to evaluate the submissions:

- clarity of the research aims,
- accuracy of the methodological approach,
- contribution in terms of originality/innovativeness,
- theoretical and practical contribution,
- clarity of communication,
- significance of the bibliographical basis.

The *peer review* process resulted in full acceptance or rejection of the submissions. In the case of disagreement among reviewers' evaluations, the decision was taken by the Chairs of the SIMA thematic groups or conference track. Each work was then sent back to the Authors together with the referees' reports. The suggestions received by the referees were used by the Authors during the presentation of their research works at the Conference.

The evaluation process ended with the acceptance of 211 short papers and 58 long papers. This volume proposes the papers whose Authors have authorized their publication.

All the long papers published in this volume were presented and discussed during the Conference and published online on the web portal of Sinergie-SIMA Management Conference (https://www.sijmsima.it/).

While thanking all the Authors, Chairs, and participants, we hope that this volume will contribute to advance knowledge about the management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society.

The Conference Chairs

Guido Cristini, Beatrice Luceri, Arabella Mocciaro Li Destri, and Marta Ugolini

#### **SUMMARY**

#### Track 1 - Entrepreneurship

Empowering Student Innovators: Framing Entrepreneurship Education in Europe Chiara Bartoli, Federica Brunetta, Christian Lechner	PAG.	3
Entrepreneurial Education as a transition driver from informal to formal entrepreneurship in complexity context: the AWE program.		
Fabio Greco, Francesco Carignani, Francesco Bifulco	"	11
Fostering Entrepreneurial Thinking: Analysing the Drivers and Impact of Entrepreneurship Education Dario Peirone, Judy Yueh Ling Song	"	17
Students' entrepreneurial intentions among personal and contextual factors: a pilot study exploring the role of emotions.		
ROSSELLA BARATTA, PIERMATTEO ARDOLINO, DIEGO BELLINI, SERENA CUBICO, FRANCESCA SIMEONI	"	23
Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainability. How can challenge-based learning impact students' entrepreneurial skills and challenge providers' problems?  ALESSANDRA SCROCCARO	"	31
Humane entrepreneurship and the circular economy: an empirical investigation.  MASSIMILIANO VESCI, ROBERTA DE ANGELIS	"	33
Is Passion a Driver of Sustainable Entrepreneurship? An Autobiographic Analysis of Fashion Entrepreneurs CECILIA PASQUINELLI, SERENA ROVAI, MATILDE MILANESI, SIMONE GUERCINI	"	39
Social Innovation: a literature review mapping intellectual structure of the field. Lorena Gonzalez, Elena Casprini	"	45
Inter-organizational knowledge transfer in Open Innovation Ecosystems: the case of Eni's territorial initiative GIORGIO DI FIORE	"	51
Empowering Digital Entrepreneurship: Regulatory Governance in Platform Ecosystems Muhanad Hasan Agha, Vladimir Korovkin, Svetlana Mironyuk	"	57
The Governance of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Ecosystem Manager or Ecosystem Act? GABRIELE IANIRO, MICHELE MODINA	"	59
A comprehensive exploration of the knowns and unknowns of Private Equity Secondary Markets Michele Lertora, Cristina De Silva, Margherita Mietto, Anna Gervasoni	"	63
Unveiling The Pitfalls Of Entrepreneurial Team Diversity: Insight From A Post-Mortem Analysis of Failed Start-Ups Adele Parmentola, Michele Costagliola Di Fiore	"	69
Agility to Handle Dynamics of Business Transformation GIUSEPPE PIRRONE, MARGHERITA MILOTTA, BIRGIT HAGEN, MARTIN CLOUTIER	"	75
Venture-Builders' Program Design and the creation of Scaleups PAOLA BELINGHERI, CHRISTIAN LECHNER	"	83
Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: exploring the Italian Tech Scaleups scenario Serena Valente, Alessia Pisoni	"	89
Innovazione e imprenditorialità femminile nelle PMI: un'analisi fuzzy dei driver della performance Ludovica Antenozio, Daniela Di Berardino	"	97

#### Track 2 - Innovation & Technology Management

Beyond Words: Leveraging Language for Strategic Decision-Making in Innovation.  MARIA RUCSANDRA STAN, FRANCESCA DI PIETRO, FRANCESCA CAPO	PAG.	105
Combining innovation and business networks for resource mobilization in the meat sector: a case study Alessandro Pagano, Elisa Carloni	"	111
The role of purpose in digital companies: a study on Exponential Organizations Francesco Derchi, Nicoletta Buratti, Francesco Vitellaro	"	115
Data Value Chain and Data Ecosystem through digital and traditional tools Loris Santarelli, Federica Ceci, Marianna Sgammotta	"	123
Web 3.0: il punto di vista dei manager sulle opportunità e le sfide del Metaverso e degli NFT Chiara Bartoli, Francesco Fasano, Francesco Cappa, Paolo Boccardelli	"	129
Fostering high-impact innovation: empirical evidence in Europe Valeria Schifilliti, Elvira Tiziana La Rocca, Maurizio La Rocca	"	135
<i>Innovation in 14.0 and firms performance in Italy</i> Francesco Capone, Niccolò Innocenti, Leonardo Mazzoni, Luciana Lazzeretti	"	141
The "5Vs" of Big Data and the Propensity to Generate Patents with Big Data Technologies in SMEs Enrico Marcazzan, Saverio Barabuffi, Giulio Ferrigno, Andrea Piccaluga	66	147
How WEIRD is Social Innovation?  JORDANA RECH GRACIANO DOS SANTOS, IAN MCCARTHY	"	153
Open Innovation search strategies and Innovation performance: differential moderating effects of Big Data Characteristics Giulio Ferrigno, Saverio Barabuffi, Enrico Marcazzan, Andrea Piccaluga	"	161
The role of digital platforms in the university exchange of knowledge: the case of Knowledge Share Mariapia Cutugno, Tindara Abbate, Fabrizio Cesaroni	"	167
The measure of digital maturity Dario Russo, Piero Demetrio Falorsi, Federico Cardone	44	171
Track 3 - International Business		
Exploring the impact of cybersecurity on digital export: evidence from food industry Giovanna Terrizzi, Alba Marino, Maria Cristina Cinici, Daniela Baglieri	"	181
Industry 4.0, Sustainability, and Internationalization: A Systematic Literature Review Martina Tomasetig	"	189
The advantage of stateness abroad: an analysis of the social networks of state-owned enterprises Gabriele Galli, Roberto Urbani	44	197
La strategia 'grab and go': intuizioni teoriche preliminari e possibili implicazioni Martina Castronovo, Anna Mina', Paquale Massimo Picone	"	205
L'imprenditorialità femminile migrante nei business familiari Giulio Palmas, Michela Floris	"	211
When algorithms help cross-cultural management educators: a proposed supportive tool Bice Della Piana, Francesco Di Vincenzo, Chiara Signore, Mario Trerotola	"	217
Decoding the future: entrepreneurial visions on AI's role in international strategic decisions Barbara Francioni, Alice Aiudi, Yuliia Kyrdoda, Simona Amerio	"	225

#### Track 4 - Management Case Studies

A Public Service Logic perspective applied to health and social welfare services provided to the elderly:		
the case of the VIII Municipality of Rome Magda Touti, Fabiola Sfodera, Luca Dezi	Pag.	233
Interpreting long-lasting corporate crises according to stakeholders' perspective:		
evidence from the ILVA experience SILVIA COSIMATO	"	239
SEVE COSMITTO		237
Knowledge sharing and learning through face-to-face and digital tools		
Loris Santarelli, Francesca Masciarelli	"	245
How do stakeholders perceive the impacts of Nature-based solutions? An Italian case study		
for coastal restoration and climate change adaptation		
GIORGIA CONDOMITTI, MARIA ROSA DE GIACOMO, SARA TESSITORE, MARCO FREY	"	251
Una ipotesi di formalizzazione markoviana della dinamica delle unità operative nei cambiamenti		
organizzativi di ENEL S.p.A.		
Mario Brunetti, Gianluca Vagnani	"	259
Empowering women workforce in steel production: A case study on implementing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives		
Laura Tolettini, Eleonora Di Maria, Emilia Filippi, Letizia Lo Preiato, Mariaasole Bannò	"	265
La trasformazione organizzativa di Autostrade per l'Italia: verso la strategic agility nell'era delle policris	si "	250
Paolo Boccardelli, Roberto Tomasi, Chiara Bartoli, Maria Lorenza Gerardi	••	273
Track 5 - Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society		
Happiness and emotions at work in organizational relationships. The role of affectivity and empathy		
for meta-organizational and nonhierarchical solutions in the resilient firm		
LUCIANO PILOTTI	"	283
The shortage of skilled personnel in the transition from Industry 4.0 to Industry 5.0: Impacts and challenges in the machine tool industry		
Eleonora Biglia, Monica Cugno, Rebecca Castagnoli	"	289
Additive manufacturing: tecnologie umane e sostenibili per il benessere degli individui e della società		
GIUSEPPE BONGIORNO, MARIACARMELA PASSARELLI, MICHELA SANGUEDOLCE,	"	207
Luigino Filice, Alfio Cariola		297
Well-being in the transition from Industry 4.0 to Industry 5.0		
Michela Piccarozzi, Federica Caboni, Roberto Bruni	"	303
Employee well-being in the era of hybrid work: In search of sustainability for organizational members		
Alfonsa Butera, Alessandra Mazzei, Silvia Ravazzani	"	311
,		
Navigating Transformative Service Research for individual and social well-being:		
A comprehensive review	"	217
Maria Della Lucia, Erica Santini, Muhammad Junaid Shahid Hasni		317
Le App di food sharing tra benefici individuali e ambientali: ascolto delle conversazioni online		
degli utenti su Too Good To Go.		
Silvia Bellini, Cristina Zerbini, Donata Tania Vergura, Beatrice Ceccoli	"	325
Well-being as a key for sustainable and long-term oriented management		
Dario Natale Palmucci, Gabriele Santoro	"	331
The role of the enterprise in the pursuit of the well-being for citizens and society. The contribution of the Italian Schools of Enterprise Economics and Management		
Silvia Bruzzi	"	335

The strength of Nutriscore in improving sustainable eating habits and well-being: bad and good news Ornella Bonafede, Carmela D'Agostino, Andrea Bazzani, Giuseppe Turchetti, Leopoldo Trieste	PAG.	341
Does organic food consumption impact subjective well-being? A mediation-moderation approach Celso Augusto De Matos, Marlon Dalmoro, Marcia Dutra De Barcellos	"	347
An improved framework for social sustainability: a bottom-up approach to boost social innovation and sustain employability GIUSY SICA, ALESSANDRA MICOZZI, MARIA ANTONELLA FERRI, MARIA PALAZZO	"	353
Knowledge, self-perception and eco-sustainable behaviours. Inspiring actions in green learning Adriana Apuzzo, Rita Klapper, Marialuisa Saviano, Mario Testa	"	361
Understanding the link among cultural participation, resilience, and well-being.  A systematic literature review.  GIORGIA MASILI, DANIELE BINCI	"	369
Shaping tomorrow's sustainable enterprises: profiling the hard and soft skills of sustainable managers Giulia Nevi, Giulia Gogiali, Gianpaolo Basile, Luca Dezi, Carmela Guitto	"	375
Track 6 - Marketing		
Virtual influencers in tourism marketing: insight or oversight? The case of "Open to Meraviglia" RADA GUTULEAC, GABRIELE BAIMA, CRISTIAN RIZZO	"	383
Mitigating the Negative Effects of Human-like Virtual Medical Agents on Patients' Emotions.  Results From A Preliminarily Experimental Study  ANDREA SESTINO, ALFREDO D'ANGELO, RUSSELL W. BELK	"	389
Scaling Consumer Neuroscience Technologies for Individual and Societal Well-Being. A Bibliometric Analysis of Precursors.  Andrea Bazzani, Giorgio Manfroni, Ugo Faraguna, Giuseppe Turchetti	"	393
Unveiling the Dynamics of GPT Technology Adoption: Assessing Trust in Technology and Self-Efficacy's Influence on Consumer Behavior FRANCESCA CELIO, FRANCESCO RICOTTA	"	403
Investigating Consumer Perceptions of Brand Personality and Reactions in the Automotive Industry by ChatGPT	"	400
ALESSANDRO SIGNORINI, ALESSANDRO FERI, ANGELO BACCELLONI, ELISA PUVIA  *Understanding the potentialities of metaverse for marketers. Insights from Italy  MICHELE SIMONI, ANNARITA SORRENTINO, LUCA VENTURINI, MYRIAM CARATU	"	409 419
"The influence of individual values on purchase intention of fair-trade products:  An analysis on Italian consumers"  NOHAILA KARTTI, GIUSEPPE FRANZESE, CHIARA CANNAVALE	"	425
The story that only circular products can tell: Empowering consumers through background information Shripathy Swaminathan, Vinicio Di Iorio, Francesco Testa	"	431
Reshaping customers' lifelong journey in the health and wellness contexts  Laura Grazzini, Sabina De Rosis, Raffaele Frustaci, Valentina Sbrolli, Gaetano Aiello	"	445
A Well Mind, A Wise Choice: A Systematic Review of Wellness and its Influence on Food Decision-Making SIMONA DEL CORE, ALESSIO DI LEO, FABIOLA SFODERA, NICCOLÒ PICCIONI	"	451
Taste-Makers Narratives: Analyzing the Effect of Food Influencers on Home Cooks FRANCESCO SMALDONE, GIADA MAINOLFI	"	457

Antonella Cammarota, Francesca Avallone, Vittoria Marino, Riccardo Resciniti	PAG.	463
L'integrazione del Metaverso negli eventi: impatto sugli SDG's e prospettive future Francesca Igini, Arturo Cafaro, Mario Calabrese	"	469
The impact of sustainability and country-of-origin on consumers' willingness-to-pay for a brand: A conceptual framework CHIARA SCRIMIERI, ADAMANTIOS DIAMANTOPOULOS, MICHELA MATARAZZO, ALBERTO PASTORE	"	477
Conceptualizing perceptions of institutionally derived maneuverable space for value (co)creation.  JIMMIE RÖNDELL, PETER EKMAN	"	483
Narrating the past. Exploring the antecedents of the use of heritage marketing tools by centenarian Italian companies		
ANGELO RIVIEZZO, GIUSY MIGNONE, ANTONIO LUCADAMO, MARIA ROSARIA NAPOLITANO	"	489
Examining Healthy Food Consumption Among People Over 60 years VINCENZO GISSI, ELISABETTA SAVELLI	"	495
The new dimension of brand in 'metaverse': a structured literature review Karolina Sallaku, Domenico Morrone, Annunziata Tarulli	"	503
Delving into sustainability and Made in Italy fashion brands: Perspectives from Generation Z Federica Ceccotti, Sara Boccalini, Michela Patrizi, Maria Vernuccio, Alberto Pastore	"	509
Drinking with eyes: how colors elicit consumers' taste expectations of coffee Daniele Porcheddu, Raffaele Campo, Pierfelice Rosato, Fabrizio Piu	"	517
Aging and social influence: An empirical investigation of the effect of age on consumers' susceptibility to word of mouth ALESSANDRO M. PELUSO, ANTEA GAMBICORTI, GIOVANNI PINO, MIHAELA GIANNELLI	"	523
The rise of Phygital Reality: insights from Structural Topic Modelling Daniele Virgillito, Francesco Russo, Alessia Munnia, Marco Romano	"	529
Exploring the Metaverse from the consumer perspective: insight from a systematic literature review.  MARCO FERRETTI, MARIA ANTONELLA FERRI, GIUSEPPE LA RAGIONE, MARIA PALAZZO, FRANCESCO PAROLA, MARCELLO RISITANO	"	535
Fifty Shades of Black Friday Francesca Negri, Alessandro Iuffmann Ghezzi	"	541
Track 7 - Purpose-driven Businesses		
Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Proximity: a framework for Social Ecosystem Development Ricky Celenta, Valentina Cucino, Rosangela Feola, Chiara Crudele	"	549
Purpose-driven Clusters in the Era of Sustainability Michele Simoni, Maria Cristina Pietronudo, Eva Panetti	"	555
The Power of Interactions. Exploring Stakeholder Adoption of pro-social practices from purpose-driven companies	"	<b>7</b> . c 1
MARTINA TAFURO, ANDREA PICCALUGA	••	561
B-Corp: un esame delle aziende alimentari Italiane attraverso la Teoria dei Segnali Nora Annesi, Valentina Cucino	"	567
Individuals' Goal Alignment in Humane Entrepreneurial Oriented Organisations: A Preliminary Study CHIARA MARINELLI GRAZIA GARLATTI COSTA, SALVATORE DORE	"	573

Open Social Innovation per affrontare le sfide globali: il caso Isinnova Valentina Cucino, Rosangela Feola, Giulio Ferrigno	PAG.	581
Track 8 - Retailing & Service Management		
The effect of entrepreneurial and customer orientations on shopper loyalty: an explorative study on small independent retailers		
ALICE MANTOVANI, LARA PENCO, SANDRO CASTALDO	"	589
Ensuring customer satisfaction and loyalty of online health and well-being: a comparison study across types of services GIADA SALVIETTI, SILVIA RANFAGNI, DANIO BERTI		597
Digital Transformation in the Italian Restaurant Industry: Navigating the Challenges and Opportunity of Food Delivery Services		
ALBERTO SUSCO, DAVIDE CANAVESIO, MONICA CUGNO	"	605
Exploring Metaverse Adoption in High-Involvement Purchases: Insights from field research Beatrice Luceri, Simone Aiolfi, Giovanni Romano	"	611
Word of mouth vs. word of machine: a preliminary analysis Graziano Abrate, Valeria Faralla	"	619
Promoting (un)conscious purchasing behaviors and choices in favor of sustainability Silvia Bellini, Chiara Bacchilega, Davide Pellegrini, Simone Aiolfi	"	623
The Family Caregiver Experience in Palliative Care Pathways: Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Approach	"	626
Marzia Cettina Severino, Costanza Galli, Sabina De Rosis		629
Balancing Act: The Impact of Product-Oriented Sustainability Information on Consumer Responses Valentina Mazzoli, Laura Grazzini, Aulona Ulqinaku	"	635
Catalysing Sustainability: Retailers as Driving Platforms in the Food Industry's Transition Alberto Massacci, Elena Casprini, Lorenzo Zanni	"	641
The right kiosk across different generations! A quantitative study in the retailing food sector Luca Corinaldesi, Gennaro Iasevoli, Chiara Ottolenghi	"	649
Retail Internationalization and Innovation: systematic literature review MICHELE BADOLATO		655
Track 9 - Small & Family Business		
Dynamics of Change: A Comparative Analysis of Commitment in Family vs. Non-Family Businesses Roberta Pinna, Michela Floris, Fabio Corona, Gianfranco Cicotto, Cinzia Dessi		673
Exploring the dynamics of external knowledge acquisition in family businesses: factors, constraints, and success indicators		
GERARDO BOSCO, ALESSIA SCIARRONE, RAFFAELE D'AMORE, DAVIDE LIBERATO LO CONTE, MARIO CALABRESE	"	679
Tradition in Transition: Exploring Organizational Dynamics and Strategies in Small Hotels Marco Corsino, Davide Bagnaresi, Francesco Maria Barbini	"	685
Whispers of Ambition: Unpacking Emotions in Entrepreneurial Orientation of Women-Led Family Businesses		
MICHELA FLORIS, ANGELA DETTORI, RICHA GOEL, TILOTTAMA SINGH	"	691

The impact of board gender diversity on family firms' value: the mediating role of environmental innovation Francesco Gangi, Maria Coscia, Lucia Michela Daniele, Nicola Varrone	Pag.	699
The digital transformation process of SMEs to compete in the current business environment: evidence from an Italian case GINEVRA TESTA, ANDREA CIACCI, LARA PENCO	"	707
Track 10 - Strategic Communication		
Millennials and Bookfluencers: a cross cultural analysis Linda Gabbianelli	"	715
The impact of communicating food safety on communication goals: an exploratory study in Agri-food firms from the entrepreneurial perspective  EMANUELA CONTI, DANIELE GIAMPAOLI, FRANCESCA CESARONI, TONINO PENCARELLI	"	721
Leveraging Italianness abroad: A corpus-assisted discourse approach to restaurant branding Walter Spezzano, Stefano De Cantis, John D. Buschman	"	727
Testing controversial advertising effects on brand associations: first insights from an affective		121
priming pilot experiment Francesca Sammartino, Francesca Conte, Siano Alfonso	"	733
Strategic Agility in Error Management: Bridging Theory and Practice in Strategic Communication MARCO BALZANO	"	741
Track 11 - Strategy & Governance		
Do executive actions reflect their personality traits?: A review of organizational misconduct Pierluigi Giardino, Andrea Caputo	"	749
Governing Micro-Municipalities: A Literature Review  Matteo Cristofaro, Nicola Cucari, Antonella Monda, Davide Liberato Lo Conte,  Anastassia Zannoni, Leul Girma, Pinalba Schilleci, Francesco Laviola, Simona Mare	"	757
Uno strumento di Governance ESG integrata per una strategia aziendale sostenibile Ilenia Ceglia, Massimo Battaglia, Nora Annesi, Francesco Mercuri	"	765
Does female corporate leadership improve environmental performance? A systematic literature review Maria Rosa De Giacomo, Marco Frey	"	771
The Geography of Innovation: The Phenomenon of Urban Clustering in the Fashion Industry Alessio Travasi, Fabio Musso	"	777
Strategic analysis of IRCCSs' sustainability management PAOLA OLIMPIA ACHARD, CHIARA BELLINI, LEONARDO IOANNUCCI	"	783
The role of HR analytics to Enable Strategic HR management in SMEs Christian Di Prima, Alberto Ferraris	"	791
Trick or Treat: Firm's strategic response to temporary shock in the real estate business Alberto Massacci	"	795
Track 12 - Supply Chain Management, Logistics & Operations		
Who Should Pay for the Returns Product? The Effect of Transparency on Consumers' Decision-making across the Reverse Supply Chain.		
BENEDETTA BALDI, NADJA VORONTSOVA, IVAN RUSSO, THOMAS J. GOLDSBY	"	805

Francesco Ghezzi, Fabio Iannone, Francesco Rizzi, Eleonora Annunziata, Marco Frey	PAG.	811
Triadic literature in sustainable supply chain management: paving the way Chiara Sguizzardi, Ivan Russo, Ilenia Confente	"	817
Logistics services providers in humanitarian logistics. A bibliometric and systematic literature review. Francesca Celio, Alessandra Cozzolino	"	823
Eco-packaging innovations in paper and cardboard. Preliminary insights from cognitive mapping on international projects  ALESSANDRA COZZOLINO, PIETRO DE GIOVANNI	"	831
Strategic reshoring: redefining competitiveness in global markets Simone Luongo, Valentina Della Corte, Enrico Di Taranto	"	837
Unpacking the "truce" in Sales and Operations Planning routine. An ethnographic study Davide Bonfio, Andrea Furlan	"	843
Which governance strategy is best for specialized investments? Insights from the weaker partner's perspective  EMANUELA DELBUFALO	"	849
Decarbonizing Last-Mile Delivery: a study on crowdsourced delivery incentives SILVIA BLASI, SARA TONIOLO	"	855
Managing critical raw materials in energy transitioning supply chains: a Resource Dependence theoretical perspective on supply chain management capabilities VITTORIO MARIA GARIBBO, FRANCESCO GHEZZI, ELEONORA ANNUNZIATA, FRANCESCO RIZZI, MARCO FREY	"	861
Track 13 - Sustainability		
The rebound effect of responsible consumption: an explorative research on sharing economy consumers Veronica Capone, Cecilia Grieco	"	869
Greenwashing Temptation: A Critical Examination of the Legal Approach against Greenwashing Lucia Gatti, Federica Buffa, Umberto Martini	"	875
Harnessing collective bargaining for fostering sustainability and competitiveness: fact or fiction? Chiara De Bernardi, Niccolò Maria Todaro, Maria Rosa De Giacomo, Marco Frey	"	881
Understanding Corporate Social Responsibility Scepticism: Implications and Insights from the Literature		
RONGTITYA RITH, RICCARDO SPINELLI	"	887
Il ruolo degli intermediari nella Simbiosi Industriale: il caso Regusto Chiara Palagonia, Gaelle Cotterlaz-Rannard, Caroline Mattelin-Pierrard, Laura Michelini	"	893
L'industria del calcio tra sostenibilità finanziaria e nuove dimensioni tecnologiche Annabella Conturso, Roberto De Renzi, Pietro Taragoni, Mario Ramaglia	"	899
Rivelare il potenziale nascosto della natura: il ruolo del management nelle public policy per la biodiversità Jacopo Cricchio, Valentina Cucino, Andrea Piccaluga, Alberto Di Minin	"	907
A explorative analysis on the impact of ESG and ESG 's controversies on corporate performance Salvatore Esposito De Falco, Antonio Renzi, Estelina Dalipi, Gianluca Vagnani, Francesca Ramaglia	"	913
Aligning with the Sustainability Promise in ESG investing: A case study on employees' ESG readiness HELENA LIEWENDAHL KRISTINA HEINONEN TERESIA STIGZELIUS CATHARINA EHRNROOTH	"	921

Food Waste and Out-of-Home Consumption Patterns: Unravelling the Actual Consumption Behavior of Food Taken Away and Consumed at Home		
LUDOVICA PRINCIPATO, CAMILLA COMIS, LUCA SECONDI, MENGTING YU, CLARA CICATIELLO	PAG.	929
The role of Paradox mindset on the intention to implement Industrial Symbiosis: linking Paradox Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior		
ALICE ALOSI, CARINA KELLER, ELEONORA ANNUNZIATA, FRANCESCO RIZZI, KARIN KREUTZER, MARCO FREY	"	935
Managing the business and biodiversity relationship: a Systematic Review SARA TESSITORE, FRANCESCO TESTA, NICCOLÒ MARIA TODARO, DUCCIO TOSI, VINICIO DI IORIO	"	941
The role of biodiversity for business and social innovation Mauro Capestro, Stefano Denicolai	"	949
How do Dynamic capabilities, Ecosystems and Green innovations contribute to the creation of a Net Zero Path? Insights from Italian wine sector.  RITA MURA, FRANCESCA VICENTINI, LUCIANO FRATOCCHI, LUDOVICO MARIA BOTTI, MARIA VINCENZA CHIRIACÒ	"	957
Linking innovation and sustainability through equity-based crowdfunding campaigns.  A focus on cultural and creative industries  CRISTINA CATERINA AMITRANO, CIRO TROISE	"	963
Product vs sales platform sustainability: who wins the online challenge?  An exploratory analysis of Italian consumers  Annunziata Tarulli, Domenico Morrone, Daniele Rutigliano, Karolina Sallaku, Raffaele Silvestri	"	969
Driving corporate social responsibility: examining the impact of diversity and inclusion across multiple levels Chiara Leggerini, Mariasole Bannò	"	975
From Dominance to Responsibility. The integration of Corporate Social Responsibility in Chaebol's Corporate Governance CINZIA DESSI	"	981
Sustainability Alignment in Cross-Border Collaborations: Dynamics, Challenges and Limits Davide Liberato Lo Conte, Saqib Shamim, Giuseppe Sancetta	"	987
Sustainable and innovative practices in foodstuffs domain: the impact on consumer's perceptions and dispositions  VERONICA MAROZZO, ALESSANDRA COSTA, TINDARA ABBATE, AUGUSTO D'AMICO	"	995
		993
Evolution of Sustainable Reporting: Impacts and Prospects of CSRD Regulation DAVIDE LIBERATO LO CONTE, RAFFAELE D'AMORE, GERARDO BOSCO, ALESSIA SCIARRONE, MARIO CALABRESE	"	1003
Greening the culinary scene: environmental management initiatives in restaurant sustainability Simone Luongo, Valentina Della Corte, Fabiana Sepe, Giovanna Del Gaudio	44	1011
Perceived authenticity of green influencers: An experiment on components and determinants Stefano Romito, Gaia Giambastiani, Clodia Vurro	"	1017
roblematizing on the three main pillars of sustainability from a paradox theory perspective Alice Alosi, Vinicio Di Iorio	"	1023
Track 14 - Tourism & Culture Management		
The evolution of sustainability discourses in online reviews: an investigation of the impact of triple bottom line dimensions on tourists' eWOM and destination satisfaction.  DAVID D'ACUNTO, SERENA LONARDI, ILENIA CONFENTE	"	1031

DANIELE GRECHI, ROBERTA MINAZZI	PAG.	1037
Data-driven Strategic Process in the Hospitality Industry: Studying Hotel consumers' purchase intention through web analytics.  GIUSEPPINA LO MASCOLO, GABRIELLA LEVANTI, MARCELLO CHIODI, ARABELLA MOCCIARO LI DESTRI		1045
Unveiling Museums' Online Reputation. The Case of the Uffizi Galleries PAOLA BECCHERLE, LUCIANA LAZZERETTI, STEFANIA OLIVA	"	1053
Cruise ship size and public perception: An explorative study on X GINEVRA TESTA, GIORGIA PROFUMO	"	1059
The motivations behind religious and spiritual tourism: an empirical investigation on Assisi visitors Francesca Rivetti, Simone Splendiani, Mauro Dini	"	1067
Industrial tourism in Italy: a spatial analysis of regional patterns of specialization Angelo Riviezzo, Antonella Garofano, Giusy Mignone		1073
Crossing Green Tracks: The Role of Monumental Railways in Promoting Eco-Sustainable Business in Slow Tourism MICHELE BERUTTI, CINZIA DESSI, GIUSEPPE MELIS, DANIELA PETTINAO	"	1079
Contributing to Cultural Welfare: A Critical Review of Methods for Measuring the Impact of Culture on Sustainability and Well-being  MARA CERQUETTI, GIULIA LAPUCCI	"	1087
Tourism in Smart City policy: an opportunity for Urban Sustainability Stefania Escobar, Giovanni Esposito, Nathalie Crutzen, Michael Nippa, Linda Osti	"	1093
Transnational collaborations for a more sustainable tourism: the role of digital transition Alessia Zoppelletto, Serena Lonardi, Umberto Martini	"	1099
Measuring Destination Carrying Capacity from Residents' Perspectives: A Pilot Study in Garda Trentino OKSANA TOKARCHUK, CAROLA STEFENELLI, UMBERTO MARTINI	66	1105
A sensitizing literature review for future research about overtourism in Milan Andrea Chiarini, Alberto Grando		1113
La formazione degli ecosistemi digitali tra strategie deliberate e processi spontanei Sonia Caterina Giaccone, Arisa Shollo	"	1119
Metaverse in social innovation: developing trends to support marginal areas sustainable growing. Gianpaolo Basile, Maria Palazzo, Maria Antonella Ferri, Mario Tani	"	1125
Harnessing Digital Technologies for Knowledge Management in Luxury Hospitality: the cases of Grand Hotel et de Milan and STRAFhotel&bar.  MARIAPINA TRUNFIO, LUNA LEONI, CECILIA PASQUINELLI, ANGELO PRESENZA	"	1131
Cultural Heritage Management in Museums: The Open Culture Dilemma Maria Della Lucia, Giulia Dore, Rana Muhammad Umar	"	1137
Destination ambassador, authenticity and informal communication. Exploratory research on mountain professionals  UMBERTO MARTINI, FEDERICA BUFFA	"	1143

### $Track\ 15 - Examining\ the\ social\ and\ environmental\ relevance\ of\ sustainable\ digital\ business\ models:$ $Impact\ on\ business\ practices\ and\ consumers\ -\ Special\ Track$

Good Governance for Smart Villages: A Bibliometric Review LEUL GIRMA HAYLEMARIAM, NICOLA CUCARI, MATTEO CRISTOFARO, FRANCESCO LAVIOLA,		
DAVIDE LIBERATO LO CONTE, ANTONELLA MONDA, ANASTASSIA ZANNONI, PINALBA, SCHILLECI, SIMONA MARE	PAG.	1151
The Paradox of Sustainability in Crowdfunding: Lessons from the Food Industry Luigi Nasta, Barbara Sveva Magnanelli, Luca Pirolo	"	1161
Paradoxical Tensions and Paradoxical Mindset as Predictors of Managers' Behavioral Responses to AI-driven Healthcare Tools: A Preliminarily Study  ANDREA SESTINO, LUÍS IRGANG, HENRIK BARTH, MAGNUS HOLMEN	"	1167
Development and Sustainability of Online Pharmacy Sales ORAZIO VELLA, SIMONE GUERCINI	"	1171
OKAZIO VELLA, BINONE GERCINI		11/1
Track 16 - Growing resilient Italian SMEs - Special Track		
The resilience of family firms: exploring the role of collaborative response with supply chain partners Claudia Pongelli, Emanuela Delbufalo, Alfredo De Massis	٤٤	1179
Verso una Misura di Resilienza per le Piccole e Medie Imprese Pietro Taragoni, Salvatore Esposito De Falco, Antonio Renzi, Gianluca Vagnani	44	1185
La diversità di genere nella forza lavoro come antecedente della resilienza d'impresa: evidenze preliminari da un caso studio Cristina Leone, Pasquale Massimo Picone, Arabella Mocciaro Li Destri	44	1193
Track 17 - Perspectives on grand challenges in international business and implications for companies Special Track	es	
"Made by": the evolution of the Country-of-Origin Effect to businesses and firms Rosario Faraci, Rosaria Ferlito, Sonia Caterina Giaccone	44	1201
Track 18 - Intelligenza artificiale nel management		
From Data to Action: AI-Enhanced Prediction of Business Crises Integrating Financial and Social Media Insights		
DAVIDE LIBERATO LO CONTE, FRANCESCO RICOTTA, GABRIELE RINNA	66	1209
When does technological innovation overlap social innovation? Conceptualizing an organizational aidriven model		
SARA DIODATI, LAWRENCE CABRERA, RICCARDO RIALTI, LAMBERTO ZOLLO	"	1215
Exploring the impact of Artificial Intelligence on Vocational Education and Training (VET) SILVIA COSIMATO, NADIA DI PAOLA, ROBERTO VONA, NUNZIA CAPOBIANCO	44	1221
AI-Powered Marketing Communication: Exploring Strategies in the Luxury Furniture Industry Niccolò Piccioni, Fabiola Sfodera, Alberto Mattiacci		1229
Artificial Intelligence in SCM: insights from two illustrative cases Serena Galvani, Roberta Bocconcelli	"	1235
Strategic Foresight and Artificial Intelligence: Evidence of a Paradoxical Relationship Matteo Cristofaro, Mie Augier, Luna Leoni, Pinalba Schilleci	"	1241
A Systematic Literature Review on AI-empowered Strategic Decision-Making process ALESSIA MUNNIA, MARCO ROMANO, REBECCA CASEY, JAMES A. CUNNINGHAM	"	1247

Gen-AI nel settore agri-food: determinanti d'adozione ed impatto organizzativo Francesco Mercuri, Diletta Piloca, Sabrina Restante, Luca Quaglieri,	_	
BERNARDINO QUATTROCIOCCHI	PAG.	1255
Managing services in tourism destinations through Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning: The Data for Destination Model		
SILVIA BAIOCCO, DANILO CROCE, PAOLA MARIA ANNA PANICCIA, ROBERTO BASILI, ANDRIY SHCHERBAKOV, ALESSANDRA ARCESE	"	1263
The Future of Digital Technologies: AI-Driven Interfaces for Universal Usability GIUSEPPE LANFRANCHI, ANTONIO CRUPI	"	1273
Track – General management		
Blockchain Waste Management: A Systematic Literature Review for the Public Administration Gloria Diana Marinsanti Rwakihembo, Francesca Faggioni, Marco Valerio Rossi	"	1281
Blockchain Waste Management: are Italian managers ready? GLORIA DIANA MARINSANTI RWAKIHEMBO, FRANCESCA FAGGIONI, MARCO VALERIO ROSSI	"	1287
Creating a Blockchain Governance framework for Circular Economy: Preliminary results		
GLORIA DIANA MARINSANTI RWAKIHEMBO, FRANCESCA FAGGIONI, MARCO VALERIO ROSSI	"	1291
Social acceptance of Decentralized Renewable Energies in East African rural communities: preliminary evidence from a multiple case study		
Fabio Iannone, Eleonora Annunziata, Francesco Rizzi, Marco Frey	"	1295
Sustainable Management of the Photovoltaic Waste Stream: Regional Analysis and Economic and Management Perspectives		
Andrea Franzoni, Chiara Leggerini, Mariasole Bannò	"	1301
Enhancing Well-Being for People with Disabilities, Insights from Multiple Case Study of Smart Nature-Based Solutions' Actions in Italy		
GIOVANNA BAGNATO, AUGUSTO BARGONI CHIARA GIACHINNO	"	1307
Managerial and technological challenges for climate finance. A multidisciplinary model based on AI for the assessment of sustainability		
DANIELE LEONE, ELVIRA BUONOCORE, EVA PANETTI, BELINDA LAURA DEL GAUDIO, DARIO SALERNO, ANDREA CAPORUSCIO, SALVATORE SCOGNAMIGLIO, FRANCO TRUBIANI, MARIA CRISTINA PIETRONUDO	"	1315

## Sustainable Management of the Photovoltaic Waste Stream: Regional Analysis and Economic and Management Perspectives

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#### **Abstract**

Photovoltaic panel utilisation has grown significantly in Italy and globally during the past two decades. This technology's primary benefit is that it converts sunlight into power without emitting greenhouse gases throughout its operation. The lifespan of solar modules is typically restricted to approximately 25 to 30 years. Hence, it is logical to anticipate a further rise in the generation of associated waste in the upcoming years. We suggest a regional approach to estimate the amount of waste that will require disposal, considering the various types of panels now employed in Italy. This method will allow efficient planning of waste management for solar panels. Furthermore, it will encourage the advancement of innovative recycling and material treatment methods, reducing the environmental footprint and guaranteeing sustainable waste management in the future. The methodology will be applied focusing on the installation of solar panels using different technologies (thin film, monocrystalline silicon, and polycrystalline silicon) in Italian regions from 2000 to 2022. A preliminary economic assessment of the materials that can be recovered from photovoltaic panels will be provided.

Key words: circular economy; EoL PV modules; forecasting; PV waste management; sustainability.

**Framing of the research.** Since the 2000s, there has been a significant global spread of photovoltaic energy as a source of electricity in various regions. This technology is adaptable, widely produced, and has affordable installation costs, making it highly popular among individuals and companies. The global installed capacity increased from 224.215 MW in 2015 to 1.055.030 MW in 2022, marking a growth of almost 350% in a span of 7 years (Source: IRENA, 2023). The total installed capacity in Italy has significantly expanded since 2008 and continues to grow rapidly, as shown in Figure 1.

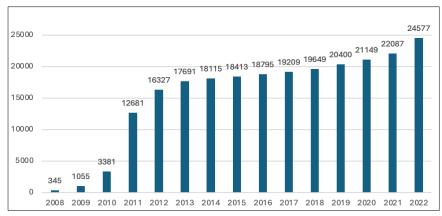


Fig. 1: Cumulative PV power installed in Italy (MW)

Source: GSE reports (2008-2022)

The installed capacity in Italy increased by 20.6% during the year 2022, rising from 22.594 MW to 25.094 MW (GSE Report, 2008-2022). Photovoltaic panels are the third most important renewable energy source in terms of installed capacity, following hydropower and wind (IRENA, 2023). Furthermore, solar energy is anticipated to emerge as one of

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the most prominent forms of renewable energy in the years to come (Romel et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2018). As a result of these installations, there will be a substantial increase in the quantity of waste that is produced by photovoltaic panels in the coming years. Furthermore, despite the ongoing attempts to create new technologies related to renewable energy sources, there is still a void in the literature concerning relevant solutions for the management of photovoltaic modules when they have reached the end of their life cycle (Mahmoudi et al., 2019; Malandrino et al., 2017). Many studies have made an attempt to forecast the waste stream that will be generated by photovoltaic panels in the European and non-European Countries (Czajkowski et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2024). used the Weibull function to make the prediction of the waste load in Australia till the year 2059. The life cycle of photovoltaic cells was also taken into consideration. It was necessary to estimate the degree to which photovoltaic technology has penetrated the market in Australia. The authors also recommended the computation of the individual materials that comprise photovoltaic modules. Furthermore, by evaluating the rate of reuse of individual components, they forecasted savings from the recovery of these components for the creation of new modules. This was done from the perspective of a circular economy. Paiano (2015) suggests doing a study that is comparable to this one in Italy; however, the author assumes a fixed period of 25 years as the span of the lifecycle, and the forecast is carried out up until the year 2050. In addition, various photovoltaic panel technologies from the first and second generations are taken into consideration. Calculations were also made in this instance to determine the quantities of waste that were produced and then separated into the various components. Using the Weibull function and taking into account not only the photovoltaic module but also the Balance of System (BOS), which is the collection of all components that are necessary for the proper functioning of photovoltaic modules, Domínguez & Geyer (2017, 2019) carried out a calculation that was comparable in both Mexico and the United States. The authors of this study took into consideration a life cycle that is typically thirty years long. When applying the Weibull function and taking into consideration an average life of thirty years, Romel et al. (2024) made a prediction regarding the quantity of panels that will be available at the end of the life cycle by the year 2045. After then, the outcomes of this particular case were compared with the reports written by IRENA in order to determine how good the results were. Kim & Park (2018), in contrast to the research that were stated earlier, presented not only the waste prediction modelled by the Weibull function but also a defined usable life duration of 25 and 30 years in two different scenarios. As a result, it was possible to do more analyses using data that was comparable. In conclusion, Sharma et al. (2023) not only made a prediction for the quantity of photovoltaic panels that will reach the end of their useful life in India, but they also investigated the issues of reuse, recovery, and disposal, as well as the implementation of policies and strategies that encourage more sustainable waste management.

Purpose of the paper. The present study is still a work in progress. The aim of this research is to provide a regional method that is capable of addressing the developing difficulty connected to the management of waste resulting from the increasing use of photovoltaic panels. Due to the fact that photovoltaic modules have a limited lifespan, it is expected that there will be a significant increase in the amount of generated waste. As a result, the primary purpose of this research is to develop a method that is both efficient and accurate in determining the quantity and nature of waste that will be generated across the nation, as well as the locations where this waste will be generated. By developing the research for each region of Italy. The study serves as a helpful instrument for businesses operating within the sector to evaluate and plan for the management of solar waste in a sustainable manner. This strategy aims to minimize the environmental impact of photovoltaic waste production by estimating the recoverable amount. Additionally, it aims to promote the advancement of recycling and material treatment through research and development of innovative solutions. This will help to ensure that waste management is sustainable over the long term, with the ultimate goal of achieving a circular economy. In order to give data and practical tools that can be used to guide waste management decisions and policies in the solar energy industry, the approach that has been developed is specifically applied by taking into consideration solar panel installations in Italian regions and in various technologies from 2000 to 2022.

**Methodology.** The proposed methodology is divided into seven steps (Figure 2).

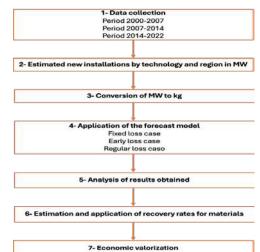


Fig. 2: Methodology to estimate photovoltaic waste

The first critical data are the total new installations for each year for each technology in each Italian region from 2000 to 2022 (measured in terms of installed power - MW). We consider three types of photovoltaic modules, which represent almost the entirety of the national market, and consist of monocrystalline silicon, polycrystalline silicon and thin film (GSE Report, 2008-2022). The source data (i.e. the new installations for each year broken down by technology and for each region) were obtained from the GSE (Gestore dei Servizi Energetici) reports and from a personal reworking of the data by the Terna database. Due to lack of obtainable data, assumptions were made:

1) 2000 - 2007: data are not available. It was necessary to consider new installations for each region as:

*New installations* 
$$(t) = Total installations  $(t) - Total installations  $(t - 1)$$$$

The only statistics available for this period are the total installations in Italy at the conclusion of period t. It was therefore necessary to consider the breakdowns of photovoltaic modules as zero over this short period. We took this assumption into account due to the limited number of photovoltaic modules in Italy till 2007. In addition, the percentage distribution of different photovoltaic module technologies within Italian regions was considered constant.

- 2) 2008 2014: data are not available. Data on new installations in Italy are available for each year. To obtain the data on new installations per region, the percentages of installations per technology in the different regions were considered constant, taking 2015 as the reference year.
- 3) 2015 2022: data on new installations are available for each region and for each year.

As a result, in Figure 3 new installed capacity by Italian region for different years are reported, respectively 2012, 2017, 2022.

Fig. 3: New installed capacity by region (MW)

Source: Personal elaboration from data available on GSE Reports 2008-2022

By multiplying the total number of new installations by the percentage of technology used in each region, we obtained the necessary data. The data obtained in MW were converted into Kg of PV modules, obtaining the conversion factor from EPDItaly (Environmental Product Declaration), following the methodology proposed by IRENA (2016) and applied by Mahmoudi et al. (2019) and Paiano (2015). Prediction regarding the generated waste stream was conducted for different scenarios:

- Fixed loss: considering a useful life of 25 years (Paiano, 2015).
- Early loss e Regular Loss: both modelled using Weibull function. The Weibull function is reported as follow:

$$F(t) = 1 - e^{-(\frac{t}{T})^{\alpha}}$$

Where t represents the useful life of the photovoltaic module, T represents the considered average life of 25 years, and  $\alpha$  is called the shape factor and is responsible for the shape of the Weibull curve. An  $\alpha$  value of 2.4928 was considered for the Early-loss scenario, and a value of 5.3759 for the Regular-loss scenario. (IRENA, 2023; Mahmoudi et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2023). In Figure 4 probability of loss based on Weibull function is reported.

0.8
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40

■Earlyloss
■Regularloss

Fig. 4: Probability of loss based on Weibull function

In Table 1 average lifetime of photovoltaic modules considered in other studies are reported, divided into different regions.

Region	Global (IEA,	Mexico	Australia	Italy (Paiano,	Europe (Lugo-	India (Sharma
	2016)	(Domínguez &	(Mahmoudi et	2015; this study)	Laguna et al.,	et al., 2023)
		Geyer, 2017)	al., 2019)		2021)	·
Average lifetime	30	30	30	25	25	25
(year)						

Tab. 1: Values of average lifetime of PV considered in other studies

Data on the composition of the materials making up the photovoltaic modules and their recovery rates will allow us to proceed to the final stages of the study, namely the estimation of recoverable materials and the resulting savings (Domínguez & Geyer, 2017, 2019; Peeters et al., 2017).

**Results.** It is important to keep in mind that the current study is still considered to be a work in progress. One of the most important findings, is the precise calculation of the quantity of material that may be recycled or reused from photovoltaic cells that have been discarded. This was done within the framework of the circular economy. This computation method was carried out for each of the locations in Italy as well as for a variety of technologies, taking into consideration the time period spanning from the year 2000 to 2047. This particular time span was selected to be reflective of the typical lifecycle of photovoltaic panels, which is anticipated to be somewhere between 25 and 30 years.

Taking into consideration the current historical backdrop, we designed an investigation to determine whether components from decommissioned solar panels could be categorised as dangerous or crucial (Lin et al., 2022). It is essential to take this step in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the environmental and socio-economic implications of solar waste management, particularly considering the rising issues that are associated with the availability of resources and the safety of materials (Lin et al., 2022). In addition to the quantification of the materials that are recyclable or reusable, a comprehensive economic analysis of these materials will also be carried out. The purpose is to determine the economic value of these materials and, from the point of view of a circular economy, the potential cost savings that the recovery of these materials might entail when it comes to the production of new photovoltaic modules. In addition to evaluating the viability of investing in recycling and reuse processes, this stage is vital for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the economic ramifications of adopting circular economy strategies in the photovoltaic panel industry. We will be able to provide an evaluation of the potential economic value of these materials. In the solar panel business, this gives a strong basis for making informed decisions and developing waste management plans, which in turn contributes to the promotion of responsible and sustainable resource management.

Research limitations. The presented research may encounter some limitations. Firstly, the collection of detailed data on the installation and distribution of solar panels may be hampered by the lack of comprehensive information, especially regarding the specific technologies used and accurate waste disposal predictions. As presented in the methodology section, some assumptions were made in order to obtain the necessary data for the completion of the study. This might compromise the replicability of the study for other states. In particular, both national and international databases were used, such as Terna, IEA (International Energy Agency), GSE (Gestore dei Servizi Energetici) and IRENA (International Renewable Energy Agency); despite this, the regional market breakdown per technology used was not always detailed and timely, and needed to be adapted. Another aspect to consider is related to the assumptions made about the

replacement of existing solar panels with new, more efficient technologies over time. Changes in replacement rates could affect waste generation projections. The complexity of photovoltaic waste management is a further challenge, especially if there is no adequate infrastructure for recycling and material treatment. Research may not fully address the practical realities and economic challenges of PV waste management. Environmental and social factors, such as impacts on human health and the environment due to exposure to chemicals during material recycling, would merit further investigation and a dedicated study. Finally, the research conclusions may be specific to the Italian context and may need to be adapted to be applied to other regional or national contexts.

Managerial implications. The exponential increase in the use of solar panels over the last 20 years has raised awareness of the importance of managing the technology's life cycle responsibly. When solar panels reach the end of their useful lives, it is essential for businesses and policymakers to make preparations for the management of waste not only during the manufacture and installation phases, but also after the panels have been installed. A strategic approach is required for this planning, which includes not only an accurate assessment of the amounts and types of waste that are generated, but also the creation of new solutions for the recycling and treatment of these wastes. In this context, businesses are being asked to make investments in the research and development of technologies for the recovery and treatment of photovoltaic materials, and they are being asked to achieve this in collaboration with other participants in the industry, governmental organisations, and research institutes. This partnership could be critical in developing sustainable solutions that can adapt to the rapid evolution of technology and environmental legislation.

This research is designed to provide utility for all parties involved. First and foremost, from the perspective of the businesses, it could be interesting to have a clear understanding of the economic return, that the photovoltaic recovery sector will have in the years to come. In this regard, the originality of the research, which consists of the determination of the amounts and regional position of the waste stream that is generated, is an helpful and all-encompassing instrument for the period of strategic business planning. On the other hand, the management implications of the circular economy in the photovoltaic panel industry necessitate a strategic and coordinated approach at the governmental level (Goe & Gaustad, 2014). In the past, policymakers in Italy have provided incentives for the manufacturing and installation of solar systems in order to encourage the growth of the photovoltaic industry so that it may serve both private and corporate consumers. In recent years, the growing utilisation of this technology has resulted in an immediate requirement to handle the issue of waste generated by photovoltaic cells at the end of their useful lives. To handle this new problem, policymakers must also encourage laws and regulations aimed at recovery and maximising the use of available resources (Goe & Gaustad, 2014). In addition to providing incentives for practices that involve the study and development of technology for recycling, recovery, and treatment of photovoltaic materials, these policies should also provide incentives for manufacturers to use recovered end-of-life materials as inputs (Lin et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Furthermore, policymakers should support the formation of partnerships between the public and commercial sectors, research institutes, and non-governmental organisations to create new and collaborative solutions for the intelligent management of photovoltaic panel waste. In order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to implement monitoring and control methods in the photovoltaic industry in order to guarantee compliance with environmental requirements and to ensure that waste is managed appropriately.

**Originality of the paper.** The originality of this paper lies in the innovative approach proposed to address a growing environmental challenge arising from the expanding use of photovoltaic panels. Although solar technology has provided substantial benefits in the production of clean energy, the research emphasises a frequently underestimated aspect: waste management at the end of the panels' life. As previously mentioned, various studies have been published in recent years to determine the quantity of waste generated by solar modules (Domínguez & Geyer, 2017, 2019; Mahmoudi et al., 2019; Paiano, 2015; Peeters et al., 2017; Santos & Alonso-García, 2018; Sharma et al., 2023). To the best of our knowledge, no one has ever penetrated into the regional context. Instead, our study presents a specialised regional technique for calculating and planning waste management from photovoltaic panels, taking into account the variety of technologies employed and the predicted increase in waste generation. This strategy is innovative because it takes a long-term view on solar waste management, anticipating and minimising potential negative environmental consequences. In particular, the study addresses businesses by providing a useful tool for planning investments to respond to a rising problem in our country, as well as the option to consider an economic return. On the other side, the study addresses policymakers in the same way, encouraging businesses and investors to approach a sensitive and timely problem. As a result, applying the proposed methodology to the specific Italian context makes an important contribution to the political and decision-making context, providing data and concrete tools to help decision makers make decisions about photovoltaic waste management and the promotion of effective environmental policies in the renewable energy sector.

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