

Navigating the University-Tourism Nexus: Employing Participatory Strategies for Liveability in Sorrento

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Abstract

The interplay between universities and their diverse urban environments presents both unique opportunities and challenges. This case study explores how university-led participatory strategies address the tourism-liveability nexus in the small city of Sorrento, facing increasing pressure from overtourism, rising housing costs, and resident displacement. Through a Human Rights Practicum students engaged residents, municipal authorities, and businesses in co-designing place-based solutions. Using surveys, interviews, and workshops, the initiative identified key challenges—including housing affordability, infrastructure strain, and lack of community voice—and proposed actionable responses grounded in human rights principles. The project demonstrates the power of integrating academic instruction with participatory practice to foster engagement, policy innovation, and resilience. It offers a scalable model for aligning tourism development with community well-being in small cities worldwide.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Human Rights, Urban Regeneration, Small Cities, Participatory Practice

Introduction

The intricate relationship between universities and their host urban environments necessitates a balanced approach that leverages the opportunities presented by these institutions while mitigating potential challenges, particularly in tourism-dependent locales (Silvestrelli, 2012). This study delves into the application of participatory practice methodologies within a university classroom setting to address pressing issues in Sorrento, a city grappling with the dual pressures of a burgeoning tourism sector and the imperative to maintain a high quality of life for its residents (Zarb & Jones, 2017). It examines how best to mitigate challenges while building on opportunities using participatory practice approaches in the university classroom (Larty, 2021).

In Sorrento – a coastal city on Italy’s Bay of Naples – tourist arrivals have surged significantly over the past decade. In 2016, Sorrento welcomed approximately 640,000 tourists; by 2018, nearly 9.9 million travellers passed through Naples Capodichino Airport reflecting the region’s growing appeal (ISTAT, 2023). This “overtourism” trend raises urgent questions about liveability and human rights in the city. Long-time residents voice concerns that allude to crowded public spaces, rising prices, and loss of cultural identity. While national officials have sometimes downplayed overtourism –claiming “too much tourism” (Positanonews, 2025) is not a real problem – local experiences strongly contradict this statement. Sorrento faces challenges that mirror those of larger metropolitan destinations (Aragú et al., 2021). These are tied to rising housing costs, exacerbated by the growth of short-term rentals and growing pressures of tourists on city infrastructure. These dynamics have strained local residents, many of whom struggle to remain in their communities due to financial pressures and limited housing availability (Kennedy, 2020).

The pedagogical strategy employed in this study integrates theoretical instruction with hands-on participatory activities, fostering collaborative relationships between the university community and various local stakeholders, with the aim of developing viable solutions to identified issues (Consilvio, 2024). Sorrento’s unique position as a small destination city renowned for its rich cultural heritage and a dynamic tourism industry makes it an ideal case study for exploring the complexities of balancing economic development with the well-being of local communities (Lalicic, 2019).

Through Leveraging participatory approaches, the study highlights the integration of university populations, residents, municipal authorities, and other relevant stakeholders to co-create solutions that balance the needs of locals with the demands of tourism (Innella et al., 2024). Key findings from surveys and interviews reveal that residents feel underrepresented in decision-making, with many voicing concerns about the prioritization of tourism over local needs. By promoting open dialogue, fostering community engagement the research identified and presented possible solutions, such as improving regulations on short-term rentals, implementing rent controls, enhancing public transportation, and developing a place-based, interactive responsible tourism campaign as a catalyst for education, awareness, and larger human-centred urban regeneration projects (Innella et al., 2024).

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of embedding human rights principles—such as the right to housing and cultural participation—into policy frameworks to ensure equitable outcomes (Greene, 2011). Through student coursework using in-depth exploration of human rights law, participatory practice, and sustainable development principles, students utilized their curriculum in theory and practice to engage directly with the Sorrento community in their university neighbourhood. The Service-Learning (Saija & Pappalardo, 2024) course design and place-based engagement serve as a conduit to foster strong bonds within the community through research, data collection, group discussion, and surveys.

Co-design and co-creation are powerful tools that require collective brainstorming, cooperation, and collaboration. These types of exercises use real-world examples and case studies to build a sense of problem ownership (Cruz et al., 2022) and motivation, shaping the students as part owners of the Peninsula's problems, but also key players in the solution for its resilience. This case study demonstrates that participatory practice is an effective and necessary tool for creating sustainable and inclusive urban environments, especially in small cities, offering a model for other destinations grappling with similar challenges (Arellano et al., 2016). Through collaboration and innovation, Sorrento has the potential to reconcile the needs of its residents and its role as a global tourist destination through a participatory system approach that fosters long-term bonds with tourists, residents, higher education institutions (Barnet et al., 2021), and their students.

This paper illustrates the beginning two semesters of the action-research project engaging the international student population, local residents, and Sorrento's municipal authorities. In Fall 2024, the Human Rights Practicum course focused on diagnosing Sorrento's tourism impacts through a human rights lens (Lucia et al., 2021). While in Spring 2025, building off those findings, students co-designed Sorrento Saggia – Be Sorrento Smart, a responsible tourism campaign aimed at building local partnerships, improving awareness, and fostering coexistence between visitors and locals. The title "Sorrento Saggia" (Italian for "wise Sorrento") captures the campaign's ethos of being "smart" tourists who respect the host community. This unique approach leverages participatory methods to bridge theoretical insights and practical solutions.

The significance of this case study is twofold. First, it applies a human rights-based approach to urban tourism, aligning local challenges with fundamental rights such as housing, culture, and participation. Sorrento's situation exemplifies how unchecked tourism can infringe on residents' rights – from the right to adequate housing and standard of living to the right to partake in cultural life (Milano et al., 2019). Second, it situates these local efforts within the broader discourse of sustainable urban planning. International agendas like the UN Sustainable Development Goals (e.g., SDG 11 on sustainable cities) emphasize inclusive, participatory planning and the balance between economic development and quality of life (Trane et al., 2023).

This paper reviews the methodology of the participatory activities conducted. It then synthesizes key findings from the Fall 2024 research on Sorrento's tourism challenges, grouped into four themes: affordable housing, community engagement, mobility & infrastructure, and cultural sustainability (Innella et al., 2024). Subsequently, it describes the Spring 2025 work undertaken to create a 'Vision Brief' for the Sorrento Saggia campaign through PAR, co-design and co-creation processes, including the resulting "10 Easy Ways to be Sorrento Smart" guidelines for visitors. A discussion section connects these results to human rights principles and sustainable plan-

ning practices – critically examining successes, limitations, and the path forward for Sorrento. These methods not only provide valuable insights into the concerns and priorities of local residents but also serve as platforms for education and capacity building, empowering community members to actively participate in shaping the direction of tourism development (Ginanjari, 2023).

Methodology

Community involvement in tourism planning is essential for fostering sustainable benefits and ensuring the industry's long-term viability, yet it faces challenges in developing countries due to operational, structural, and cultural obstacles (Reindrawati, 2023). Effective community participation requires empowering residents in tourism development, although achieving genuine participation can be difficult without such empowerment. Successful community involvement can be achieved through social empowerment, which enhances residents' self-esteem and enables them to support tourism development (Rachmawati et al., 2022).

This study employed a Placed-based System approach employing Participatory Action Research (PAR) with co-design and co-creation frameworks in which students, residents, and officials collaboratively investigated problems and devised solutions. Rather than a traditional top-down research project, the process was iterative and co-creative (Ward et al., 2024), blending qualitative and quantitative methods over two academic semesters.

Fall 2024 – Human Rights Practicum:

In the first phase, a class of international students at Sant'Anna Institute in Sorrento undertook a practicum course with the goal to "learn where we live" by examining how human rights concepts manifest in the local context of Sorrento's tourism economy (Bianchi et al., 2024). Students first familiarized themselves with international human rights law and frameworks (e.g., the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and relevant covenants) and studied global cases of tourism-related rights challenges. With this foundation, they turned to Sorrento, conducting surveys and interviews with local residents to gather first-hand perspectives.

Approximately 50 residents from Sorrento and nearby towns in the Sorrentine Peninsula participated, providing insights into tourism's impacts on their daily lives. The survey instrument included both closed (Figure 1) and open-ended questions designed to elicit opinions on tourism's impacts on housing, infrastructure, culture, and quality of life (Wang & Wang, 2018). In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a subset of stakeholders, ranging from young professionals and small business owners to long-time residents.

The data collected were then analysed through the dual lenses of human rights and urban liveability. Students coded interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and specific human rights articles implicated. For instance, a comment about unaffordable rent was linked to UDHR Article 25 - right to an adequate standard of living, while remarks about exclusion from decision-making evoked UDHR Article 21 - right to participate in government (United Nations, 1948). This grounded approach ensured that local voices drove the problem identification. Finally, students conducted a brief literature and precedent review to see how other tourist cities have tackled similar issues (e.g., Amsterdam's regulations on short-term rentals). The Fall phase culminated in a presentation of findings and preliminary solution ideas to local government officials, including the Deputy Mayor and community representatives.

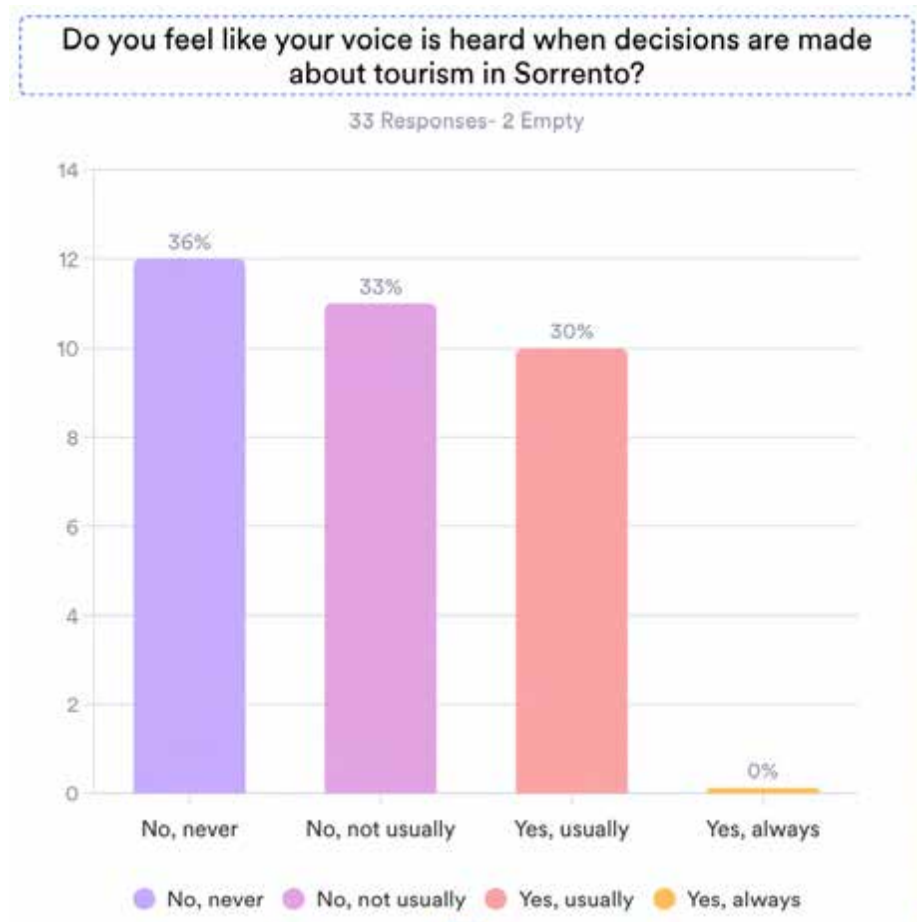


Figure 1. Fall HR Practicum Survey (generated with Jotform)

Spring 2025 – Sorrento Saggia Campaign Design:

The second phase shifted from analysis to solution-building. A new group of students, with continuity from the fall, engaged in a project-based course to create an actionable responsible tourism campaign proposed as “Sorrento Saggia – Be Sorrento Smart” with the focus on place-based cultural-driven storytelling. The pedagogical approach this semester was explicitly co-creative and multi-method. It included:

- **Participatory Co-Design Workshops:** Students and instructors facilitated brainstorming sessions to develop the campaign concept. Techniques like Business Model Canvas (Echavarria et al., 2022) exercises were used to map out the value proposition, target audiences, key partners, and resources for the campaign. This helped ensure the proposed solution was grounded in local reality and feasible (Figure 2).

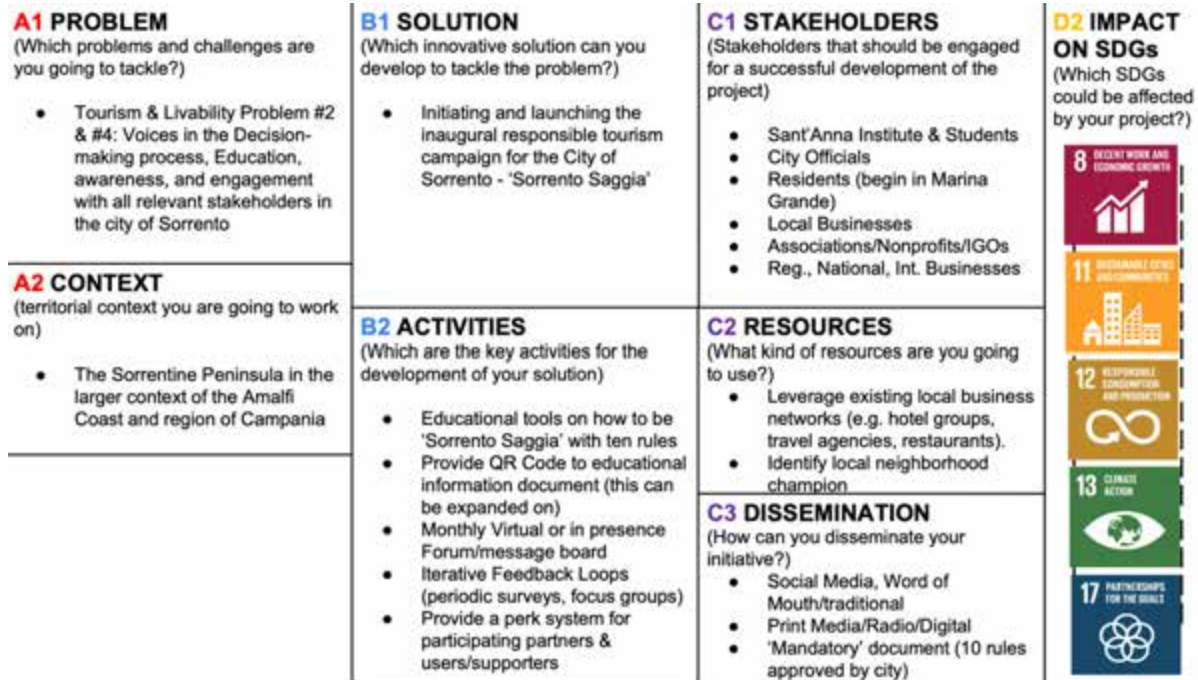


Figure 2. Sorrento Saggia Adapted Business Model Canvas from “Decision-making” for Sustainable Development Goals Course – Politecnico di Torino.

• **Stakeholder Analysis & Power Mapping:** Building on political science frameworks (e.g., Dente's (2014) model of actor resources (Konstantinidis et al., 2021)), the class identified key stakeholder groups and analysed their levels of interest and power regarding tourism management. Stakeholders ranged from political actors to special interest groups (local business owners, tourism operators), general interests (the resident community at large), and experts (NGOs, academic institutions). By categorizing stakeholders and the resources they control (political, economic, legal, cognitive), students gained insight into potential allies and barriers for the campaign. A classic power-interest matrix (Cottafava & Corazza, 2020) was constructed to visualize where to focus engagement: for example, local residents and business owners have high interest in liveability issues, but varying degrees of power to influence policy; the municipality has high power but needed to be convinced to prioritize human-centred tourism (Figure 3).

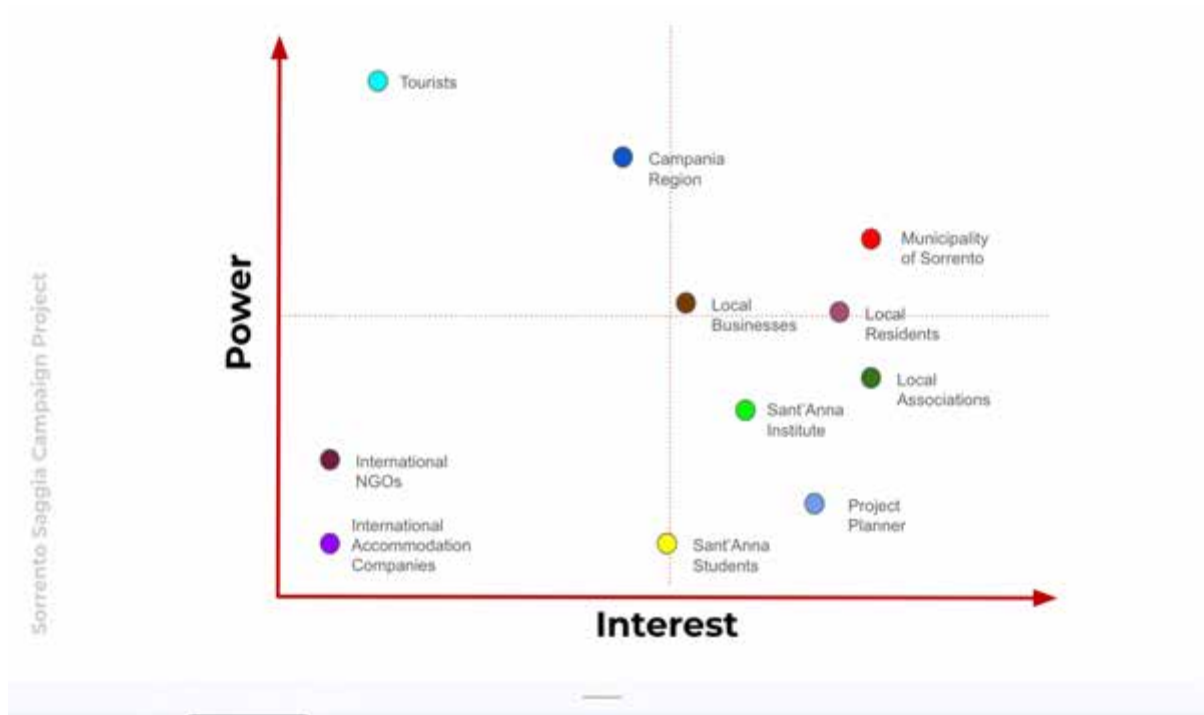


Figure 3. Stakeholder Power-Interest Matrix

• **Follow-up Interviews and Surveys:** To design effective campaign messages, the students conducted additional interviews with stakeholders, particularly those in the tourism sector, to gather feedback on proposed ideas. In total, 8 in-depth interviews were carried out in Spring 2025 with individuals representing different roles – such as a hotel employee, a travel agency owner, a vacation rental manager, a student program coordinator, and local business owners. These interviews were less about diagnosing problems (as that had been done in fall) and more about co-envisioning solutions and gauging stakeholders' willingness to collaborate. For instance, interviewees were asked how tourists could be educated to respect local norms, or what incentives might encourage businesses to support the campaign.

• **Place-Based Systems Approach:** Throughout, the project was guided by a place-based perspective – meaning it sought solutions tailored to Sorrento's specific cultural and geographic context, rather than one-size-fits-all fixes. This involved site visits to areas like Marina Grande (a traditional fishing village in Sorrento) where the university is located, as well as the residence of many of the students. This localized the initiative as deeply as possible for students to observe tourist-local interactions in their own neighbourhood, and mapping of "hotspots" where conflicts or overcrowding were most pronounced.

Using these methods, the Spring team developed the content and implementation plan for Sorrento Saggia. The campaign was envisioned as a partnership between the city government, local businesses, community organizations, and tourists themselves. The mixed-methods approach – combining community-based research in fall with co-design and stakeholder engagement in spring – exemplifies how universities can serve as facilitators in complex urban issues. It allowed for continuous feedback loops: preliminary solutions were adjusted based on stakeholder input, increasing local buy-in. The methodology's participatory nature is itself a finding – it modelled the inclusive decision-making that residents had illustrated a greater need for in their community.

Findings: Tourism Impacts and Liveability Challenges in Sorrento

The Fall 2024 research revealed a nuanced picture of how tourism growth has affected Sorrento's liveability. Four interrelated challenge areas were identified, each linked to residents' enjoyment of their rights and quality of life. These are:

(1) Affordable Housing

In response to the housing crisis, the Fall 2024 practicum explored various **policy options and best practices**. Students presented a menu of regulatory ideas gleaned from other cities: for example, short-term rental caps as implemented in Amsterdam, (Tedds et al., 2021), stricter licensing and primary residence requirements for rental hosts, zoning restrictions to protect residential zones, and even community-driven solutions like Community Land Trusts (Phang, 2018; Williams, 2018) to secure affordable units. They also discussed how cities like Vienna invest in government-subsidized housing to keep prices stable. While local Sorrento officials have been limited by current national and regional regulations these examples provide a roadmap. Any durable solution will likely require applying a bidirectional action of top-down policy (e.g., regional law to limit short-term rentals) and bottom-up action (e.g., locals forming cooperatives to buy and rent homes at affordable rates). The immediacy of the issue is, however, very clear. Without intervention, Sorrento risks losing its local community, thereby also losing the authentic character that draws visitors to the peninsula initially.

(2) Voices in the Decision-making Process

The second major theme was a feeling among residents of being excluded from decision-making about Sorrento's future. Over two-thirds of surveyed citizens reported (Figure 1) that they do not feel heard by local government on tourism and liveability issues. Many believed that tourists' needs may often be put before their own in municipal priorities (Aragú et al., 2021). Notably, some respondents observed that during local elections and political discourse, the problems of overtourism or housing seldom receive serious attention – politicians rarely mention these issues, focusing instead on the benefits of tourism. This has fostered a sense of disconnect and disempowerment among the public.

During stakeholder interviews in Spring 2025, this theme of voice re-emerged. For instance, the CEO of Fondazione Sorrento (a local cultural foundation) stressed the importance of Sorrentini youth having an active role in changing the public perception of their city. He introduced the idea of “turismo versus turismi” – suggesting that there isn't a single monolithic tourism, but multiple ways tourism can manifest, and that locals and tourists must collaborate to shape a diversity of experiences. Implicit in his view is that local voices (especially young people's voices) should help redefine Sorrento not just as a mass-tourism hotspot but as a living city with artistic, cultural, and educational dimensions. This perspective bolsters the argument that participatory approaches are not just feel-good extras, but central to rebalancing tourism on more equitable terms.

In summary, the research highlighted a democratic deficit in Sorrento's tourism governance. Addressing it will require effort both from the government to actively solicit and listen to citizen input (Innella et al., 2024) and from residents to organize and articulate their demands. The Sorrento Saggia campaign itself was partly an answer to this: a citizen-aware initiative that could amplify local perspectives. By involving residents in the creation of the campaign (PONTIKAKIS et al., 2024), the project attempts to embed local engagement as a cornerstone of the solution.

(3) Strains on Mobility and Infrastructure

Addressing mobility issues requires both supply-side improvements that call for better transport services, infrastructure upgrades and demand management through controlling the flow of vehicles and people (Ebbesson, 2022). Sorrento's relatively small geographic footprint means creative solutions. Some are already in use in limited ways, such as electric minibuses or timed entry to certain areas (ZTL zones). However, it is still not enough supply to support the demand of the transportation infrastructure (PONTIKAKIS et al., 2024), especially during high tourist traffic months. Involving residents in designing these solutions – for instance, consulting them on which streets could be pedestrianized without hurting local access – will be crucial, in creating buy-in and ownership

for any future proposed solutions. The measures must aim to benefit locals as well as enhance the tourist experience by alleviating the frustrations of congestion (Coni et al., 2020).

(4) Cultural and Environmental Impacts.

The fourth challenge area revolves around the **preservation of Sorrento's cultural heritage and environment** in the face of mass tourism. Sorrento is steeped in intangible cultural heritage – from the evening passeggiata (leisurely stroll) tradition to its culinary and artisanal practices. Residents are proud of these traditions, yet many fear that excessive tourism is diluting its authenticity (Wang et al., 2022) and putting natural sites at risk. The Sorrentine Peninsula's unique ecosystem (cliffs, marine areas, lemon groves) is under pressure. Issues raised included litter and waste management challenges (Saija & Pappalardo, 2024), strain on water resources in high season, and damage to trails or beaches from overuse.

While most locals acknowledge tourism's importance to Sorrento's economy, many fear that without intervention the city may lose the character and culture (Kennedy, 2020) that makes it so unique and attractive to visitors. The challenge is how to channel tourism in a way that enhances rather than erodes local culture and environment. In Fall 2024, students highlighted that Sorrento needs to find a balance where tourism and local quality of life “thrive in unison.” This aligns with the concept of human-centred tourism, which was notably being discussed in the region under the banner “Umanesimo nel Turismo” (Humanism in Tourism). In fact, in April 2025 a summit of Amalfi Coast mayors resulted in the “Carta di Amalfi,” (Positanonews, 2025) a charter pledging a new humanistic approach to tourism focusing on people and cultural respect. Such high-level commitments show the growing recognition that tourism must be reoriented to value community and culture alongside profit.

The project's findings contributed to this dialogue by identifying specific local cultural values to safeguard. For example, the tradition of the evening passeggiata was repeatedly mentioned as something tourists should respect and even participate in, rather than disrupt. Likewise, cultural sites like Marina Grande's fishing village or historic monasteries should not be treated as mere backdrops for Instagram, but as living communities (Acampa et al., 2020).

To address these issues, the proposed solutions centred on education and mutual respect – essentially, fostering a two-way awareness: educating tourists about local norms and encouraging locals to engage with visitors in sharing their culture (Panneels, 2023). This leads directly into the Sorrento Saggia campaign, which was the actionable outcome focusing largely on this domain of awareness (Thojampa et al., 2023) drafted an initial “10 Rules” list for responsible tourist behaviour based on survey feedback. These rules (elaborated in the next section) include cultural etiquette like respecting local customs, being mindful of noise, learning a few Italian phrases, and so forth. The underlying principle is that if tourists adjust their behaviour – even just a little – negative impacts can be mitigated, the visitor experience can be enriched, and bridges can be built on which locals feel less estranged in their own community.

It is worth noting as well that the cultural sustainability is also tied to housing and community: if local families and youth are forced out by costs, who will carry on traditions? The economy relies heavily on tourism, but the community also will not survive without conscious efforts to maintain local life. The mutual dependency (Kennedy, 2020) of locals and tourism means solutions must be holistic, inclusive, and innovative.

The Sorrento Saggia campaign attempts to operationalize many of the insights gathered by the Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 student cohorts, particularly by focusing on awareness, education, and stakeholder partnership (Andreoni et al., 2024) to make tourism more responsible and human centred. Drawing on the challenges identified in the Fall 2024 practicum, the Spring 2025 team further developed the initial “**Sorrento Saggia – Be Sorrento Smart,**” (Figure 4) idea into a pilot campaign aimed at promoting responsible tourism and improving coexistence between tourists and locals in Sorrento. The campaign's name uses the Italian word *saggia* (wise) to encapsulate the idea of a “smart” tourist – one who is mindful of their impact and engages positively with the community. The campaign's content and strategy were co-created with local input and seeks to initially address the issues

of housing, voice, mobility, and culture through the lens of awareness and behaviour change.



Figure 4. Current draft of '10 Easy Ways to be Sorrento Saggia - Be Sorrento Smart!'

This decalogue of good tourist behaviour is meant to be simple, positive, and empowering rather than scolding (Pisters et al., 2019). The tone is "Be Sorrento Smart," implying that smart travellers get a better experience by following these tips, and locals benefit too. Notably, many of the rules echo the issues discussed earlier: for instance, supporting local businesses can mitigate the dominance of outside investors (connecting to housing economics), proper trash disposal helps environmental sustainability, and courtesy/noise awareness addresses social frictions (Panneels, 2023). The rules also implicitly promote human rights values: e.g., respecting heritage ties into the right to culture, supporting local economy touches on the right to work and decent livelihood for locals, etc (Sarid & Goldman, 2021).

Stakeholder Partnerships and Participatory Implementation

Beyond messaging, Sorrento Saggia was conceived as a partnership-based **initiative**. Recognizing that no single entity can solve overtourism, the campaign proposed a network of collaborators (Cruz et al., 2022):

- **Municipal Government:** The City of Sorrento's buy-in is crucial for legitimacy and resources. The campaign was to be presented to the mayor and council (indeed, the project's final deliverable was a Vision Brief for the municipality). The hope is that the city would formally endorse Sorrento Saggia, perhaps integrating it with the official tourism promotion strategy. Support could include modest funding for materials, placement permission for posters, and encouragement of participation (e.g., Mayor publicly urging businesses to join).

- **Local Businesses:** Hotels, restaurants, shops, and tour operators are on the frontlines of tourist interactions. The campaign sought to create a **coalition of businesses** that commit to promoting responsible tourism – for instance, by displaying the Sorrento Saggia logo and rules, offering information to customers, or even providing small incentives (Innella et al., 2024). One idea raised was a "Sorrento Saggia Card" or stamp program. Tourists who follow certain good practices (like using recycling bins or visiting a local cultural event) could get stamps or points redeemable for discounts at participating businesses. An Airbnb manager liked the idea of a benefits card, noting it would drive conscious tourists to those businesses and reward good behaviour. While a full-fledged rewards system might be complex to implement initially, even symbolic gestures (a free limoncello after a tourist

fills a recycling bag, for example) can gamify (Kavouras et al., 2023) responsible behaviour.

- **Educational Institutions:** Sant'Anna Institute and possibly local schools can sustain the campaign's momentum. Students can continue as volunteers or interns to run social media, conduct surveys with tourists about their awareness, and update campaign content, supporting iterative feedback loops (Larty, 2021) for initiative evolution and long-term resilience. The involvement of youth not only provides manpower but also keeps the initiative innovative. The Fondazione Sorrento CEO explicitly noted the importance of youth engagement for shifting perceptions, and indeed younger locals can be great ambassadors if empowered.
- **Community and Associations:** Local civic groups (environmental clubs, cultural associations, neighbourhood committees) were identified as key partners. For example, a local fishermen's association in Marina Grande could co-host an event where tourists are invited to a morning of fishing and beach cleaning – exemplifying rules from the list like respect the environment, and experience authentically. These types of grassroots events provide concrete action under the campaign umbrella (Arellano et al., 2016).
- **Tourists themselves:** Uniquely, Sorrento Saggia considers visitors not just as targets to educate, but as potential allies. The campaign encourages a view of tourists as temporary citizens who can contribute positively (Corte et al., 2018). Mechanisms for feedback were suggested, such as a QR code on the poster linking to a short survey or pledge: "Sign the Sorrento Smart Traveller Pledge". Tourists who take the pledge to follow the rules might get a digital certificate or be featured (with permission) as example travellers on social media. The point is to create a sense of community among responsible tourists, turning it into a type of movement that transcends the borders of the Sorrentine peninsula even after they have returned home (Pasquinelli et al., 2021). In an era when travellers increasingly seek meaningful, sustainable experiences, this could tap into an existing segment of conscientious tourists.

The implementation plans emphasized starting with a pilot in one neighbourhood – Marina Grande was chosen due to the University's 'home' location, its historical significance, and resident-tourist character. There, the campaign could be rolled out in a contained setting, refined, and then scaled up across Sorrento and potentially to nearby towns in the peninsula and Amalfi Coast. The place-based strategy (Grieco et al., 2024) aims to utilize informed tailored messaging for the community, leveraging feedback from the residents as campaign components are rolled out.

Human Rights and Urban Sustainability Framing

What distinguishes Sorrento Saggia from a generic "respect the city" campaign is its explicit rooting in human rights and sustainability principles. The educational materials don't overtly lecture about UN articles to tourists but kept the principles as a guiding framework (United Nations, 1948):

- By promoting respect for local culture, the campaign helps uphold the right of locals to enjoy their culture (UDHR 27) and combats the alienation overtourism can cause.
- Emphasizing support for local businesses touches on the right to work and favourable conditions (UDHR 23) for Sorrentini – the campaign indirectly advocates livelihoods by steering tourism revenue to those who live and work here.
- The focus on mutual respect and dialogue echoes the right to freedom of expression and information (UDHR 19) – encouraging open cultural exchange between locals and visitors. It's about sharing the "story" of Sorrento in an inclusive way.
- Environmentally, respecting the ecosystem aligns with the right to health (clean environment as part of well-being) and with SDG 11's sustainability targets.

The campaign also unites with the emerging regional policy context. The “Carta di Amalfi” signed in April 2025 signalled a commitment from local leaders to human-centric tourism (Positanonews, 2025). Sorrento Saggia could be seen as a ground-level implementation of those positive ideals – turning words into action in the city of Sorrento. If successful, the Sorrento Saggia campaign could serve as a model for other Amalfi Coast towns (Positano, Amalfi, etc.) which share similar issues. A bottom-up approach from a small city (Pignatelli et al., 2023) like Sorrento can be an example for larger destinations – a living laboratory for managing overtourism in a way that major cities might learn from (Barnet et al., 2021).

The Municipality of Sorrento is expected to continue its active role in the initiative, including assistance with local promotion, identifying key performance indicators, and maintaining long-term collaboration on sustainable tourism programs.

Potential Impact and Sustainability of the Campaign

While Sorrento Saggia was in a proposal/pilot stage by Spring 2025, its anticipated impact can be considered. The campaign set a goal of achieving visible changes within 1–2 years, such as improved tourist behaviour, stronger local-business-tourist networks, and enhanced community pride. Even partial uptake and adoption of the campaign could yield benefits:

- If even 30% of tourists read and heed the 10 rules, that might significantly reduce complaints about noise or litter.
- If a dozen key businesses actively promote the campaign, others may follow, creating a tipping point where responsible tourism becomes part of Sorrento’s brand – its story and identity.
- By establishing an iterative management and feedback loop, the campaign can adapt and possibly expand into broader initiatives – for instance, feeding into discussions of establishing “tourist carrying capacity” limits or new city ordinances (with public backing).

A critical factor is measurement (Jurado et al., 2012). The plan includes tracking certain indicators: number of businesses participating, number of tourists signing the pledge or engaging online, changes in resident satisfaction (perhaps through follow-up surveys). Over time, more concrete metrics like reduction in waste or noise complaints could be examined. Though these are challenging to attribute directly to a campaign, they help in evaluating overall progress.

Sorrento Saggia is not a cure-all for larger planning issues like housing affordability – those require policy innovation and adaptive governance. However, it addresses the softer side of the problem: culture, awareness, and the social contract between hosts and guests. By improving the daily micro-interactions between tourists and locals, the campaign can alleviate tension and build goodwill that makes bigger changes possible (Consilvio, 2024). For instance, a community that sees tourists willing to adapt might be more unified in pushing for housing regulations, knowing the goal is not to stop tourism but to ensure its respectful and balanced.

In summary, the Sorrento Saggia campaign represents a practical output of the participatory process (Cruz et al., 2022). It translates abstract human rights and liveability concerns into tangible actions for everyday life in a tourist city. Its collaborative formation is as important as the content – the process empowered stakeholders, creating a sense of shared ownership of Sorrento’s future (Barnet et al., 2021).

Human Rights as a Framework for Urban Tourism:

One of the project’s key contributions is framing tourism impacts in terms of human rights. This lens proved effective in Sorrento by re-centring the conversation on people rather than just economics (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2020). Often, tourism development debates get reduced to metrics like visitor numbers, revenue, or GDP contribution.

By contrast, a rights-based approach asks: How are residents’ rights and needs being affected? In Sorrento, this

meant recognizing housing as a right, elevating the importance of cultural life for community identity, and asserting that locals should have a say in policies (Brewer & Kliever, 2023).

Participatory Planning and Co-Creation: The process used in Sorrento underscores the value of participatory planning in tackling complex urban issues. The active engagement of students, who acted as neutral facilitators and researchers, helped bring out community voices that might otherwise be ignored (Collins et al., 2022).

Balance of Power – Challenges in Implementation: Despite the positive aspects, one must critically acknowledge the **power dynamics** and potential challenges. While students and community members can propose and pilot solutions, lasting change in Sorrento will depend on those in power – local government, regional authorities, tourism businesses – taking up and institutionalizing measures (Greenway, n.d.). Housing affordability, for example, ultimately requires policy changes (like those mentioned: caps or incentives for long-term rentals) that only officials can enact.

Scalability and Sustainability: Another point of discussion is how scalable and sustainable these participatory efforts are. The Human Rights Practicum and subsequent project were academic exercises with limited duration (Flanagan et al., 2019). For the impact to last, local institutions need to absorb and continue the work. Encouragingly, the involvement of entities like Fondazione Sorrento and interest from the mayor's office (who received the final presentations) suggest potential for institutionalization (Ivona et al., 2019).

One possibility could be establishing a permanent working group or forum on Sustainable Tourism in Sorrento, possibly chaired by the municipality but with citizen and business representatives, and perhaps advised by academics and/or technical experts. This group could continue monitoring issues and implementing initiatives like Sorrento Saggia.

In terms of geographic scalability, Sorrento Saggia could be adapted by other towns along the Amalfi Coast, which would benefit from a regional coherence (especially since tourists often visit multiple towns along the Amalfi Coast). The DMO (Destination Management Organization) being created for the Sorrentine Peninsula is a key opportunity (Positanonews, 2024). While DMOs traditionally focus on marketing, modern ones also manage sustainability. Feeding the lessons of this project into the DMO's strategy (e.g., making responsible tourism a core pillar) could amplify its reach.

Theoretical Implications for Sustainable Urban Planning: The challenges Sorrento faces are a microcosm of urban tourism in historic cities worldwide – from Venice and Barcelona to Bali and beyond. The interplay between tourism and housing gentrification, infrastructure stress, and cultural change is widely recognized in literature on “touristification” and “overtourism.” Giovanna Russo Krauss's study (2019) of Capri highlights how excessive luxury tourism altered the island's cultural landscape over time.

Sorrento adds to discourse by providing a case where stakeholders are actively responding with a rights-based narrative. It supports the argument that sustainable urban tourism requires integrating planning disciplines with community development (Esposito, 2023). Urban planners often deal with land use, transportation, etc., while tourism management deals with marketing and service. The transdisciplinary approach in Sorrento blends these by treating tourism as an integral part of city planning (Rogerson, 2019) that must include residents' voices. The project can thus be seen as a practical application of the theory of collaborative planning (Healey, 1997) in a tourism context – where diverse actors negotiate and co-create urban policy.

Community Empowerment and Social Cohesion: A positive, if intangible, outcome of the participatory process is increased community empowerment and potentially social cohesion (Anderson & Jung, 2023). Knowing that their concerns were studied and presented to city officials may give residents a sense that change is possible. Also, the narrative shift from “tourists vs locals” to “tourists and locals vs the problem”, while subtle can shift perspective and inspiration when it comes to problem ownership. By casting irresponsible tourism behaviours and lack

of planning as the problem – not tourism or tourists inherently – the campaign frames it as a solvable issue with everyone's cooperation (Bianchi et al., 2024).

Monitoring Human Rights Fulfilment: By explicitly referencing human rights (like housing, culture, work) in local discussions, Sorrento sets a precedent for possibly monitoring tourism impacts against rights indicators (Cole & Eriksson, 2010). For instance, the city could track whether the percentage of resident population is stabilizing (or still declining) as one measure of the right to housing/local residency or survey their satisfaction with access to public spaces (right to leisure and culture). These could become indicators in the city's urban plan or the DMO's performance metrics, ensuring that tourism is always evaluated in terms of community well-being, not just economic output.

Conclusion & Limitations

Sorrento's journey through the Fall 2024 Human Rights Practicum and Spring 2025 Sorrento Saggia campaign demonstrates a promising pathway for tourist cities seeking liveability (Bizzarri & Micera, 2021). By diagnosing tourism's impacts through a human rights lens and actively involving the community in crafting solutions, Sorrento has begun to reclaim the narrative of its future – striving to ensure it remains both a welcoming destination and a fulfilling home.

The project balanced theory and practice (Ranieri et al., 2023): principles like the right to housing and cultural life were translated into concrete actions like rule lists, forums, and partnerships. This showed that human rights need not remain abstract in local governance; it can directly inform city policies and visitor conduct (Arnstein, 1969). Meanwhile, students and residents working side by side exemplified how universities can serve their host communities, acting as catalysts and mediators in complex urban issues.

Limitations: It's important to candidly acknowledge some limitations of this study and project. The sample size of surveys and interviews was relatively small and may not capture all perspectives (e.g., perhaps not many voices of hotel developers or big tour operators, who have a stake too). As a student-led project, it may have gaps in expertise – professional urban planners or economists might refine some proposals. The campaign's efficacy is unproven as of this writing; it is based on theories of behaviour change and anecdotal support, but whether it truly changes tourist behaviour remains to be seen. There's also the issue of language and cultural barriers – many international tourists may not speak English or Italian well enough to engage deeply with the campaign content. Thus, materials need to be multilingual and culturally sensitive (something the team considered by planning translations).

Critical Next Steps: For Sorrento, a key next step is to integrate these efforts with formal policy. One suggestion is for the city to declare an objective like "Make Sorrento a model of responsible tourism by 2030" and outline actions in its strategic plan (Piano Urbanistico Comunale). This could secure funding and continuity. Additionally, pushing for the region (Campania) to pilot tourist zoning or rental limits in Sorrento could complement grass-roots actions on housing. The synergy of top-down and bottom-up is needed: neither community campaigns nor regulations alone will suffice. As an analogy, public health issues are tackled with education campaigns and laws; similarly, overtourism may require soft measures like Sorrento Saggia and hard measures like limits on cruise passengers or Airbnb permits.

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