

Sustainable tourism: Luigina Jessica Montano's doctoral thesis awarded

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IRVAPP researcher worked on an innovative approach to the evaluation of sustainable tourism policies in the European context

[Luigina Jessica Montano](#), a researcher at the Institute for Valuative Research on Public Policies (IRVAPP), has received a major award for her doctoral thesis presented at the University of Surrey (UK). The thesis entitled *"Evaluating the impact of complex tourism interventions in EU-funded project contexts,"* was **awarded by the Italian Evaluation Society** as the **best thesis on the topic of evaluation**.

The originality and relevance of her work, which focuses on **how to evidence and communicate the wider impact of sustainable tourism interventions in a holistic, context-sensitive manner**, was commended by the judging panel, who **praised the methodological rigor and contribution of her work at a European level**. Dr. Montano has taken an **innovative approach**, overcoming the idea that **policy evaluation** is merely a bureaucratic tick-box exercise to reassure funders of an intervention that their money was well spent. On the contrary, her research proposes to harness evaluation as a **tool for learning and empowerment**, through an active involvement of stakeholders and beneficiaries who assume the role of "co-evaluators" of the intervention.

One of the most relevant aspects of the thesis is the integration of **three qualitative methodologies** within the sphere of theory-based evaluation, namely – **Theory of Change, Process Tracing and Most Significant Change** – to evidence and narrate the impacts of EU-funded projects, particularly in the context of an **EU-INTERREG** programme. The thesis is based on complex realism, a theoretical approach to account for nonlinear, emergent change happening throughout an intervention and delve into how interactions between actors involved within an intervention can affect the achievement of desired outcomes.

The researcher demonstrates that qualitative methodologies, applied in a participatory and complexity-aware manner, can not only provide useful information for evaluation purposes, but also foster shared learning and promote more informed accountability among all stakeholders, from

policyholders to local beneficiaries.

The recognition by the [Italian Evaluation Society](#)



neutrality of the topic, relevance at the effectiveness of the methods communicate project impacts effectively esis was particularly praised for its clarity of n a critical perspective. The committee the role of the evaluator – not only as an perspective.

You can follow the links below to the

three open-access publications of the thesis:

Co-learning through participatory evaluation: an example using Theory of Change in a large-scale EU-funded tourism intervention *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*

Impact evaluation with process tracing: explaining causal processes in an EU-interreg sustainable tourism intervention *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*

Harnessing the power of stories: Evaluating complex tourism interventions through a 'most significant change' approach. *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights*

PERMALINK

<https://magazine.fbk.eu/en/news/sustainable-tourism-luigina-jessica-montanos-doctoral-thesis-awarded/>

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