

# Action Research-Based Sustainability Evaluation

## The Case of Tourism Product Development

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# Introduction

- ❖ The Bellagio principles (participation, vision of sustainability, assessment content, presentation of results & collective learning) offer a suitable guideline for dealing with the complexity and multidimensional nature of sustainable development (SD).
- ❖ However, sustainability evaluation is mainly practiced as a measurement task that relies on external expertise, scientific knowledge and effective communication strategies.
- ❖ We theoretically elaborate and empirically explore the use of action research in the field of sustainability evaluation. Particular attention is drawn to its role in establishing a clear vision of sustainability within a specific evaluation context.



# Why Action Research (AR)?

- ❖ Participation as active involvement of the evaluator and stakeholders (co-evaluators) in the process of knowledge co-creation & development of new skills and capacities.
- ❖ It expands the scope of sustainability evaluation beyond the discovering, description and judgment of facts to include the promotion of dialogues and critical reflection that contribute to exposing the underlying values, assumptions and reasoning behind the multiple views of SD.

*“AR represents an alternative for assessing the success or failure of an activity aiming at sustainability as well as for increasing understanding and learning on SD.”*



# Methodology and Data

- ❖ We illustrate the use of AR by presenting findings from the implementation/evaluation of a pilot project, which aimed at assisting a group of female micro-sized enterprises (catering, hospitality, pottery, natural health care, etc.) in their efforts to improve their product development skills.



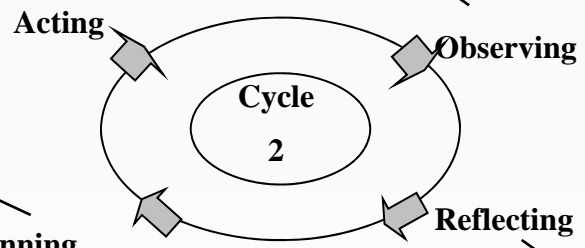
- ❖ **The general purpose of the evaluation was to explore:**
  - ❖ How this particular group of entrepreneurs and their stakeholders understood the notion of SD?
  - ❖ How thus understandings were translated into practice through a product development process that was based on action and reflection?
  - ❖ How a better understanding of SD supported their product development efforts?

# Methodology and Data



❖ Photographing and video recording of encounters and interactions between entrepreneurs and customers.

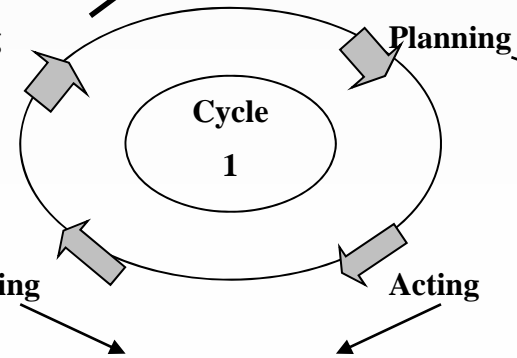
❖ Observation of meetings & workshops  
 ❖ Focus group  
 ❖ Writing of local population  
 ❖ Secondary data analysis (review of policy documents and reports)



❖ Observation of meetings and workshops



❖ Focus group  
 ❖ Observation of meetings



❖ Convergent interviews  
 ❖ Observation of meetings  
 ❖ Secondary data analysis (review of newspaper articles, brochures, Websites, etc.)

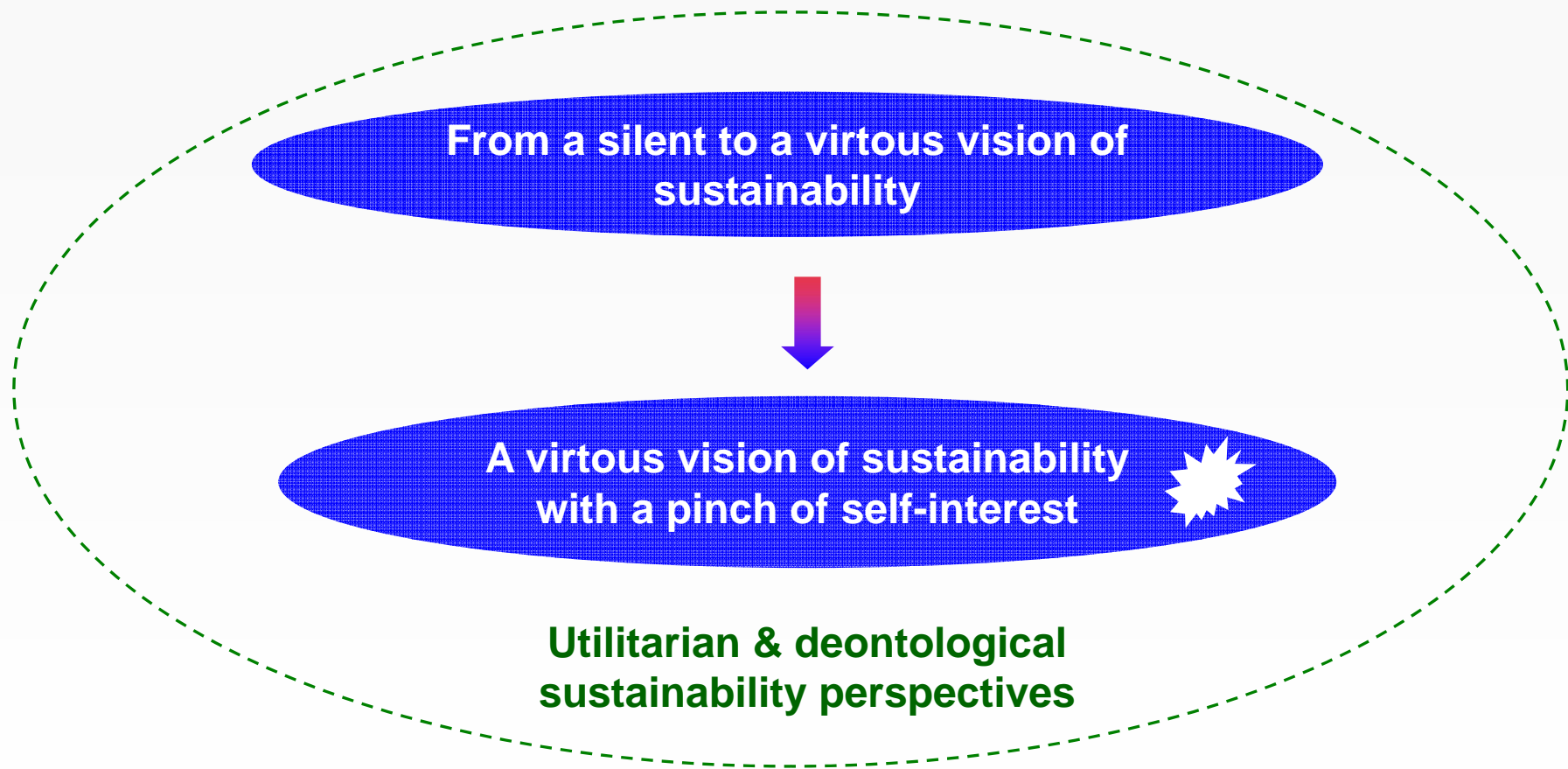


❖ Photographing and video recording of encounters and interactions between entrepreneurs and customers.



# Outcomes of the Evaluation

The role of Values in sustainability evaluation



*Better understanding of sustainability → improvement of product development*

# Implications

- ❖ By assessing sustainability initiatives dynamically through ongoing interaction and relationships with practitioners, evaluators can help them to increase their understanding of sustainability as well as to link it to their everyday life.
- ❖ While this study focuses on the (re-)definition of a sustainability vision, it offers insights into the role of action research in facilitating participation, collective learning and presentation of evaluation results.
- ❖ The case is unique, but the ontological and epistemological premises, on which this evaluation approach is based, can be used in different sustainability evaluation contexts.



*Thank for your attention!*

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