



Monographic Section

Seasonal work in the Italian tourism industry: a systematic literature review¹

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Abstract. This systematic literature review examines seasonal work in the Italian tourism industry, a sector that is crucial to the country's economy. It aims to synthesise research on the characteristics, challenges, and implications of seasonal work, focusing on both tourism workers and businesses. By analysing the academic literature on the topic, this review highlights the gaps in current research and suggests areas for further investigation, including job quality and working practices, entrepreneurial issues and new market segments. Research on seasonal work can inform policies aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of seasonality on the tourism industry and local economies.

Keywords: seasonal work, tourism industry, tourism companies, Italy, systematic literature review.

BACKGROUND

This systematic literature review aims to provide an overview of what is known in the scientific literature about the seasonal work in the Italian tourism industry, focusing on both workers and companies. This exploration is particularly relevant as Italy is one of the world's leading countries in terms of tourism revenue, and tourism is a key sector of the national economy (OECD 2022; WTTC 2024). The reason lies in the variety of its attractions, such as seaside tourism, winter and summer mountain tourism, culture and wellness. After a significant drop in tourist flows in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and a partial recovery in 2021, a resumption of tourism and sectoral employment growth have been recorded (Banca d'Italia 2023). In Italy, over 1.5 million people were employed in tourism-

¹ This article is the result of a collaborative work. Gaspani authored the following sections: Method, Review question and sub-questions, Search strategy, Synthesis of the products. Mazzaglia wrote the sections Background and Research avenues. The sections Search flow and Summary table were written jointly.

related activities in 2023 (EBNT 2024), and the country, along with Germany, France and Spain, accounts for over half of tourism employment in the European Union (Eurostat 2024a).

As most tourist destinations worldwide, Italy is subject to systematic fluctuations in tourism flows throughout the year (Hylleberg 1992). Seasonality is the result of – stable and variable – natural and institutional factors on both the supply and demand sides (Bar-On 1975). The former relate to natural phenomena and variations in climatic conditions in destination countries. The latter reflect the norms and practices of a society in terms of religious, cultural and social factors. Other causes of seasonality include the fashion for visiting particular destinations at certain times of the year, sports seasons, travel habits (Butler 1994) and the type of attractions of interest (Baum, Hagen 1999). From an empirical perspective, there have been several attempts to measure seasonality² and classify seasonal patterns in tourism. Butler and Mao (1997) identify three main forms of seasonality. One-peak pattern occurs in the destinations with a single significant peak season throughout the year. Two-peak seasonality is found in destinations that usually have a peak in summer and another peak in winter. Non-peak seasonality indicates that tourism activities occur throughout the year and with fewer irregularities. The latter is typical of urban destinations with non-seasonal attractions. The form and intensity of seasonality may differ between and within countries (Eurostat 2024b). The Mediterranean tourism industry has traditionally been characterised – beyond the specificities of each area – by a strong orientation towards the summer months (Krabokoukis, Polyzos 2024). In Italy, the regions with the highest concentration of tourists are those with a single peak in the south (with a seaside vocation), while some two-peak profiles appear mainly in mountain regions (Cicarelli 2018). The regions with a higher degree of seasonality are Calabria, Sardinia, Apulia and Abruzzo; those with less seasonality are Lazio, Piedmont and Lombardy, which are also economic and institutional centres (Eurostat 2024b).

From an economic point of view, seasonality affects both tourism employment and companies. In Italy, the annual average for the tourism sector in 2023 was 1,394,002 employees and 200,991 enterprises with at least one employee, with significant variations throughout the year (from 1,135,184 and 182,525 in February to 1,667,247 and 220,610 in July) (EBNT 2024). Seasonality shapes the nature and quality of employment, leading to widespread seasonal jobs (Baum 1999). According to Fellini (2017: 113-114), due to fluctuations in demand, tourism companies may favour a specific form of flexibility or adopt a dual strategy, distinguishing between a core involved in internal flexibility (the most qualified workers, with better working conditions) and a periphery involved in numerical flexibility (workers with less strategic skills) (see also Park *et alii* 2016). In the periphery, most seasonal workers show a recurring presence over the years, engaging in alternative activities during off-peak periods. The remainder are temporary workers, often employed for less than a season. In Italy, indeed, the tourism workforce is substantially young (58.7% of employees are under 40 years-old), with a large presence of women (52.3%) and foreigners (26.8%), especially in low-skilled occupations (EBNT 2024). 51.6% of employees work part-time (the vast majority are manual workers). In 2023, 54.2% of total tourism employees were on permanent contracts, while 45.2% were on seasonal or fixed-term contracts. Seasonal contracts were mainly concentrated in the accommodation sector, amusement parks and thermal centres (45.3%, 41.9% and 21.5% of total sectoral employment respectively) (EBNT 2024). While Lombardy, Lazio and Piedmont have the highest incidence of permanent employment (66.7%, 66.0% and 63.4% respectively), Trentino-Alto Adige, the Aosta Valley and Sardinia record the highest levels of seasonal employment (58.1%, 53.7% and 37.2% respectively) (EBNT 2024). The Italian tourism sector is characterised by high staff turnover, linked to the poor quality of jobs. In addition, undeclared work is widespread (European Platform Tackling undeclared work 2020). As a result, the share of Italian workers in tourism-related jobs has declined in recent years, while intra- and extra-EU seasonal migrant workers have played an important

² As noted by Lundtorp (2001) and Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff (2005), tourism seasonality has been measured in many ways. It is usually measured in number of visitors, arrivals or departures, or overnight stays, and is generally described by summary indicators that synthesise the dispersion of a distribution (see Karamustafa, Ulama 2010). Although seasonality is often measured on an annual basis, it can also be analysed on a monthly or weekly basis (Rosselló, Sansó 2017).

role³ (European Commission 2023). During the Covid-19 pandemic, seasonal tourism workers were among those most affected by the closure of the activities and were excluded from the standard social security benefits (Renga 2020), contributing to a significant spillover of human resources to other sectors (CNR 2023).

In Italy, Lombardy, Lazio and Veneto are the regions with the highest presence of tourism businesses. However, the density of tourism companies (companies per thousand inhabitants) is higher in the Aosta Valley (9.1), Trentino-Alto Adige (7.1), Liguria (5.0), Tuscany (4.4) and Sardinia (4.2) (ENBT 2024). The negative impact of seasonality on companies mainly relate to off-peak periods, with a sharp reduction in revenues due to low demand (Corluka 2019). Tourism companies incur high fixed costs to meet the operational needs of the peak tourist season, with difficult returns on capital investment due to under-utilised facilities (Manning, Powers 1984). In addition, firms may experience a limited ability to attract investment (Baum 1999). Problems may also arise from the over-utilisation of facilities and equipment during peak seasons (Corluka 2019). The main challenge that seasonality poses to tourism companies is in attracting, managing and retaining staff (Krakover 2000; CNR 2023). Although some firms try to limit variations in staffing levels throughout the year, many incur fixed costs for recruitment, selection and training in each peak season (Jolliffe, Farnsworth 2003). However, seasonality can also have positive impacts on businesses, providing them with opportunities to undertake maintenance and renovations or to develop new markets (Park *et alii* 2016). Although many entrepreneurs may prefer to close during the off-season, their approach to seasonality may be informed by economic and non-economic motivations (Martin Martin, Guaita Martinez 2020). At the local level, seasonality can represent a problem especially in peripheral areas with a weak economic structure, poor diversification or a high dependence on tourism (Kastenholz, Lopes de Almeida 2008). In line with the geographical, social and economic characteristics of each destination, tourism companies and local communities, along with policymakers, can develop strategies to reduce seasonality (Baum, Hagen 1999; Corluka 2019). These strategies include extending the main season, diversifying markets and products, using differential pricing, promoting domestic tourism in the off-season, and organising off-season events (Butler 1994; Weaver, Lawton 2002).

On the basis of these premises, it is relevant to delineate the state of the art of research on seasonal work in the tourism sector. Indeed, it is worth stressing that there are no systematic literature reviews on the Italian context that consider both workers and companies. In the following section, the method is illustrated. Subsequently, a summary of the articles included in the review is presented, and their content and specificities are analysed. Finally, some research avenues are outlined.

METHOD

In recent years, systematic literature reviews have become increasingly popular in organisational and labour studies, as well as in the field of tourism (Kravariti *et alii* 2021; Wang, Cheung 2024). Although various definitions exist in literature (see for example Gough *et alii* 2017; Fisch, Block 2018; García-Peñalvo 2022), it can be understood as a comprehensive review of the scientific material selected to address a specific question, using a systematic and reproducible method to identify relevant studies. The next sections follow – with some adaptations – the stages illustrated by Jesson *et alii* (2011) and document the search process. Firstly, the research questions, electronic databases to be searched, literature selection criteria and search terms are defined. Subsequently, the databases are searched, information is extracted, and outcomes are presented. Finally, a summary table is structured and analysed.

³ In recent years, the European Union has sought to harmonise seasonal worker programmes across member states (Hooper, Le Coz 2020).

Review question and sub-questions

The identification of the review question and sub-questions is a crucial phase of the systematic review, as it influences the decisions to be made, the scientific products to be included in the process and the development of the subsequent analysis (Jesson *et alii* 2011).

Table 1. The review question and sub-questions.

Question	What is known in the academic literature about seasonal work in the Italian tourism industry?
Sub-questions	Which tourism sectors have been investigated the most?
	In which geographical area or destination?
	What is the aim of the studies that address seasonal tourism work?
	Are these studies theoretical or empirical?
	What aspects of tourism seasonal work have been analysed, considering both workers and businesses?

Search strategy: databases, selection criteria and queries

In order to meet the research aims, both international and Italian electronic databases were inquired, and the search was conducted in both English and Italian. The international databases considered were Elsevier/Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO and Proquest. The databases explored to search for academic products in Italian language were Torrossa, Rivisteweb and Proquest. Table 2 illustrates the criteria adopted to select the products. The search was limited to scientific articles as the peer review process generally ensures a certain level of quality and rigour.

Table 2. The inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion conditions		Exclusion conditions
Products	Peer-reviewed journal articles (Editorials and Research notes included)	Books and chapters in books
		Reports
		Conference proceedings
		Sentencies and commentaries on sentencies
		Working papers
Sectors	Tourism industry and sub-sectors	Book reviews
		Dissertations and other unpublished works
Country	Italy, and comparative studies involving Italy	Sectors unrelated to tourism
Languages	English and Italian	Not related to Italy
Period	All time	Other than English and Italian
		-

Although several books and book chapters have been written on the subject in Italian, they were not included in the research due to the limited electronic access to these products. Furthermore, the search for chapters is limited by the fact that they often do not have abstracts, or Italian databases do not allow them to be searched from the abstracts. In addition, although some useful knowledge may be found in non-academic and non-peer-reviewed journals as well as in the so-called grey literature, this type of resource was not included as it is not covered by academic electronic databases.

In line with the characteristics – potentials and limitations – of each database, partially different search strategies were adopted. For the international databases, the search was carried out in English, starting from the titles and abstracts of the articles (Scopus and Web of Science do not allow full-text searches), while for Italian articles the search covered the entire text of the document. Indeed, many of the oldest Italian articles do not have abstracts, while others only have abstracts in English. Table 3 and Table 4 show, in relation to the databases consid-

Table 3. Databases and queries: search in English.

Databases	Search section(s)	Query 1 - Workers	No.	Query 2 - Companies	No.	Tot.
Web of Science	Topic (title, abstract, keyword plus, and author keywords)	TS=(touris* AND season* AND (Italy OR Italian OR Mediterranean OR Europe*)) TS=(work* OR employment OR employee* OR labour OR contract* OR job* OR occupation*)	140	TS=(touris* AND season* AND (Italy OR Italian OR Mediterranean OR Europe*)) TS=(employer* OR compan* OR firm* OR business* OR enterprise* OR organisation* OR corporation*)	69	209
Scopus	Article title, Abstract, Keywords	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (touris* AND season* AND (italy OR italian OR mediterranean OR europe*))) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY (work* OR employment OR employee* OR labour OR contract* OR job* OR occupation*))	177	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (touris* AND season* AND (italy OR italian OR mediterranean OR europe*))) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY (employer* OR compan* OR firm* OR business* OR enterprise* OR organisation* OR corporation*))	118	295
Proquest	All abstract & summary text – SUMMARY	touris* AND season* AND (Italy OR Italian OR Mediterranean OR Europe*) AND work* OR employment OR employee* OR labour OR contract* OR job* OR occupation*	174	touris* AND season* AND (Italy OR Italian OR Mediterranean OR Europe*) AND employer* OR compan* OR firm* OR business* OR enterprise* OR organisation* OR corporation*	100	274
EBSCO	AB Abstract	touris* AND season* AND (Italy OR Italian OR Mediterranean OR Europe*) AND work* OR employment OR employee* OR labour OR contract* OR job* OR occupation*	27	touris* AND season* AND (Italy OR Italian OR Mediterranean OR Europe*) AND employer* OR compan* OR firm* OR business* OR enterprise* OR organisation* OR corporation*	30	57

Note. The reported numbers also include scientific articles classified as other products in the databases considered (e.g. case studies, editorials).

Table 4. Databases and queries: search in Italian.

Databases	Search section(s)	Query 1 - Workers	No.	Query 2 - Companies	No.	Tot.
Torrossa	Full-text	[Testo] Italia [Parola] O [Testo] Italian* [Parola] E [Testo] turismo [Parola] O [Testo] turistic* [Parola] E [Testo] stagional* [Parola] E [Testo] lavor* [Parola] O [Testo] occupazion* [Parola] O [Testo] occupat* [Parola] O [Testo] impieg* [Parola] O [Testo] contratt* [Parola]	236	[Testo] Italia [Parola] O [Testo] Italian* [Parola] E [Testo] turismo [Parola] O [Testo] turistic* [Parola] E [Testo] stagional* [Parola] E [Testo] aziend* [Parola] O [Testo] impres* [Parola] O [Testo] eserciz* [Parola] O [Testo] organizzazione* [Parola]	147	383
Rivisteweb	Full-text	turismo AND lavoro AND stagionale turismo AND lavori AND stagionali turismo AND lavoratori AND stagionali turismo AND occupazione AND stagionale turismo AND occupazioni AND stagionali turismo AND occupati AND stagionali turismo AND impiego AND stagionale turismo AND impieghi AND stagionali turismo AND contratto AND stagionale turismo AND contratti AND stagionali (italia OR italian*) AND (turismo OR turistic*) AND stagional* AND (lavor* OR occupazion* OR occupat* OR impieg* OR contratt*)	115 80 93 66 14 33 45 9 32 50	turismo AND stagionale AND azienda turismo AND stagionali AND aziende turismo AND stagionale AND impresa turismo AND stagionali AND imprese turismo AND stagionale AND esercizio turismo AND stagionali AND esercizi turismo AND stagionale AND organizzazione turismo AND stagionali AND organizzazioni	20 46 36 93 30 44 49 47	902
Proquest	Document text – FULLTEXT	(italia OR italian*) AND (turismo OR turistic*) AND stagional* AND (lavor* OR occupazion* OR occupat* OR impieg* OR contratt*)	42	(italia OR italian*) AND (turismo OR turistic*) AND stagional* AND (aziend* OR impres* OR eserciz* OR organizzazione*)	38	80

Notes. The search in Torrossa also included other materials (such as national and international laws, commentaries on laws, book reviews, bibliographies), classified by the platform as articles. The reported numbers refer to scientific articles only.

Although the full-text search in Rivisteweb supports single and multiple character wildcard (“*” symbol) within single terms (but not within phrase queries), several searches had to be carried out (<https://www.rivisteweb.it/rivisteweb/complexsearchsyntax>). Rivisteweb also does not allow the user to select the type of product to be filtered out. It was therefore necessary to select the articles manually from the search results. The numbers refer to scientific articles only.

ered, the keywords and queries used for each search, with a distinction between seasonal tourism workers and businesses. The search terms “tourism” or “touristic*” were used for international and Italian databases. Although the tourism sector consists of several sub-sectors (e.g. hospitality, travel operators), it was preferred to use these more general terms as some sub-sectors may be only partially related to the tourism industry as they provide services to both tourists and non-tourists (e.g. restaurants, transports) (Eurostat 2022). The terms “Italy” or “Italian” were only used to search for articles in English. For English-language articles, the terms “Mediterranean” or “Europe*” were included in order to retrieve comparative studies between the Italian case and other European or Southern European countries. For both English- and Italian-language articles, the term “seasonal” was searched separately from other terms such as “work”, “employee*”, “occupation”, and so on. The aim was to include products in which the two terms have been used – in the abstract or in the text – in different sentence forms and not necessarily combined. Although this strategy required more work in the next phase to exclude articles not relevant to the research objective, it was preferred in order not to miss any relevant articles.

The searches were carried out between 25 and 30 June 2024. In order to outline the state of the art of the research on seasonal work in the Italian tourism sector, the searches were not limited in terms of years of publication of the articles.

RESULTS

Search flow

A total of 2,200 publications were identified, of which 1,347 were duplicates. 853 articles were selected for screening based on title and Abstract. 662 articles were excluded for being off-topic or not related to Italy and 191 were retrieved. Of the 172 articles assessed for eligibility, 117 articles were excluded after reading the full-text as off-topic (e.g. article addressing seasonality, tourism flows or policies) or poorly informative. 55 publications were then included in the review (Figure 1).

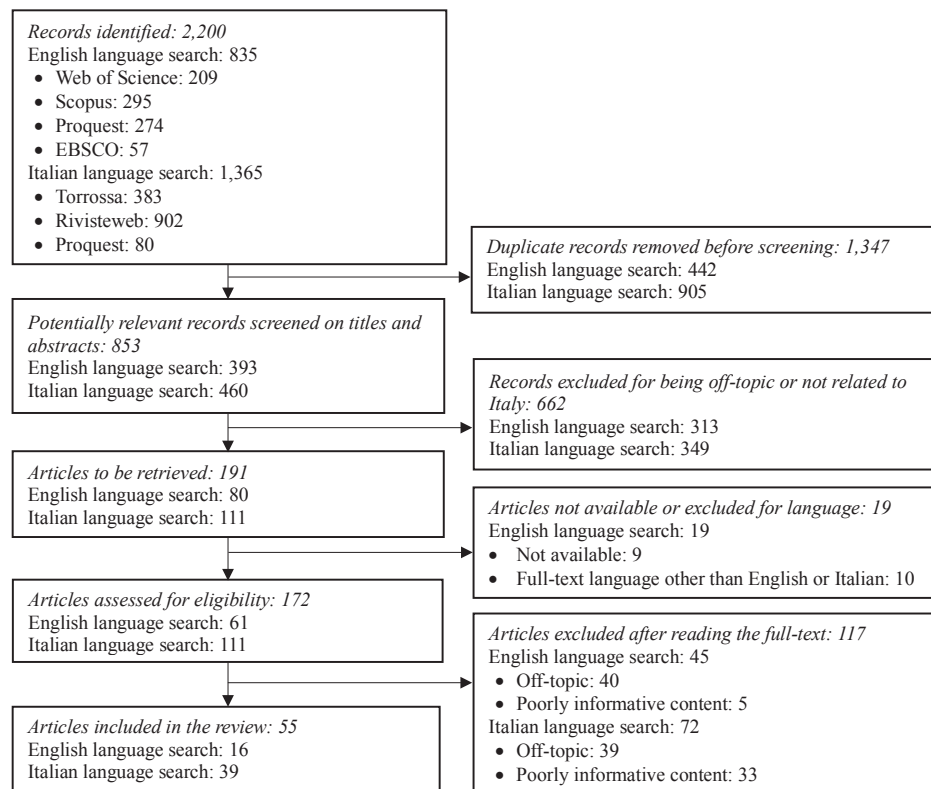


Figure 1. Study selection process.

Summary table

After the selection of the articles, information was extracted. Table 5 chronologically summarises the studies. In line with the review question and sub-questions, it includes tourism sub-sector, aim, context, type of paper and synthesis of the main contents concerning seasonal work.

Synthesis of the products

The included articles are from 1980 to 2023. Their distribution by year of publication (Figure 2) shows that from 1981 to 1996 no articles were published on seasonal work in tourism in Italy. Although there has been an increasing trend in the number of annual publications since 1997, it should be noted that there were only four years in which 5 or 4 articles were published: 2005 and 2012, and 2021 and 2023 respectively. The low number of articles published in recent years contrasts with the fact that seasonal workers in tourism were among those most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In general, there seems to be little scientific interest in this topic.

With regard to the distribution of articles per journal (Table 6), it is noted that only one journal published 5 articles. Two journals published 4 articles, two journals published 3 articles and six journals published 2 articles. All other journals published only 1 article each. In summary, more than the half of the articles included in the systematic literature review (no. 31) appear in 11 journals. However, only a few of these journals can be considered strictly sociological. In addition, most of the selected articles were published in Italian journals.

These findings are consistent with the fact that Italian sociology has traditionally paid little attention to service jobs – especially to low-skilled service jobs – even though they account for around three-quarters of all jobs in advanced economies (Fellini 2017), and tourism jobs are a significant component (WTTC 2024).

In terms of article types, 21 are review articles (including 1 viewpoint paper) while 34 are empirical articles. Of the latter, 19 follow a quantitative approach, 8 a qualitative approach (including 1 evaluation of project implementation) and 7 a mixed method design. Theoretical papers and literature reviews were classified as “review”, as well as the so-called empirical literature reviews (commentaries on quantitative data collected and analysed by national or international institutions and organisations). Quantitative studies were mainly conducted through surveys, web surveys and secondary data analysis. Instead, qualitative research mainly used interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. It is worth noting the difficulty of classifying some articles as “review” or “empirical”, while many older articles do not have a clear methodological section. This classification, therefore, is based on the main content of the products.

Despite their significant contribution to the Italian tourism industry, seasonal work remains under-researched in all sub-sectors. Out of the 55 articles examined, 19 are not tourism-specific and 16 are related to tourism in general (of which 1 with an insight on MICE⁴ and 1 with an insight on mobile trade). The most investigated sub-sector is that of hotels, with 12 articles (of which 1 also considers “extra-hotel” accommodations, 1 apartments and skiing, 1 MICE, 1 restaurants and travel agencies, 1 restaurants). Instead, there is only 1 specific article for each of the following sectors: outdoor tourism, agrotourism, MICE, cable railways, bathing facilities, enogastronomic tourism, port services in passenger transport, walking trade in the informal economy. Among the sectors that rely almost exclusively on tourists (Eurostat 2022), travel agencies, tour operators, reservation services and related activities are virtually ignored in the literature. Instead, among the industries that provide services to both tourists and non-tourists, different sectors result to be scarcely or not at all researched, such as passenger transport, restaurants and food and beverage activities, and renting services.

With regard to the geographical context of the studies, 19 articles are about Italy (of which 1 with an insight on Calabria, 1 on Emilia-Romagna and Trentino-Alto Adige, 1 on Apulia, 1 on Piedmont and the Aosta Valley). Moreover, 5 articles focus on Emilia-Romagna, 5 on Sardinia; 4 on Trentino-Alto Adige; 4 on Lombardy; 3 on Veneto; 2 on Apulia; 1 on Lombardy and Piedmont; 1 on Marche and Emilia-Romagna; 1 on Southern Italy and

⁴ Meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions.

Table 5. Articles included in the systematic literature review.

Reference	(Sub-)sector	Aim of the article	Context	Type of article	Main contents on seasonal work
van der Werff (1980)	Tourism (gen)	Analysing the material polarisation due to tourism growth	Grosseto and Castiglione della Pescaia (Tuscany)	Empirical (qual)	- Seasonality affects the number and characteristics of people hired by small entrepreneurs in the tourism sector (restaurants, hotels, bathing establishments, commercial activities). The industry employs more outsiders than locals during the peak summer season. - Seasonality also impacts on earnings and work activities.
Lassandari (1997)	Not tourism-specific	Analysing the implementation of a new national collective agreement	Rimini (Emilia-Romagna) and other Italian areas	Empirical (qual)	- Undeclared work and contractual violations characterise the tourism sector, partly due to seasonality and limited unionisation. The UCICT-CISAL collective agreement (1992) provides less protection for workers than the agreement signed by CGIL, CISL and UIL. - In Italy, many systems of industrial relations coexist. Seasonal workers employed in small tourism enterprises are difficult to mobilise.
Gastronuovo (1997)	Not tourism-specific	Reflecting on the development of tertiary activities and tourism	Southern Italy and Sicily	Review	- In Sicily, employment in the hotel sector decreases in the low season and almost doubles in the summer. - In Southern Italy, seasonality leads to under-utilisation of facilities in the low season. To revitalise the sector, the environmental and historical-artistic heritage should be promoted internationally.
Penco (2000)	Port services in passenger transport	Investigating the characteristics of ports in maritime passenger transport	General, insight on Italy	Review	Seasonal peaks in tourist demand for passenger transport by ferry affect port operations, the scheduling of departures and the intensity of the service. The need for facilities capable of handling seasonal peaks can lead to cost increases during periods of low activity.
Rossin (2001)	Enogastronomy	Describing the impact of food and wine tourism on local areas	Italy and Calabria	Review	Food and wine activities have fostered the development of an integrated and sustainable approach to tourism. These activities have a strong impact on the accommodation, commercial and restaurant services of the areas, reducing the seasonality of tourism flows.
Perrone (2001)	Not tourism-specific	Analysing Senegalese migration and community features	Italy	Review	Senegalese people and communities who migrate to Italy prefer areas with industrial districts or tourism industries. Tourism gives them the opportunity to engage in commercial activities.
Giaccone (2002)	Not tourism-specific	Analysing the regulation of industrial relations	Veneto	Review	- In the 1990s, tourism became the main activity in Venice. Strategies focused on infrastructures, industrial relations, professional training, and support for the employment of disadvantaged groups. - As seasonality disappeared, the expansion of hotels began.
Silvestrelli, Agazzani (2002)	Tourism (gen)	Analysing territorial marketing policies in the tourism industry	Senigallia (Marche) and Rimini (Emilia-Romagna)	Empirical (mixed)	- Senigallia is characterised by a summer peak season. This has limited the development of new tourist segments and the diversification of the hotel industry, which is characterised by small and low-end facilities. - Rimini developed deseasonalisation strategies through product diversification, new business areas (e.g. trade fairs, leisure) and upgrading of accommodation facilities.
Pittau, Di Sciullo (2003)	Not tourism-specific	Illustrating seasonal agriculture and retail	Italy, insight on Rimini (Emilia-Romagna) and Trento (Trentino-Alto Adige)	Review	- In Rimini, irregular vendors were initially Senegalese. Now Asians are also involved. The share of vendors without residence permits has decreased. - In Trento, Eastern European workers have entered the hotel sector. - The seasonal work permit lasts from 20 days to 9 months. After two years, workers can obtain a three-year permit (Bossi-Fini law).
Zanfrini (2003)	Not tourism-specific	Illustrating migration policies and access to the labour market for migrant workers	Italy	Review	- Tendency to promote temporary immigration based on seasonal needs (e.g. tourism) or to address cyclical shortages in the labour market, mainly for low-skilled jobs that Italians refuse. - The 2001 Flows Decree established 83,000 arrivals (20,000 more than the previous year), distinguishing between seasonal and other types of arrivals.
Marta (2004)	Not tourism-specific	Tracing the evolution of labour market and professional profiles in craft, manufacturing and tourism	Alto-Adige (Trentino-Alto Adige)	Empirical (mixed)	- The demand for tourism labour is mostly seasonal. This results in a low presence of young people and local staff, a large number of migrant workers (mainly from Eastern Europe), and a low sense of attachment to the job. - Despite the importance of the ski industry, most hotels increase their activity in the summer. However, fixed-term contracts are prevalent.

(Continued)

Table 5. (Continued).

Reference	(Sub-)sector	Aim of the article	Context	Type of article	Main contents on seasonal work
Aiello, Pupo (2005)	Hotel and "extra-hotel" accommodations	Analysing the impact of a measure aimed at improving tourism accommodations	Calabria	Empirical (quan)	- Measure 3.1 of the regional Programma Operativo Plurifondo (1994-1999) favoured projects in summer destinations, neglecting other tourism types (natural, enogastronomic, religious). - The sector remains highly seasonal, with unskilled labour and high turnover. Tourism businesses are small and poorly innovative. The lack of collaborations hinders the promotion of joint products and services.
Frey <i>et alii</i> (2005)	Not tourism-specific	Illustrating structural changes in labour supply and demand	Province of Bolzano (Trentino-Alto Adige)	Review	- High presence of migrant workers (from Southern Italy and non-EU countries) in tourism seasonal jobs due to local labour shortages. - In 2002, seasonal contracts represented the largest share of new employment contracts, especially in restaurants and hotels.
Gentileschi (2005)	Tourism (gen), insight on mobile trade	Analysing migrant flows and their impacts on employment and housing	Sardinia	Review	- Large presence of foreign seasonal workers in the tourism sector. - Many immigrants living in other Italian regions move to Sardinia during the summer. This has implications for housing, as they are concentrated in the main tourist areas. A common activity is beach vending.
Leonardi (2005)	Not tourism-specific	Analysing the role of bilateral bodies (<i>enti bilaterali</i>) in industrial relations	Italy	Review	- According to the Tourism collective agreement (1999), 30% of the contribution to the territorial bilateral bodies should be allocated to income support for seasonal workers attending training courses. - The need to represent workers in small and seasonal enterprises was one of the reasons for the creation of bilateral bodies.
Paddeu (2005)	Agrotourism	Mapping the offer of agrotourisms and analysing customer demand	Province of Oristano (Sardinia)	Empirical (quan)	- The agrotourism sector mitigates the summer seasonality by promoting inland areas, cultures and traditions. - The development of agrotourism activities allows the expansion of income sources and the creation of new jobs.
Bernini (2006)	MICE	Analysing the congress sector, its relations with the territories and the local tourism supply	Italy	Review	- The congress sector contributes to deseasonalise the destinations and positively impacts on employment in the supply chain. - Almost half of the congress centres are in Lombardy, Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto. In tourist areas and in the south, the offer is limited.
Nicholls (2006)	Outdoor	Analysing the implications of climate change for outdoor recreation	Europe, insight to Southern Europe and Italy	Review	- Southern European countries will experience intense climate warming. This will change the seasonality of some tourist facilities. - Ski resorts need to diversify their offer to include outdoor activities and conference facilities. Smaller resorts may find it difficult to adapt their services and are more likely to close.
De Carlo <i>et alii</i> (2009)	Tourism (gen), insight on MICE	Exploring the city's image and rebranding for Expo 2015	Milan (Lombardy)	Empirical (mixed)	The high seasonality of the business and fair sector - the driver of tourism in Milan - affects the work of tour operators, which operate independently rather than collaborating to develop new tourism markets.
Villa (2009)	Not tourism-specific	Analysing the legal status of EU and their integration in the labour market	Italy	Review	- Law no. 39/1990 linked seasonal work to labour market demand and entry quotas. Non-EU people who lose their jobs can register on employment lists for the remaining period of their work permit (Leg. Decr. no. 286/1998). - Law no. 189/2002 attempted to link the duration of the residence permit (which cannot exceed 9 months for seasonal work) to having a job.
Iannone (2010)	Not tourism-specific	Analysing the labour market in Rome	Rome (Lazio), insight on provincial and regional level	Review	- Most of the new hirings in tourism was temporary and seasonal. - At provincial level, unemployment had been falling steadily since 2005, even taking into account seasonal phenomena in various sectors such as tourism. However, it increased at the beginning of the crisis.

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Table 5. (Continued).

Reference	(Sub-)sector	Aim of the article	Context	Type of article	Main contents on seasonal work
Sainaghi (2010)	Hotel and MICE	Analysing the relationship between MICE and the hotel sector	Milan (Lombardy)	Empirical (quan)	Seasonality affects Milan as a tourist destination, where the MICE sector play an important role. International events and the concurrence of several events positively affect hotel revenues.
Corsino <i>et alii</i> (2011)	Hotel	Assessing the production efficiency of hotels	Province of Trento (Trentino-Alto Adige)	Empirical (quan)	Most prestigious tourism areas tend to have a longer season. In these areas, companies with better organisation and management are able to offer higher quality services at higher prices.
De Bernart <i>et alii</i> (2011)	Mobile trade in the informal economy	Understanding the relationship between migration and irregular seasonal work	Rimini (Emilia-Romagna)	Empirical (mixed)	- Over the past decade, beach vending has not changed significantly in numbers, but rather in terms of origin. Relevance of ethnic networks and social capital: from mainly Senegalese to mostly Asian vendors. - Compared to the past, the offer of services (e.g. massages) gains in importance and the number of sellers of counterfeit goods decreases.
De Filippo, Strozza (2012)	Not tourism-specific	Analysing labour market entry and working conditions of migrants	Province of Caserta (Campania)	Empirical (quan)	- In tourism, migrants have more job opportunities in the summer months. - Most of the self-employed migrant workers in the tourism sector are involved in commercial activities, especially street vending.
De Mozzi (2012)	Not tourism-specific	Reviewing collective bargaining provisions support for non-EU workers	Italy	Review	Collective agreements may include principles or obligations, such as the possibility to define agreements to facilitate the access of migrants to seasonal jobs (e.g. CNIL of 9/2009 and 5/2010 for tourism workers) or the priority for seasonal workers to return to Italy in the following year.
Gallia (2012)	Tourism (gen)	Analysing the economies of the Italian small islands and their potential development	Italy; small islands (less than 1,000 km ²)	Review	- It is possible to extend the tourist season beyond the summer by promoting culture, agri-food production and natural resources other than the sea. - De-seasonalisation generates the extension of business and new jobs. It would limit emigration, which mainly involves young people.
Torluccio (2012)	Hotel and restaurant	Analysing the financial structure of small and medium-sized firms.	Europe, insight on Italy	Empirical (quan)	In Italy, as in other European countries, seasonality impacts on the financial structures of small and medium-sized businesses in the tourism sector, especially those involved in accommodation and food services.
Vergori (2012)	Tourism (gen)	Analysing the effect of seasonality on the forecasting of tourism flows	Province of Lecce (Apulia)	Empirical (quan)	- The province has a highly seasonal tourism demand in the summer. - The summer peak puts pressure on various segments, such as bathing establishments and transport. Reducing seasonality can improve business efficiency and help in planning tourism-related activities.
Bronzini (2013)	Not tourism-specific	Investigating poverty dynamics and impoverishment processes	Senigallia (Marche)	Empirical (mixed)	- Demand for labour increases in the summer period, leading to difficulties in childcare due to a lack of services. - Discontinuous jobs and incomes can lead to indebtedness and family impoverishment. The non-renewal of precarious and seasonal contracts particularly penalises young people, women and migrants. - Compared to the core activities of the tourism industry (e.g. hotels, travel agencies), restaurants create fewer seasonal jobs.
Lancellotti, Vavassori (2013)	Tourism (gen)	Illustrating the factors underlying the creation of new tourism professions	Italy and Apulia	Empirical (mixed)	- Between 2007 and 2012, the seasonal labour demand increased for low-skilled profiles and decreased for medium- and high-skilled roles. - In Apulia, the creation of new tourism professions aims to de-seasonalise tourism and strengthen local businesses.

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Table 5. (Continued).

Reference	(Sub-)sector	Aim of the article	Context	Type of article	Main contents on seasonal work
Sainaghi, Baggio (2014)	Hotel	Analysing the relationship between structural social capital and performance	Livigno (Lombardy)	Empirical (quan)	The positioning of hotels within the network involving different actors offering products and services (e.g. lodging firms, travel agencies, tour operators, associations) is relevant for the management of seasonality. This positioning is more important in the low season.
Gabriele, Tundis (2015)	Hotel	Analysing the impact of incentives on the hotel sector	Trentino (Trentino Alto-Adige)	Empirical (quan)	The subsidies provided under the Provincial Law no. 6/99 of the Autonomous Province of Trento had a positive impact on the hotels, reducing the seasonality of their activities.
Sainaghi (2015)	Cable railway	Illustrating the management of cableway companies	Italy	Review	- The profitability of cableway companies is subject to weather risks, high seasonality, and variability of demand. - The decisions of the public authorities affect the companies. It is important to assess the potential of the facilities in relation to the type of tourism in a destination, as investments commit companies for a long time.
Obadić, Pehar (2016)	Tourism (gen)	Assessing the impact of the tourism industry on GDP, employment and capital investments	Mediterranean countries, insight on Italy	Empirical (quan)	- Mediterranean countries have a summer peak season. Seasonal jobs are dominated by female workers and are characterised by unsociable working hours, making work-family balance difficult. In Italy, most workers have upper secondary or post-secondary education. - Employers face difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff.
Olini (2016)	Tourism (gen)	Exploring how HR management and decentralised bargaining can help the tourism sector recover	Italy	Review	- The average wage in the tourism sector is low. This is due to low hourly wages and the diffusion of part-time and seasonal contracts. - Seasonal work also involves skilled workers. - Seasonal work is rarely addressed in second-level bargaining.
De Vincenzi (2017)	Not tourism-specific	Presenting the results of an INPS project of unemployment benefits	Italy	Empirical (quan)	- The highest concentration of new records under NASpI (New Social Insurance for Employment) is in July and October. This is especially due to precarious public school teachers and seasonal tourism workers. 22.2% of unemployed people who received at least one NASpI benefit worked in hotels, bars and restaurants.
Iannuzzi (2017)	Hotel	Analysing the racial and sexual division of labour in the hotel sector	Venice (Veneto)	Empirical (qual)	- The seasonality of tourism creates fluctuations in the workforce. Although permanent contracts are still prevalent, fixed-term, seasonal and on-call contracts are widespread. - Seasonality significantly impacts hotels in the low-middle segment, while it has a little impact on high-end hotels.
Pulina, Santoni (2018)	Hotel	Analysing the economic efficiency of the hotels	Sardinia	Empirical (quan)	Seasonality reduces hotel profitability, especially in the most specialised tourism area (the province of Olbia-Tempio). The tourism infrastructure, built for the summer peak, is underutilised during the low season.
Fiori, Foroni (2019)	Hotel	Applying the demand forecasting models to small and medium-sized hotels	Milan and Lake Maggiore area (Lombardy/Piedmont)	Empirical (qual)	- Seasonality affects the performance of small and medium-sized hotels. Compared to larger ones, these hotels suffer more from volatile demand as they depend on special events. - Seasonal closures are common, with consequences for employment.
Pappadà (2019)	Tourism (gen)	Presenting the A.R.T.S. project (Arte Rete Turismo Salento)	Apulia	Empirical (qual)	- A.R.T.S. aims to promote Apulia and develop deseasonalisation strategies focused on art, culture, religion, enogastronomy, sport, and wellness. Another aim is to promote the region in foreign markets. - The project is implemented by a network of businesses, local authorities and transport companies.

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Table 5. (Continued).

Reference	(Sub-)sector	Aim of the article	Context	Type of article	Main contents on seasonal work
Sainaghi <i>et alii</i> (2019)	Hotel (and apartments) and skiing	Analysing the balanced scorecard of a new destination product, and the implications for lodging and skiing firms	Livigno (Lombardy)	Empirical (mixed)	- Seasonality concentrates tourism flows in the winter season, with a relevant impact on staff turnover, especially ski instructors. - The Skipassfree project has positively affected ski companies' activities and has favoured the diversification of the accommodation and commercial sectors, the coordination between businesses, and investments. However, it is not effective in deseasonalising tourism.
Battilani, Bagnaresi (2020)	Bathing facilities	Tracing the evolution of the bathing facilities sector from a socio-historical perspective	Riccione (Emilia-Romagna)	Empirical (qual)	- Seasonal activities of bathing establishments have historically contributed to the growth of entrepreneurship and new professions. - The family-based management of many businesses involves lots of women. - Seasonal work opportunities that arose around the bathing establishments increased earning possibilities for the lower classes and fishermen.
Dematteis (2020)	Tourism (gen)	Illustrating the crisis of mass winter tourism in the mountains, and the rise of experiential tourism	The Italian Alps and the Apennines, insight on Piedmont and the Aosta Valley	Review	- Ski stations at lower altitudes are reducing their openings due to climate change. Some destinations have created a deseasonalised offer by enhancing their environmental, cultural and enogastronomic heritage. - Importance of creating an integrated offer to attract tourists.
Renga (2020)	Not tourism-specific	Showing how the Covid-19 pandemic revealed the limits of the social protection system	Italy	Review	- During the pandemic, social protection benefits were grafted onto existing schemes (e.g. Decree-Law no. 18/2020, 9/2020, 23/2020). - Seasonal workers in tourism who involuntarily ceased work had a subsidy of 600 euros for March and April 2020. It rose to 1,000 euros in May.
Filippi <i>et alii</i> (2021)	Not tourism-specific	Analysing the labour market and discontinuous work from the financial crisis to the pre-Covid-19 pandemic	Italy	Empirical (quan)	- Law no. 27/2020 strengthened the existing social protection benefits and introduced a benefit also for seasonal workers in tourism. - Discontinuous work increased. It partly reflected the seasonality of the regions, being concentrated in mountain areas (Trentino-Alto Adige, the Aosta Valley) and coasts (Apulia, Basilicata, Sicily, Calabria, Sardinia).
Guidetti <i>et alii</i> (2021)	Tourism (gen)	Discussing the perceived job quality and satisfaction of seasonal tourism workers	Province of Rimini (Emilia-Romagna)	Empirical (quan)	- High share of women, young people and migrants in seasonal tourism jobs. Perceptions of seasonal work vary according to both worker and job characteristics. Young people are mainly employed in highly skilled jobs, but they are the most dissatisfied group. - Seasonal workers usually have expectations of time flexibility. Young workers are more attracted to part-time jobs to enjoy their leisure.
Lombardi <i>et alii</i> (2021)	Tourism (gen)	Analysing the Italian tourism industry at municipal level	Italy	Empirical (quan)	The Covid-19 crisis and its impact on the Italian tourism industry has highlighted the problems related to the seasonality of tourism demand, supply and contracts, especially in the "super-touristic" destinations.

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Table 5. (Continued).

Reference	(Sub-)sector	Aim of the article	Context	Type of article	Main contents on seasonal work
Raspadori (2021)	Hotel	Tracing the features and evolution of the professional profiles of hotel workers	Italy	Empirical (quan)	- Low-skilled job opportunities are mainly available in the summer months. - The impact of seasonality on employment varies geographically and over time. In 1955, there was a strong impact in some Northern regions (Liguria, Aosta Valley, Trentino, Veneto) and in coastal or mountain areas (Rimini, Jesolo, Cortina). In 1973, the greatest impact was in Southern destinations such as Taormina (Sicily) and Costa Smeralda (Sardinia).
Del Re <i>et alii</i> (2022)	Not tourism-specific	Reflecting on the “Great resignation” phenomenon	Veneto	Empirical (qual)	As a result of the policies to contain Covid-19, people who used to work seasonally in hotels and restaurants found more stable employment in other sectors. This has led to a significant labour shortage.
Reginato <i>et alii</i> (2022)	Hotel, restaurant, and travel agencies	Analysing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism and the evaluation by companies of the policies realised	Sardinia	Empirical (qual)	- Measures to cope with the pandemic led to a drop in revenue for tourism businesses, which also experienced a delay in support measures (e.g. contribution exemption for seasonal hires). - The decline in employment mainly affected seasonal workers. Many were not employed and received their benefits late.
Chiaromonte (2023)	Not tourism-specific	Discussing labour law provisions of Decree-law no. 20/2023 on the entry flows of foreign workers	Italy	Review	Decrease from 250,000 work permits for migrants under the 2007 Flows Decree to 30,850 in 2020. Increase in 2021 (+69,700), 2022 (+82,705) and 2023-2025 (+452,000 entries planned). Quotas are mainly reserved to seasonal workers in agriculture and tourism. The economy needs foreign workforce and rapid regularisations.
Fasone, Pedrini (2023)	Tourism (gen)	Understanding the factors that influence workers' investment in training and stay in the tourism industry	Province of Rimini (Emilia-Romagna)	Empirical (quan)	- Most seasonal workers have a high school diploma. Many are university students. Women often work part-time in low-skilled jobs. Gender segregation discourages their investment in training and careers in tourism. - Seasonality makes it difficult for employers to find and retain workers with the skills they need.
Krabokoukis, Polyzos (2023)	Tourism (gen)	Analysing tourism seasonality	Mediterranean countries, insight on Italy	Empirical (quan)	Italy is less affected by tourism seasonality than other Mediterranean countries (e.g. Greece, Croatia). This is related to the significant domestic demand. Lower seasonality can have a positive impact on the development of more stable jobs in tourism and other related sectors.
Massidda, Piras (2023)	Tourism (gen)	Analysing the factors influencing the length of stay of tourists	Cagliari, Domus de Maria, Villasimius, Pula, Muravera (Sardinia)	Empirical (quan)	- Extending the length of stay of tourists can reduce the negative impacts of seasonality on the operational costs of hotel companies. - Sociodemographic characteristics of tourists and length of stay may influence their choice of accommodation.

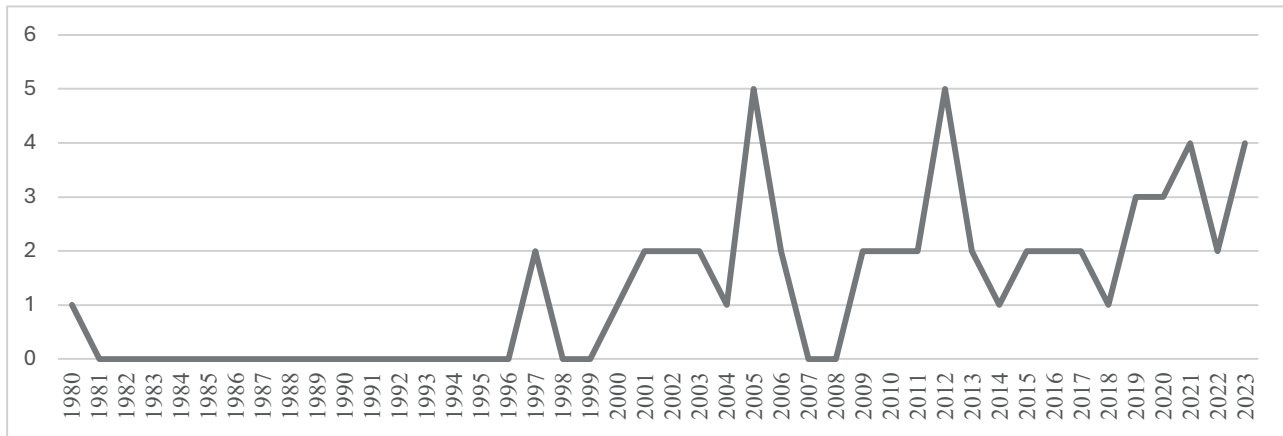


Figure 2. Yearly distribution of the articles included in the systematic literature review (1980-2023).

Table 6. Distribution of the articles included in the systematic literature review by journal.

Journal	No. (each)
Economia e Diritto del Terziario	5
Tourism Economics; Quaderni di Economia del Lavoro	4
Economia & Lavoro; Sociologia del Lavoro	3
Economia e Società Regionale; Giornale di Diritto del Lavoro e di Relazioni Industriali; International Journal of Hospitality Management; Mondi Migranti; Rivista Economica del Mezzogiorno; Sociologia Urbana e Rurale	2
Affari Sociali Internazionali; Annals of Tourism Research; Belgeo; Cambio; Diritto, Immigrazione e Cittadinanza; Economia dei Servizi; European Journal of Tourism Research; Il Mulino; Italia Contemporanea; Journal of Place Management and Development; Journal of the Knowledge Economy; L'industria; Lavoro e Diritto; Management Control; Managing Leisure; Rivista del Diritto della Sicurezza Sociale; Rivista di Economia e Statistica del Territorio; Rivista Giuridica del Mezzogiorno; Rivista Trimestrale di Scienza della Amministrazione; Scienze Regionali; Storia e Problemi Contemporanei; Sustainability; Tourismos; Zagreb International Review of Economics & Business	1

Sicily; 1 respectively on Marche, Tuscany, Lazio, Campania, Calabria and the Italian small islands. In addition, 4 articles focus on Europe or the Mediterranean countries, with an insight on Italy.

The articles included in the systematic literature review address several issues related to seasonal work. The main issues examined, albeit with varying degrees of coverage, are: the impact of seasonality on the tourism labour market and employment, industrial relations and workers' rights, the condition of migrant workers, the legal framework and policies on seasonal work, the socio-economic condition of seasonal workers, the impact of Covid-19 on seasonal labour, as well as strategies to cope with or reduce the impact of seasonality on businesses, and entrepreneurs' challenges in planning and decision making. Some articles cover multiple issues, with varying levels of detail.

RESEARCH AVENUES

This systematic literature review aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing scientific research on the impact of seasonality on tourism labour and businesses in Italy. On the basis of the main results derived from the analysis of the articles, it is possible to highlight some gaps in the literature on the subject and to trace potential avenues of research.

Firstly, future research should compensate for the scarcity of sociological studies in the literature on seasonal work. As noted above, much of the existing research is based on legal, economic or managerial approaches.

Although there has been increased interest in the sociological dimensions of tourism, the focus on labour issues remains underdeveloped. Analyses of the multiple dimensions of job quality – such as job security and flexibility, income and work organisation, working hours and rhythms, skills and career development, engagement in decision-making and collective representation (Findlay *et alii* 2013; Holman 2013) – can provide deeper insights on seasonal tourism work. Other closely related avenues concern, on the one hand, the analysis of the balance between work and private life of workers and, on the other hand, the impact of the job quality on their health conditions, aspirations and motivations. A further research path is the study of the characteristics and working practices of different professional figures – including the emerging ones – not only in summer and winter destinations, but also in urban contexts. Finally, the difficulties and challenges faced by tourism companies and entrepreneurs need to be further investigated, especially in sectors with a high quota of seasonal employees, such as accommodation, amusement parks and thermal baths (EBNT 2024). Business aspects that should be explored in more depth include, for example, human resource management and recruitment, selection and training processes. In addition, entrepreneurial choices in terms of investment and the decision to stay open or closed in the off-season deserve further investigation, especially in relation to peripheral areas that are highly dependent on tourism.

Furthermore, the systematic literature review shows that some Italian areas are underrepresented in seasonal work research. Studies focus mainly on well-known tourist destinations, while less renowned areas with lower seasonal tourism peaks remain largely unexplored. Although Calabria, Apulia and Abruzzo are among the regions most affected by seasonality (Eurostat 2024b), research in these contexts is scarce or non-existent. Another suggestion concerns the development of comparative analyses between different regions and destinations both within Italy and between countries. Currently, studies of single sites or regions seem to prevail in the literature. However, cross-regional or cross-country comparisons could be very helpful in understanding how institutional factors affect tourism labour, firms and the wider sector in different contexts. This is particularly relevant in a country like Italy, where regional differences can be significant. Moreover, most studies focus on seaside tourism and, to a lesser extent, mountain tourism, leaving unexplored the seasonal work of both employees and enterprises in alternative tourism destinations (e.g. lakeside locations) and segments (e.g. religious, arts and culture, sports and wellness).

From a methodological perspective, there are opportunities to enrich the current research by expanding the use of qualitative and mixed method designs. Although quantitative techniques provide valuable insights, in-depth interviews, focus groups and document analysis can provide a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of seasonal workers and the specific needs of tourism employers. In this respect, it should be highlighted the absence of ethnographic approaches in the studies included in this systematic literature review. This technique could offer rich explorations of everyday working practices, interactions and dynamics between employees, employers and customers within the tourism industry.

Finally, it is worth noting that the need to investigate the impacts of the seasonality of tourism on the world of work at the local level complicates the extension of the results of single studies to a wider scale. Moreover, the distinctive features of each territory make it difficult to generalise and compare the results of projects conducted in different contexts, limiting the theoretical scope of the research. These issues may prevent a study from being published in the most prestigious international journals, which tend to favour research with broad implications. As noted in the previous section, the large majority of the articles included in the systematic literature review have been published in Italian journals. A fundamental challenge for the future of research in this field is the development of methodological approaches and designs aimed at incorporating the need to understand local specificities into more global tourism processes (Zampoukos, Ioannides 2011; Baum 2015).

This agenda – although not comprehensive – could make a significant contribution to the understanding of the multifaceted aspects of seasonal work. In addition, implementing research on the perspectives of both workers and employers could have a relevant impact on policies aimed at mitigating the negative effects of seasonality on the tourism industry. While several studies examine the specificities of tourism work and outline some strategies adopted to deseasonalise the destinations, there is little analysis of the effectiveness of policies. More research in this direction would guide policymakers in designing targeted interventions, especially in contexts where tourism is highly seasonal.

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