POST COVID-19 TOURISM

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM AND OFFERINGS IN SERBIA AFTER COVID-19

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ABSTRACT: *The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the global tourism industry, including the gastronomy sector. Drastic economic changes and reduced tourism activity, along with changes in consumer habits, necessitated an urgent adaptation of business strategies in these sectors. This paper explores opportunities for the development of gastronomic tourism and offerings in Serbia post-pandemic, with a focus on changes in tourist preferences and emerging trends in dining. Health safety regulations led to the introduction of new standards in the service sector, particularly affecting the hospitality and tourism industries, forcing them to alter their business approaches. The paper analyzes how the tourism and hospitality sectors have adapted to the changes brought about by the pandemic, as well as opportunities for the revitalization and improvement of these sectors. Through market analysis and new trends, the paper addresses factors that could contribute to the development of gastronomic tourism. The aim of the paper is to provide guidelines that could enhance Serbia's competitiveness in the tourism market by effectively utilizing its gastronomic potential. From its rich gastronomic heritage and preserved environment, it is concluded that Serbia has a unique opportunity to position itself as an even more attractive destination for food and drink enthusiasts.*

KEYWORDS: *gastronomy, tourism, COVID-19, traditional food, Serbia*

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has become a global epidemic that has triggered a severe health, financial, and economic crisis. Governments around the world have taken drastic measures such as lockdowns and travel bans (Fotiadis et al., 2021). The pandemic has affected people and business activities worldwide, altering the organization of all business areas, including tourism services (Mandarić et al., 2022). International arrivals declined in the first segment of 2020, representing a significant financial loss. It was anticipated that the pandemic would have a serious and lasting impact on the travel and tourism sector (Fotiadis et al., 2020).

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Gastronomic tourism encompasses the enjoyment of regional food and beverages, as well as unique personal experiences. It involves travel aimed at exploring the culinary specialties of a destination and experiencing memorable gastronomic moments. According to the World Tourism Organization, gastronomic tourism includes all tourist activities related to food and drink at culinary destinations (Akdag-Caglar & Demirabas, 2021). Gastronomy is a part of local culture and a means to promote local economic development and tourism in the area. In this sense, gastronomic tourism plays a key role in a tourist's decision to revisit a particular place, in choosing destinations, and in promoting locations (Durmaz et al., 2022).

Today, gastronomy is a key component of the hospitality sector. For all types of travelers, meals in restaurants and other gastronomic establishments represent not only pleasure and experience but also a fundamental need. Various forms of gastronomic venues, such as restaurants, bars, fast food outlets, and food trucks, are as essential as accommodation for travelers. Additionally, countries successfully leverage their culinary heritage as an important tourist attraction; for example, France is renowned for its cheeses and wine, Italy for its pasta and pizza, and Japan for its sushi (Ostrowska-Tryzno & Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2022). Gastronomic tourism, or food tourism, has become one of the most dynamic segments of global tourism. It is defined as a set of activities such as visiting food producers, restaurants, and food festivals, where tasting and experiencing local dishes are the main motives for travel. This form of tourism encompasses experiences related to food and culinary traditions and plays a crucial role in preserving local traditions and cultural values. The integration of food and tourist destinations is increasingly recognized as an important aspect of tourism development (Rivza et al., 2022).

The experience of food as a premium encounter is clearly evident in the ongoing use of a destination's culinary culture and heritage for the development and marketing of tourism products. It includes activities such as consuming local food and cooking traditional dishes, as well as purchasing food souvenirs that evoke the flavors and sights of the visited place. Tourists remember these sensory characteristics through taste and aroma, making the food experience memorable (Park et al., 2023).

The pandemic has led to the closure of restaurants and other hospitality establishments, directly impacting gastronomic tourism. Isolation and restrictive measures have greatly reduced the number of tourists and local visitors. This has led to a decrease in visits, affecting the dynamics of gastronomic offerings. Restaurants, which often provide authentic local cuisine, were forced to close due to reduced business and a lack of tourists. The paper will also discuss adaptations and innovations in gastronomic offerings and changes in tourist demand based on a further review of the literature. Due to travel restrictions, there has been a decrease in the number of foreign tourists, while domestic tourism has experienced some growth. Domestic tourists have increasingly explored local gastronomic destinations, with a notable rise in interest in rural tourism. People began seeking destinations outside urban centers with a lower risk of infection. This has led to increased popularity of rural homesteads and smaller rural destinations offering authentic gastronomic experiences.

After the pandemic, the hospitality sector has been gradually recovering. The paper will highlight the importance of promoting local cuisine through Serbia's various potentials, with a focus on authentic gastronomy as a key element in attracting tourists post-pandemic.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TOURISM IN SERBIA

Tourism is highly sensitive to crises such as natural disasters, infectious diseases, and political instability. While the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on major tourist centers, rural areas experienced a rise (Gajić et al., 2023). The study by Vesić et al. (2021), conducted in the region of Western Serbia, shows that more than half of the respondents believe that the pandemic has severely reduced the number of guests in their hospitality establishments. Although some hoteliers considered temporarily closing their establishments due to financial problems, the majority did not intend to completely cease operations in tourism. On the other hand, during the pandemic, rural, mountain, and health tourism emerged as popular alternatives for travelers (Gajić et al., 2023).

During the quarantine measures, domestic tourism experienced a smaller decline compared to international tourism. This segment of tourism has taken a leading role in stabilizing the economic situation. In the early post-pandemic period, domestic tourism partially compensated for the lack of international arrivals (Keller, 2020). Data on tourist arrivals in Serbia after the pandemic reveal significant changes in the popularity of various destinations. Vrnjačka Banja, although the most visited spa in the country, experienced a decrease in the number of tourists in 2020 compared to the previous year. A similar trend was observed in mountain centers, where Zlatibor saw a significant decline, while Kopaonik experienced a somewhat smaller decrease in visitor numbers. In contrast, Kragujevac saw a dramatic drop in the number of tourists, and Niš also recorded a significant reduction (Podovac & Matić, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced international tourism in the Republic of Serbia during 2020, with Belgrade experiencing the hardest hit due to its key role in urban tourism. In contrast, rural regions such as Vojvodina, Šumadija, Western, Southern, and Eastern Serbia suffered a smaller decline, thanks to the development of mountain and spa tourism, as well as milder restrictions (Bošković et al., 2021). In Western Serbia, rural tourist households represent a significant portion of the hospitality sector. During the pandemic, there was a rise in online activities and promotional campaigns for rural tourism, resulting in three times more social media posts and easier access to accommodation information (Vesić et al., 2021).

Although the number of tourists in certain rural areas has increased, the rural tourism market has not yet fully recovered and faces challenges in achieving significant growth after the pandemic (Gajić et al., 2023). The question is how long tourists will remain favorably inclined toward domestic tourism, given that most will likely prefer seaside or international destinations again. However, there is potential for sustained interest in rural tourism due to the anticipated reduction in income and the need for more affordable options. Additionally, domestic rural destinations offer greater safety and better access to medical care, which could further attract tourists (Vaishar & Šťastná, 2020).

ANALYSIS OF THE STATE OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN SERBIA

Gastronomic tourism, which is deeply connected with local, rural, and historical aspects, allows tourists to explore different regions by visiting local food producers and consuming traditional cuisine. This form of tourism significantly contributes to economic benefits and the promotion of local culture by preserving and valuing gastronomic heritage (Rivza et al., 2022). Although currently operating as a minor part of domestic tourism, there is potential for it to develop into a distinct sector, particularly with the growth of domestic tourism (Sokolova et al., 2021).

According to Banjac et al. (2016), it is important to analyze cultural, historical, and natural destinations in rural areas that are significant for the development of gastronomic tourism, as well as the menus that represent the offerings of these destinations. The Republic of Serbia has significant potential for tourism development due to its rich gastronomy and favorable natural conditions. While there is interest in traditional specialties and wine, there is a need for better promotion and development of the tourism offer (Vukolic, 2020).

Serbia, influenced by various cultures throughout its history, has developed a unique cuisine that combines Oriental and Central European influences. In Vojvodina, characteristic dishes include dumplings and fermented sausages, while in Šumadija and Western Serbia, notable dishes consist of pies and meat products. Eastern Serbia is distinguished by specialties such as honey, cheese, and ajvar. Although numerous gastronomic events exist, many specific regional events are not sufficiently recognized. It is recommended to visit gastronomic events that contribute to the recognition and preservation of Serbian culinary heritage (Kilibarda et al., 2018). Employees in tourism and hospitality are aware of the potential for developing gastronomic tourism, as well as the shortcomings that need to be addressed, such as the provision of authentic dishes and better promotion in tourist activities. Addressing these issues could bring multiple benefits to Serbia (Kalenjuk et al., 2013). Food and tourism are connected with the image of tourist destinations in various ways. In recent decades, the inclusion of gastronomic offerings in tourism marketing has become increasingly important, with food serving as an attractive element in brochures, videos, and television programs. New products and authentic experiences based on the destination's gastronomy contribute to this. Local food is at the center of festivals and events that attract both tourists and locals. In order to develop gastronomic tourism, it has been suggested that rural areas promote their gastronomy to become major tourist attractions. Additionally, food can be a key component of larger tourism events and represents significant potential for the development of culinary tourism (Vukolić, 2020). Emphasizing the specific indigenous gastronomic offerings can significantly contribute to the expansion of rural tourism in the tourism market in the future (Cvijanović & Gajić, 2022). Gastronomic tourism is becoming an increasingly important trend in modern tourism, given that more than one-third of tourist expenditure is spent on food, according to a report by the World Tourism Organization. Data shows that Europeans travel for cultural experiences that include culinary aspects. Visitors' budgets are spent on gastronomic products, which highlights the importance of local cuisine for the quality of their vacation (Strategy for the Development of Tourism of the Republic of Serbia, 2016).

ADAPTATION AND INNOVATION IN GASTRONOMIC OFFERINGS

Significant limitations in the hospitality market occurred in 2020, as countries imposed restrictions on domestic and international travel, reducing the demand for services offered by restaurants (Rutynskyi & Kushniruk, 2022). The term "gastronomy" refers to the process of exploring, tasting, experiencing, studying, and understanding food and its characteristics. To overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, some restaurateurs sought new opportunities in response to customers' desire to dine out (Ostrowska-Tryzno & Pawlikowska-Piechotka,2022). During the pandemic, technology enabled the hospitality sector to create experiences such as online cooking and virtual dinners to replace physical visits to restaurants. These innovations allow customers to enjoy food and local traditions from the comfort of their homes, with virtual interaction with chefs and restaurant owners (Garibaldi & Pozzi, 2020). Changes in the hospitality industry were quickly introduced after the outbreak of the pandemic, including restaurant automation, online cooking classes, and the expansion of takeout services. Online gatherings and sharing culinary experiences via the internet became popular in response to changes in customer behavior. Many restaurants soon developed delivery segments, adapting their spaces for food storage and packaging preparation due to the fear of infection and preventive measures. This new restaurant model, without physical guests, has become common worldwide (Ostrowska-Tryzno & Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2022). Technology in gastronomic tourism has offered new opportunities under the current conditions of travel restrictions and social distancing. Suppliers, such as restaurants and wineries, developed at-home experiences to maintain contact with customers and encourage future visits. These innovations not only helped overcome the current challenges but also had a lasting impact on gastronomic tourism, shifting from a focus on products and services to a different approach that encompasses the entire experience and involves travelers in the design and development of these experiences (Garibaldi & Pozzi, 2020).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN SERBIA

There are a number of conditions that facilitate the development of a diverse tourist offer in Serbia. Key factors include low population density and small settlement sizes, traditional agricultural production, attractive natural landscapes, preserved ecosystems, and biodiversity. Additionally, important factors are the preservation of traditional social values, the warmth and hospitality of the hosts, and the opportunity for tourists to engage in agriculture, collect forest fruits, and produce homemade goods. These activities represent a long-term interest in maintaining ecological balance and maximizing the use of natural potentials. The development of tourism within agricultural households especially contributes to the economy of rural areas, while various models of rural tourism, such as Vojvodina farms, Šumadija villages, and monastery estates, provide authentic experiences in line with the principles of sustainable development (Čomić, 2002). In addition to key strategic steps for recovery, such as enhancing the capabilities of local government, strengthening social networks and skills in rural areas, promoting innovation, and developing resilience to change, it is essential to thoroughly investigate the level of service quality and determine strategic measures for improvement (Gajić et al., 2023). Food tourism contributes to the preservation of regional identities and culture by providing visitors with unique experiences and expanding their knowledge of the gastronomy of the destination they are visiting. The development of this sector relies on collaboration among stakeholders and must be market-oriented while benefiting the community. The food industry, together with agriculture, plays a crucial role in the country's economy, with a particular focus on crop cultivation and livestock farming, including the production of dairy and meat products. Countries can use labels to indicate the origin, ensuring that products meet established standards (Kiráľová & Malec, 2021). Food tourism can further strengthen gastronomic identity by participating in local food-related events. This allows tourists to integrate into the community through gastronomy. Participation in local events can be significant in spreading knowledge through word-of-mouth recommendations (Andresson & Mossberg, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed the tourism sector in Serbia, leading to significant shifts in how tourists explore destinations. As travel returns to normal, the need for adaptation and innovation becomes increasingly apparent, with a particular focus on gastronomy. Rural tourism, which experienced expansion during the pandemic, offers unique opportunities for discovering local cuisines and authentic gastronomic experiences. Serbia, with its rich culinary heritage, preserved nature, and renowned gastronomic events, has the potential to stand out as an attractive destination for food enthusiasts. Authentic gastronomic offerings can significantly enhance tourist attractiveness, but success depends on keeping up with innovations and new trends. The introduction of technologies such as digital platforms for online tastings and virtual culinary tours can help attract tourists and maintain interest during periods when physical travel is restricted.

The increased importance of local gastronomic products not only contributes to preserving ecological balance but also supports local communities and their producers. Therefore, continuous monitoring and implementation of innovations in gastronomy and tourism, along with adapting to new trends, will be crucial for the recovery and further development of gastronomic tourism and food offerings in Serbia.

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NEUROURBANISM AND ACCESSIBLE TOURISM: SAVORING DESIGN AS A THERAPEUTIC PROPOSAL FOR HEALTHY AGING

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ABSTRACT: *It's estimated that by 2100, the population aged 60 or over will reach 30% in the world, according to UN data from 2024. It's also expected that the vast majority of elderly people will live in urban environments, especially in low- and middle-income countries, such as Brazil, Africa and Asian countries. In this perspective, this study aims to investigate how NeuroUrbanism and Environmental Gerontology can contribute to the creation of accessible and therapeutic tourist environments for the elderly, proposing the concept of "savoring design" as an approach to improve the well-being of older tourists. As an exploratory method, an integrative literature review was adopted, covering research published between 2018 and 2024 on urban accessibility, healthy aging and tourism. The analysis revealed that urban environments designed based on the principles of NeuroUrbanism can reduce stress, improve safety and encourage social interactions among the elderly. Savoring design, inspired by Positive Psychology, was highlighted as an effective approach to promoting conscious appreciation of the environment through aesthetic landscapes, green areas, rest areas and accessible pathways, thus improving relaxation and quality of life for older adults during their tourism experiences. The results indicate that, in addition to meeting the physical needs of accessibility and safety, urban planning should integrate interventions that promote the emotional and cognitive well-being of older tourists. The conclusion suggests that accessible urban design, combined with strategies that promote well-being, is essential to ensure that tourist destinations are inclusive and welcoming.*

KEYWORDS: *urbanism; tourism; neuroscience; accessibility; healthy aging.*

INTRODUCTION

By 2100, 1 in 3 people will be 60 years of age or older worldwide (UN, 2024). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the proportion of people aged 60 or older is expected to double between 2020 and 2050, rising from 12% to around 22%. This equates to more than 2 billion people aged 60 or older worldwide by mid-century (PAHO, 2020). According to projections from the UN Population Division, between 1950 and 2100, the age group of elderly people aged 60 and over is expected to grow 15.4 times in the period, which has been characterized as a profound process of population aging (UN, 2024). In addition to the

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issue of increased life expectancy, the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT) showed that 55% of the world's population lived in urban areas in 2021, rising to 68% by 2050 (UN, 2022). It is estimated that 79% of the population of Latin America and Caribbean lives in large urban centers. Therefore, it is expected that the vast majority of older people will live in urban environments, especially in low- and middle-income countries, such as Brazil, Africa and Asian countries (UN, 2022).

Aging is characterized by physiological changes, such as modifications to physical and sensory capacity, as well as cognitive and emotional changes. However, such changes do not occur uniformly in all individuals (Batistoni *et al*., 2014). Heterogeneity in aging is marked by differences in health trajectories, lifestyles, socioeconomic status, and environmental context (Freitas and Py, 2022). A cross-sectional study involving more than 3,100 elderly individuals aged 60 or over found that residents living in socioeconomically advantaged neighborhoods with access to parks and public squares have greater cognitive reserve[1] than populations who aged in neighborhoods far from urban centers, with little or no presence of green areas effectively accessible to the community (Soloveva *et al.*, 2023). Recognizing the importance of healthy aging and the implications of this process on the population, the UN General Assembly and WHO declared the "Decade of Healthy Aging (2021-2030)". The aim is to unite governments, international organizations, health professionals, civil society and other stakeholders to improve the lives of older people, their families and communities (PAHO, 2020).

Accessible Tourism (AT) is a field that is increasingly developing, with the central objective of removing physical, sensory and attitudinal barriers, allowing people with disabilities, reduced mobility and other conditions to have full access to tourist experiences. Initially focused on the inclusion of people with disabilities (PWDs), AT has evolved to encompass the concept of Universal Design (UD), created in the 1960s by Ronald Lawrence Mace, whose premise is tourism projects for all age groups and conditions, ensuring equal access (Speck, Di Marco and Natividade, 2016). Even with around 1 billion inhabitants in the world with some type of physical or intellectual disability, 80% of whom live in developing countries, accessibility is not only a matter of social inclusion in the tourism sector, but also an economic opportunity (UN, 2022). In built environments, it is guided by the ISO 21902:2021 standard, entitled "Tourism and related services — Accessible tourism for all". According to

[1] *Cognitive reserve is characterized as the brain's ability to tolerate pathological changes, such as those associated with aging or neurodegenerative diseases, without presenting clinical manifestations of cognitive decline (Stern, 2009).*

the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), older people are increasingly active in the travel and tourism sector, representing a growing market (OECD, 2023). With more time available after retirement and often with financial resources, this age group in society is willing to explore new tourism experiences, as long as accessibility conditions are adequate to their needs (OECD, 2023).

In this perspective of positive emotional experiences in urban areas, Neurourbanism presents itself as an interdisciplinary field of study under construction capable of evaluating biological, psychological and social influences during population aging, taking into account not only the physical structure of the city, but also the emotionality present in individual and collective flows on a given territorial scale (Adli *et al.*, 2017; Hollander and Sussman, 2020). It aims to explore the relationship between urban environments, the human brain, cognition and mental health. Combining principles from psychiatry, urban planning, psychology, neuroscience, architecture, sociology, philosophy and ethnography, this field studies how cities and urban design influence the well-being and mental health of inhabitants (Adli *et al.*, 2017; Hollander and Sussman, 2020). The convergence of this knowledge aims to understand how urban space can affect the human brain in the short, medium and long term, investigating elements such as spatial perception, lighting, air quality, temperature, noise, among others.

METHODOLOGY

Recognizing the importance of AT in the context of social rights, inclusion and well-being in city design, this study aims to analyze how urban variables, such as lighting, air quality, thermal and acoustic comfort and the presence of green areas, directly influence the brain responses of tourists over 60 years old, taking into account knowledge from neuroscience, positive psychology and environmental gerontology. Aiming to guide design decisions in urban areas in favor of AT and, consequently, provide health and quality of life for occupants, we propose the implementation of evidence-based design (EBD)[1], capable of fostering therapeutic and memorable experiences. Therefore, as this is an exploratory study, an integrated literature review was carried out involving the keywords "neuroscience", "accessible tourism", "urban space" and "healthy aging". For the review, in addition to the question "How can fully accessible urban areas provide therapeutic experiences for elderly tourists?", the following criteria were adopted: articles published between 2018 and 2024, peer-reviewed and in English.

[1] *This method is particularly relevant in the creation of urban environments, as it seeks to maximize human well-being, health and functionality of space based on verified evidence (Ravensbergen and El-Geneidy, 2022).*

The Boolean operators used were "AND" and "OR". Of the 1,012 initial articles, 8 were compatible with the study proposal and were therefore analyzed. Complementary authors such as Bryant and Veroff (2007), Pallasmaa (2015), Adli *et al.* (2017), Hollander and Sussman (2020), Olszewska-Guizzo (2023) among others, were of fundamental importance for understanding the theme. The aim is, therefore, to formulate evidence-based urban design proposals, taking into account the responsibility of urban planning professionals to design environments beyond technical regulations, capable of not only allowing, but providing significant, memorable and therapeutic experiences to tourists and elderly citizens, combining urban planning and tourist accessibility.

RESULTS

After analyzing the articles, the current state of the art of the proposed theme has not yet been considered in the academic scenario, especially the convergence of the theme of Neurourbanism with AT. However, from the moment the subjects are analyzed separately, AT is at the beginning of its development, essentially in the theme of integrated urban routes for the elderly in densely urbanized cities (Escuderos, Andreu and Ros, 2021). The same occurs with Neurourbanism, whose publications began in 2017 (Ndaguba *et al.*, 2022). Another important point was the growth of productions about neuroscience applied to tourism. According to Michael *et al.* (2019), neuroscience applied to tourism aims to explore the understanding of specific mental processes in human behaviors in tourist experiences, suggesting that unconscious emotional and cognitive responses are natural processes that need to be studied and understood, not as special cases, but that are incorporated as natural parts of tourism research in favor of investigations centered on users and feelings of well-being and performance quality in tourist experience spaces (Michael *et al.*, 2019).

Through EBD, the premise of "savoring design" was highlighted as an effective approach to promote conscious appreciation of the environment through aesthetic landscapes, green areas, rest areas and accessible paths, allowing sensory reconnection with nature and, consequently, qualifying the tourist experiences of the elderly population in urban spaces. Savoring experiences refer to the set of sensations, perceptions, thoughts, behaviors and emotions that an individual experiences when paying attention to and appreciating a positive stimulus or experience, influenced by both environmental characteristics and situational circumstances. The intensity and quality of these experiences vary according to duration, complexity, ability to reduce stress, self-regulation and the social interactions involved (Bryant and Veroff, 2007). In the context of urban space, savoring can be understood as the conscious experience of pleasant sensations derived from interaction with the environment.

The integration of multisensory experience with savoring design in urban space suggests that environments should be designed to provide rich and varied stimuli that promote a tactile, auditory and olfactory perception of space (Ravensbergen and El-Geneidy, 2022). An architecture that only appeals to the sense of sight fails to fully engage the body and is therefore not capable of generating a complete and meaningful experience of space. Instead, he argues that space should be experienced through a deep and holistic interaction, in which the body becomes an instrument of perception (Pallasmaa, 2015). For older adults, who often suffer from changes in their sensory capacities, spaces that offer subtle variations in texture, temperature and sound can be therapeutic, stimulating the brain and providing enriching experiences (Freitas and Py, 2022). Considering the proposal of AT in urban areas capable of providing therapeutic, pleasant and memorable experiences for elderly tourists, the applicability of "savoring design" was investigated in an interdisciplinary manner in six variables of urban design: (i) lighting, (ii) noise pollution, (iii) air quality, (iv) presence of green areas, (v) perception of safety and (vi) urban furniture, shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Savoring Design guidelines for accessible tourism in urban environments.

Cognitive and emotional implications of spatial variable	**Design Guidelines**
(I) **Lighting** is a critical variable to ensure the safety, spatial orientation and comfort of users, especially the elderly. Studies show that lighting directly affects mood and cognition, regulating circadian rhythms and influencing the limbic system, which is responsible for emotional response. For elderly tourists, poor lighting can cause disorientation, insecurity and stress, especially at night, increasing the risk of falls and reducing the quality of the experience (Ndaguba *et al.*, 2022).	**Integrative Lighting**: use lighting technologies that mimic natural light and adjust color temperature throughout the day to support the circadian rhythm, promoting greater cognitive and emotional well-being. **Focus on Safety Perception**: ensure uniform lighting without deep shadows to reduce the fear of accidents or crimes in urban spaces, especially in areas with high tourist concentrations and rest stops. **Focus on Visual Cues**: implement strategic lighting at points of interest and signage to facilitate navigation and reduce cognitive overload for seniors, promoting a more pleasant and safe experience.
(ii) **Noise pollution** in cities can be detrimental to mental and cognitive health, contributing to increased stress, mental	**Low Noise Pollution Zones**: create rest areas where noise pollution is minimized by means of natural acoustic barriers, such as trees and shrubs,

fatigue and hearing loss, especially in elderly populations. Excessive noise directly affects the prefrontal cortex and other areas responsible for attention and working memory, compromising the ability of elderly people to orient themselves and appreciate tourist environments. Creating quiet areas and pleasant sound experiences can significantly increase savoring and improve the cognitive health of elderly tourists (Ravensbergen and El-Geneidy, 2022).	or artificial ones, such as acoustic walls. **Incorporation of Natural Sounds**: promote positive auditory experiences, such as the sound of water fountains or birdsong, which can calm the nervous system and facilitate the savoring experience. **Urban Noise Management**: establish regulations that limit noise levels in areas with high concentrations of elderly people and tourists, especially in tourist areas of high cultural and historical value.
(iii) **Air quality** has direct implications for physical and mental health, influencing cognitive and emotional functioning. Prolonged exposure to air pollutants can cause inflammation in the brain, contributing to cognitive decline in the elderly and compromising the tourist experience. Urban environments with high air quality not only promote physical health, but also improve mental clarity and overall well-being, essential for a positive savoring experience (Grigorescu *et al.*, 2020).	**Creating Green Corridors**: integrating ecological corridors and green areas that help filter the air and reduce pollution, while also providing therapeutic spaces for walking and relaxation. **Air Quality Monitoring**: using real-time air quality monitoring technology and providing this information in an accessible way to tourists and residents so they can make informed decisions about their travel. **Reducing Pollution Sources**: implementing strategies to reduce vehicle emissions and other pollutants in tourist areas, such as promoting electric public transportation and limiting traffic in certain areas.
(iv) **The presence of green spaces** are essential for promoting mental and physical well-being, especially in densely populated urban environments. From a neuroscientific perspective, contact with nature stimulates the limbic system and other areas related to emotional processing and memory, facilitating the savoring experience. For older tourists, accessible and well-designed green spaces provide opportunities for relaxation, social interaction, and sensory stimulation that can reduce stress and improve mood (Olszewska-Guizzo, 2023).	**Biophilic Design**: incorporate natural elements, such as vegetation, water and natural light, in a coherent manner throughout the urban landscape, creating pleasant and stimulating microclimates for the brain. **Accessibility in Green Areas**: ensure that green areas are easily accessible by ramps and adequate paving, promoting the inclusion of people with reduced mobility and other special needs. **Social Interaction Spaces**: provide meeting and social spaces in parks and squares, which encourage intergenerational interaction and the formation of communities, fundamental elements for healthy aging.
(v) **The perception of safety** is a determining factor in the quality of the tourist experience, especially for the elderly, who tend to be more vulnerable to dangers and accidents. Urban safety is directly related to emotional well-being and the ability to explore the city without fear or stress. Safe spaces facilitate	**Adequate lighting**: as mentioned above, lighting plays a key role in the perception of security. Well-lit environments reduce the feeling of vulnerability and increase users' confidence in the space. **Active Surveillance and Monitoring**: implement discreet surveillance systems and a visible police presence to reinforce security without

savoring, allowing the elderly to fully enjoy their tourist experiences (Hollander and Sussman, 2021).	compromising the feeling of freedom and comfort. **Preventative Design**: propose urban spaces that discourage criminal behavior through design strategies that increase visibility and constant occupancy of public spaces.
(vi) **Urban furniture** is considered a key component for the comfort and functionality of public spaces. For older people, the availability of comfortable and accessible seating at strategic points can significantly improve the tourist experience, allowing them to rest, socialize and absorb the environment more efficiently. In addition, the ergonomics and suitability of urban furniture can directly influence savoring, promoting a longer and more enjoyable experience (Michael *et al.*, 2019).	**Functional and Comfortable Furniture**: design benches and seats that provide ergonomic support and are located in areas that allow for the enjoyment of scenic views or social events, promoting savoring. **Diversifying Furniture Types**: offer a variety of furniture options, including backless and backless seating, picnic tables, and lounge chairs, to accommodate the different needs and preferences of senior tourists. **Accessible Furniture**: ensure that all street furniture is accessible to people with reduced mobility, including raised seating options, armrests, and non-slip surfaces.

DISCUSSION

Implementing the concept of savoring design in cities requires a systematic and integrated approach that considers urban, tourism, and strategic planning needs. Cities such as Copenhagen and Singapore have adopted successful practices that integrate efficient public transport infrastructure with tourist zones and green areas, promoting inclusive mobility (OECD, 2023). Interconnectivity between tourist hotspots and the use of accessible transportation, such as subways, buses, and bike paths, significantly improves the mobility experience of older adults who require physical or cognitive support (Grigorescu *et al.*, 2020). New York City's High Line is a significant example of how urban planning interventions can transform urban areas into spaces for enriching sensory and aesthetic experiences, aligning with the principles of savoring design and inclusive urbanism. The project provides a walkable and connected environment, while integrating variables such as vegetation, strategic lighting, and adapted street furniture (Ravensbergen and El-Geneidy, 2022).

By connecting tourist areas with transportation modes and ensuring that urban planning addresses accessibility needs, cities can provide an inclusive and enriching tourist experience for all users (Escuderos, Andreu and Ros, 2021). The integration of green spaces, the installation of urban furniture that allows for relaxation and contemplation, and the control of urban lighting and sound are essential to creating environments that encourage savoring and promote the mental health and well-being of residents and tourists. Ultimately, savoring design has the potential to transform the urban experience, especially for older adults, promoting health, well-being, and memorable experiences in densely urbanized cities.

CONCLUSIONS

These guidelines, informed by the principles of neuroscience, gerontology and accessible tourism, have the potential to profoundly reconfigure the urban tourism experience aimed at senior citizens, promoting the creation of more welcoming, safe and cognitively stimulating environments. By emphasizing key variables such as adequate lighting, harmonious soundscapes, air quality, presence of green areas, improved security and ergonomic arrangement of street furniture, planners can structure spaces that encourage the practice of savoring. This allows senior tourists, when interacting with such environments, to experience more intense and pleasurable experiences, resulting in cognitive and emotional gains. The process of healthy aging transcends medical care and individual behaviors, proving to be equally dependent on the configuration of the urban environment, which should be designed to stimulate brain function through enriching sensory, social and emotional experiences. By incorporating these guidelines into city planning, it is possible to not only attract a greater number of senior tourists, but also ensure that their experiences are marked by positive and lasting memories, while providing conditions for healthy aging of residents.

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ACCESSIBLE TOURISM FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA: AN EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGN APPROACH TO SENSORY GARDENS IN URBAN AREAS

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ABSTRACT: *It is estimated that approximately 55 million people worldwide live with dementia, and this number is projected to triple by 2050. In Brazil and Latin America, cases are expected to increase by 200%, making dementia the seventh leading cause of death globally. Accessible Tourism (AT) for people with dementia, especially through the creation of sensory gardens in urban areas, emerges as a promising strategy to significantly improve the quality of life of these people, while promoting social inclusion, collective well-being and the sustainable development of tourism. Dementia causes cognitive and sensory impairment, resulting in difficulties in perceiving stimuli, disorientation and increased anxiety. In view of this, the aim is to investigate the most recent scientific evidence that, combined with the concept of accessible tourism in urban areas, can guide urban planning managers to promote improvements in city infrastructure and adapt public policies aimed at serving people with dementia. This exploratory research is based on an integrative literature review, including publications between 2020 and 2024, on the themes of "dementia", "tourism", "evidence-based design" and "accessibility in urban areas". As a result, seven elements were considered promising in urban design: (i) controlled stimulation of the senses; (ii) familiarizing and safe environments; (iii) integration of memories and narratives; (iv) variety of accessible routes; (v) incorporation of restorative nature; (vi) appropriate colors and materials; and (vii) connectivity and access to urban transport modes. These elements prove to be effective both accessible and sustainable tourism, promoting inclusive, healthy and economically viable environments.*

KEYWORDS: *dementia, tourism, evidence-based design, accessibility, urban areas.*

INTRODUCTION

The Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) 2024 report highlighted that more than 55 million people worldwide live with dementia, and someone is diagnosed with the condition every 3 seconds. The global prevalence is estimated to reach 153 million by 2050, a significant increase, particularly in Latin America, where cases are expected to grow by 200% by then, in contrast to the 100% expected in the United States (AID, 2024). Dementia, already the seventh leading cause of death globally and the leading cause in some countries, represents an annual

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economic burden of US$1.3 trillion, a figure that is expected to more than double by 2030. The responsibility for addressing this challenge lies with governments, which must promote awareness, diagnosis and detection, in line with the goals of the WHO Global Action Plan on Dementia. Currently, only around 50 countries have implemented National Dementia Plans, despite more than 21% of governments having committed to developing them in 2017, reflecting the urgency of a more effective response (AID, 2024).

This set of symptoms that significantly affect the ability to carry out daily activities, predominantly associated with aging, causes symptoms such as memory loss, confusion, depression, apathy and mood swings, in addition to impacting their families, caregivers and society in general. Given the prevalence and severity of this condition, academics have investigated ways to create dementia-friendly communities and provide care for these people (AID, 2024). Studies highlight the importance of providing social comfort, health interactions that preserve the dignity of patients, music-based therapies as a treatment, challenges faced by caregivers and factors that influence the acceptance of psychosocial interventions by patients (Alzheimer's Association, 2024).

According to Buckley (2022), tourism activities have demonstrated benefits for the well-being and mental health of the general population. Despite the potential of tourism to benefit people with dementia and other stakeholders, such as formal and informal caregivers and medical specialists, the topic is still little explored (Waby, 2023). However, tourism has been proposed as a non-pharmacological intervention for individuals in the early stages of dementia (Wen *et al.*, 2022). With dementia still incurable and attempts at new drugs for Alzheimer's Disease (AD) having a failure rate of 99.6% between 2002 and 2012, innovations and cost-effective interventions are becoming increasingly necessary. Accessible Tourism (AT) has the potential to offer experiences that stimulate confidence, memories and independence for these patients (Cummings *et al.*, 2021).

Experts in geriatric care note that most tourism destinations still do not accommodate the unique needs of visitors with dementia. This scenario is slowly changing in countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, where dementia-friendly travel guides are being developed and dementia-specific attractions are being designed, including dedicated cafes, sensory trails and art workshops (Wen *et al.*, 2022). With regard to sensory enrichment, the emerging field of study of Accessible Tourism (AT) presents itself as a promising possibility to be developed, given the character of creating environments that allow all people, regardless of their physical, sensory or cognitive abilities, to fully participate in tourism activities (Escuderos, Andreu and Ros, 2021).

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) report estimates that the accessible tourism market could reach more than 8 trillion dollars annually (WTTC, 2023). According to the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), tourists with physical or cognitive limitations, such as people with dementia, tend to travel more frequently and stay for longer periods compared to the average tourist. They often travel with family members or carers, increasing the total number of travelers in a group and therefore increasing direct spending on accommodation, food and activities (ENAT, 2023). Furthermore, the study carried out by VisitEngland in 2018 found that tourists with disabilities or reduced mobility, including those with marked cognitive decline, spent approximately £15.3 billion in the UK during the year. This study emphasizes that tourists who require more specific support have a significant economic impact, especially in sectors such as hospitality and services, and that investment in accessible infrastructure can further attract this audience (Wen *et al.*, 2023).

From this perspective, taking into account the proposal of Accessible Tourism (AT), this study aims to investigate the bibliographic production focused on the applicability of sensory garden projects in urban areas, taking into account: the accessibility of the project; the tourist activity as a proposal for health and well-being for the public with dementia, caregivers, family members and health professionals; evidence-based design (EBD); and the integration of this therapeutic area with the city design. It is expected that the findings of the study can guide urban planning managers to promote improvements in the infrastructure of cities and to adapt public policies aimed at serving people with dementia.

METHODOLOGY

As this is exploratory research, an integrative literature review was used as a method between 2020 and 2024. The research focuses on the theme of "Accessible Tourism of Sensory Gardens for people with dementia in urban areas", guided by the question "How can accessible tourism in sensory gardens benefit people with dementia, caregivers and family members in the urban environment?". The keywords ""dementia", "sensory garden", "tourism", "evidence-based design", and "accessibility in urban areas" were defined. The Boolean operator selected was "AND". In this way, it was possible to arrive at the groups: "dementia" AND "sensory gardens"; "evidence-based design" AND "accessibility in urban areas"; "dementia AND "tourism" AND "sensory garden"; "accessibility in urban areas" AND "tourism" AND "sensory garden"; "dementia" AND "evidence-based design".

The searches were carried out between June and September 2024, in the CAPES Periodicals repository. The inclusion criterion adopted was articles whose theme involved the biopsychosocial and therapeutic benefits of sensory gardens for the public with dementia, family members and caregivers. As an exclusion criterion, articles that did not meet the requirements were eliminated: a) language: English; b) search for articles; c) period: last four years (2020-2024); d) filtered by peers; e) exclusion of repeated publications. Of the 534 studies searched, only 12 met the proposal linked to the initial research question. As results, seven promising elements stand out for the design of sensory gardens that are essentially accessible and capable of providing well-being, sensory stimulation and mental health to users, whether they are diagnosed with dementia or not: (i) controlled stimulation of the senses; (ii) familiar and safe environments; (iii) integration of memories and narratives; (iv) variety of accessible routes; (v) incorporation of restorative nature; (vi) appropriate colors and materials; and (vii) connectivity and access to urban transport modes.

RESULTS

As a result of the method adopted, sensory gardens are spaces intentionally designed to engage the five human senses — sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste — through essentially natural elements. These gardens play a significant role in sensory stimulation, especially for individuals facing cognitive and sensory declines due to neurodegenerative conditions, in addition to providing inclusion and socialization for older people who find themselves isolated in their homes most of the time, deprived of multiple senses essential for healthy aging (Hung *et al.*, 2023). These environments promote positive responses in the brain, helping to improve cognition, memory, and mood. In the context of individuals with dementia, sensory stimulation through contact with textures, aromas, sounds and colors can evoke past memories and provide emotional comfort, alleviating symptoms such as anxiety and agitation (Moszkowicz, Moszkowicz and Porada, 2023).

Studies have shown that integrating these therapeutic environments into urban areas represents a crucial opportunity to improve the quality of life of people with dementia, while transforming these spaces into accessible and inclusive destinations (Fleming, Bennett and Zeisel, 2022; Elbasyoni and Gammaz, 2023). One of the main approaches is to create places that can be easily accessed, ensuring that the urban route to the garden is intuitive and safe (Lak *et al.*, 2021). This can be achieved through fluid connections with public transport and adjacent streets, as well as adequate signage to guide people with cognitive impairments. The *Dementia-*

inclusive Planning and Design Guideline is the first document of its kind to compile strategies and actions for the design of the built environment at the neighborhood scale (Happy Cities, 2023). Even though it does not prioritize sensory garden design, the document presented significant advances in this area of study of urban planning and dementia.

Sensory gardens, when designed for Environmental Enrichment (EE)[1], play a crucial role in stimulating several brain areas, promoting neuroplasticity[2] and strengthening cognitive reserve[3], especially in individuals with dementia and neurodegenerative diseases (Murroni *et al.*, 2021). Neuroscience has shown that exposure to environments rich in sensory stimuli can activate adaptive processes in the brain, mitigating dysfunctional behaviors and slowing synaptic degeneration (Lai *et al.*, 2023). With a view to guiding urban planning managers to promote improvements in city infrastructure and to adapt public policies aimed at accessibility, inclusion and dignity of people with dementia, seven EBD-oriented guidelines were proposed for sensory garden projects, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Proposal Sensory Garden Projects for the Accessible Tourism in urban areas.

(i) Controlled Stimulation of the Senses	
Sensory gardens should balance sensory stimulation without causing overload. According to Attention Restoration Theory (ART), natural environments promote cognitive recovery by reducing the need for directed attention (Olszewska-Guizzo, 2023).	. **Aromatic plants s**uch as sage (*Salvia officinalis*), lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) and rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*) have demonstrated anxiolytic, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and neuroprotective effects. They have also demonstrated potential in the treatment of common neurological disorders, including Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, migraines and cognitive impairments. They are able to stimulate olfactory memory without overloading the sensory system (Faridzadeh *et al.*, 2022). . **Natural sound elements**, such as running water, which create a relaxing ambient sound and help reduce agitation (Cheng and Sabran, 2022). . **Varying tactile surfaces**, such as different floor textures and plants, which encourage touch and promote reconnection with the environment, improving mood.

[1] Refers to environments that offer a wide variety of sensory, cognitive, motor and social stimuli that can promote brain development and mental well-being. These environments are characterized by the presence of varied visual, auditory and tactile stimuli, opportunities for problem-solving, cognitive challenges and the practice of physical activities (Murroni et al., 2021).

[2] The brain's ability to reorganize itself and adapt to changes throughout life. This includes the formation of new neuronal connections (synapses), the modification of the strength of these connections and, in some cases, even the generation of new neurons (neurogenesis). This process occurs in response to new experiences, environmental stimuli, injuries or changes in functional demands (Murroni et al., 2021).

[3] It refers to the brain's ability to resist neuropathological damage and maintain cognitive function in the face of injury or aging (Lai et al., 2023).

(ii) Familiar and Safe Environments	
For people with dementia, familiar and predictable environments are essential to reduce disorientation and anxiety. Studies show that accessible urban design should minimize physical and cognitive barriers (Fleming, Bennett and Zeisel, 2022).	**. Well-defined and legible spaces**, without confusing passages or unnecessary forks, using visual reference points such as characteristic trees or sculptures. **. Clear signage with simple**, large icons, aiding spatial orientation and reducing the risk of disorientation. **. Soft, uniform lighting**, avoiding harsh shadows that could confuse or cause fear. Adequate night lighting also ensures safety.
(iii) Integration of Memories and Narratives	
Sensory garden designs should be able to activate positive memories and promote personal narratives. Studies on affective memory suggest that environmental stimuli can trigger old memories, improving self-esteem and emotional well-being in people with dementia (Fleming, Bennett and Zeisel, 2022).	. **Create themed areas inspired by cultural or regional memories**, such as gardens of local plants, which refer to familiar activities. . **Incorporate social spaces** that facilitate interaction and social reconnection, with comfortable and accessible furniture for rest.
(iv) Variety of Accessible Routes	
People with dementia and their caregivers have different levels of mobility and endurance. Inclusive pathways should meet a variety of needs, based on the concept of universal design (Fleming, Bennett and Zeisel, 2022).	**. Routes with accessible**, flat and non-slip pavements, which allow wheelchair mobility and prevent falls. **. Short and long route options**, allowing users to choose their own route according to their level of comfort and need.
(v) Incorporation of Restorative Nature	
Green environments have a proven restorative function in scientific literature. The presence of vegetation improves air quality and provides calming effects (Olszewska-Guizzo, 2023).	**. Compact urban forests or sensory groves,** where the visitor is enveloped in tall vegetation, creating a sense of refuge and privacy. **. Water features**, such as small ponds or fountains, which not only contribute to the relaxing soundscape, but also serve as visual focal points that anchor the space.
(vi) Suitable Colors and Materials	
The perception of colors and contrasts is altered in people with dementia, and inappropriate use of colors can increase confusion. Soft colors and well-distributed contrasts	**. Soft, natural colors for main areas**, avoiding bright or complex tones that can generate anxiety. **. Natural materials, such as wood and stone**, create a pleasant tactile connection and do not cause artificial sensations or discomfort to the touch.

help with spatial perception, contributing to walkability and the performance of daily activities (Wiener and Pazzaglia, 2021).	
(vii) Connectivity and Access to Urban Transport Modes	
Sensory gardens should not be isolated enclaves; they should be connected to the city, favoring accessibility and shared use by the entire population. The theory of the walkable city argues that accessible and well-connected environments encourage everyday use of these spaces (Olszewska-Guizzo, 2023).	**. Central location** or in areas easily accessible by public transport, increasing accessibility and frequent use by people with reduced mobility. **. Smooth transitions** between urban areas and the garden, such as green squares that gradually introduce the visitor to sensory immersion.

DISCUSSION

Gradually, partnerships between universities and urban planners have been incorporating sensory garden practices in strategic locations in urban centers, considering people with dementia, residents of the region and, consequently, encouraging tourist visits by the public interested in mental health and cognitively beneficial stimuli for human aging. A practical example of this integration is the *Dementia-Friendly Community Gardens* in Singapore, where sensory gardens were incorporated into densely populated neighborhoods. The planning of these gardens aims to create environments that promote social interaction and engagement with nature, with specific areas dedicated to horticultural activities, sensory stimulation and relaxation (Alzheimer's Association, 2024). In France, the University of Sorbonne carried out practical applications of sensory gardens mediated by the principles of EE, finding promising improvements in the behavioral and attentional state of elderly people with mild and moderate dementia (Bourdon and Belmin, 2021).

In Australia, more than 20 venues host events in *memory cafes* where people with dementia socialize over morning tea. Similarly, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in Sydney offers workshops where educators guide participants through the interpretation of artworks, followed by creative activities to do at home, providing beneficial behavioral stimuli while also making tourism accessible to new participants (Wen *et al.*, 2022). A particularly notable initiative is *Australia's first dementia-friendly sensory trail*, which opened in 2021 in Woowookarung Regional Park, near Melbourne. Designed by the Victorian State Government with input from people with dementia and their caregivers, the nearly one-kilometer trail winds through lush forest inhabited by kangaroos and wallabies. The trail is accessible to wheelchair users and assistance dogs, with nine designated stops, including community meeting spaces where visitors can listen to music and share their impressions of the natural landscape (Wen *et al.*, 2022).

In the United Kingdom, a *Guide to Dementia-Friendly Tourism*, published by government agencies Visit England and Visit Scotland, outlines strategies for improving services for travelers with dementia. Recommendations include accessible toilets, clear signage, discounts for carers and directories of local attractions suitable for this group. In addition, a growing number of tourist attractions in these countries are implementing dementia-friendly initiatives. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example, is developing art appreciation programmes specifically for visitors with dementia. In the United States, more than a dozen museums, galleries, and nature centers in states including Minnesota, Michigan, Tennessee, and others participate in the *Spark! cultural program*, which offers creative workshops for individuals with dementia. Similarly, the National Museums of Liverpool in England offers a variety of services, including guided tours called *memory walks* through the city's historic sites, group reminiscence sessions, and intergenerational activities for children and their grandparents (Alzheimer's Association, 2024).

These examples highlight the growing recognition of the need for tourism that caters to people with dementia. While there is still much to be done to expand accessibility, the development of dementia-friendly travel experiences shows promising potential not only to improve the well-being of people affected, but also to create inclusive and enriching experiences that benefit travelers, their caregivers and the community at large. Finally, despite their recognized importance in academic and practical terms in some regions of the world, there is still a lack of studies investigating the implementation and dynamics of sensory gardens in *macromobility*[1] and *micromobility*[2] of urban modes in order to add data and evidence-based design to urban planners in cities.

[1] *Refers to transportation systems that allow travel over longer distances, often intercity or interstate, with greater passenger and/or cargo capacity. These modes are designed to connect large urban areas or even different regions, states or countries, offering medium to long-distance travel (Olabi et al., 2023).*

[2] *It involves transportation modes aimed at short distances, typically within urban or metropolitan areas. These means are generally individual or have limited capacity, focused on fast and affordable trips for short distances, such as the last kilometer between public transport and the final destination (Olabi et al., 2023).*

CONCLUSIONS

Integrating the concepts of reason, emotion, behavior, and memory into the design of sensory gardens in urban areas not only mitigates the negative impacts of dementia, but also transforms these spaces into tourist attractions with therapeutic benefits. The design principles for sensory garden projects, based on neuroscientific evidence and linked to the purposes of Accessible Tourism, support the emotional and cognitive well-being of people with dementia, creating restorative environments that benefit both patients and their caregivers and family members. In addition, such spaces can stand out as innovative tourist destinations by providing multisensory experiences that encourage relaxation and connection with nature, attracting tourists in search of regenerative and healthy experiences. In addition to welcoming people with dementia, sensory gardens offer other visitors an opportunity to enjoy a space designed to evoke calm, stimulate the senses, and promote emotional recovery. In this way, these environments not only meet the needs of a specific group, but also consolidate themselves as places of reconnection with the natural environment in the midst of urban areas, contributing to the development of inclusive and sustainable tourism, while reinforcing the role of cities as promoters of health and well-being.

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THE CHECK OUT OF THE LUSO BRAZILEIRO HOTEL

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ABSTRACT: *Heritage is the memory of a time that no longer exists, and the history of a people is deeply linked to its heritage. Tourism offers the opportunity to explore historical monuments, museums and buildings that tell the story of a city and its people. This study analysed the abandonment of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro in João Pessoa, Paraíba, and its implications for memory, heritage and tourism in the region. Inaugurated on 9 May 1916, the hotel quickly became popular, but almost a century later it is in a state of deterioration and neglect. Its current situation represents a significant loss to the city's history and tourism potential. In contrast, the Hotel Globo, which has undergone a integral restoration, stands out as a symbol of the revitalisation of the Historic Centre, attracting visitors and promoting local culture. The methodology of this study included bibliographical and documentary research with descriptive analysis. Investing in the restoration of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro could revitalise an important area of the Historic Centre, boost tourism and create economic opportunities for João Pessoa.*

KEYWORDS: *Heritage; Hotel; Tourism.*

INTRODUCTION

To abandon history is to lose the memory linked to a past, to a time that no longer exists. When history is abandoned, all that remains are accounts built from fragments of a memory preserved in the present, which only survives through the construction and reconstruction of shared memories.

The history of a people is intrinsically linked to their heritage, which can be both material - made up of tangible objects - and immaterial, encompassing customs, beliefs and traditions. Heritage represents everything that belongs to a locality and was built by human beings. According to its relevance, it should be preserved because it constitutes a cultural asset

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for the community and, in this context, it can also become a tourist attraction.

Tourism offers an open door for people to visit historical monuments, museums and buildings that tell the story of a city and its people, inviting travellers to immerse themselves in the local culture. This experience offers a plunge into the customs, traditions and flavours of a community. With this in mind, the aim of this study was to analyse the abandonment of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro in the city of João Pessoa, Paraíba, and to assess the implications of this abandonment for memory, heritage and tourism in the region.

THE HOTEL

The first record of the building that would later house the Hotel Luso Brazileiro dates to 12 May 1883, when the newspaper O Liberal Parahybano published an article about a ball held at the Hotel Globo, which shares the same name as the hotel built in 1929. The event was in honour of the customs inspector. In this context, the location on Álvaro Machado Square stands out in the local hotel industry due to its strategic position opposite the Great Western railway station.

On the same site, important hotel establishments followed, including the Hotel Central, which in 1912 was a pioneer in the city by offering electric lighting, sanitary facilities with crockery and a top-quality kitchen. Mr Henrique Siqueira, who would later become the owner of a hotel also called Hotel Globo, appears in the records as one of the first owners of Hotel Central and in later records as the hotel's maître d' (Vanzella & Brambilla, 2022).

In the early 20th century photograph below, the Hotel Central building is highlighted, and you can see that the features of the doors, windows and balcony have been preserved, even after the refurbishment that transformed the building into the Hotel Luso Brazileiro.

Figure 1: Hotel Central, in Álvaro Machado square.

Source: Public domain

On 9 May 1916, at 4pm, the Hotel Luso Brazileiro was inaugurated in the capital of Paraíba. The hotel had spacious accommodation, with twenty splendid rooms, providing comfort and convenience for its guests.

The Hotel Luso Brazileiro, which was inaugurated on 9 May 1916, quickly won over the public due to its privileged location, the good layout of the rooms, the outstanding cleanliness, the affordable prices, the excellent cuisine and, above all, the kindness of the owners. The opening ceremony was attended by many people, including representatives of the press, all of whom were offered a glass of champagne. During the ceremony, the music band of the State Police Force played in the hotel courtyard.

Figure 2: Hotel Luso Brazileiro

Source: Public domain

The first record of a hotel operating in the building dates back to 1883, and the establishment remained in business until the 1930s, specifically until 1932, as shown by the data found. For around 50 years, the hotel received and hosted numerous personalities, playing a significant role in the city's history.

Figure 3: Part of the façade with sign of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro

Source: Public domain

Today, almost 100 years later, the history of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro is marked by abandonment and neglect. The once glorious hotel, which welcomed illustrious guests such as the writer Mário de Andrade in 1928, is in a state of disrepair. The roof has been destroyed and part of the walls have collapsed. The once beautiful façade now bears the scars of abandonment, with windows and doors ripped out, walls with plaster falling off, dirty and vandalised. Every day, the bricks that support the building weaken with the action of time, and the inaction of the authorities responsible for the conservation of historical heritage increases the risk of the permanent loss of the city's memory.

Figure 4: Current state of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro

Source: Public domain

HERITAGE AND TOURISM

Cultural heritage includes monuments, groups of buildings and archaeological sites that are fundamental to the memory, identity and creativity of peoples, as well as constituting cultural wealth (IPHAN, 2014). Although IPHAN adopts this definition, it was originally formulated in the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, held in 1972 during the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and was subsequently ratified in Brazil by Decree No. 80.978 of 12 December 1977 (Brazil, 1977).

The concept of heritage is widely discussed by various authors. Timothy (2011, p. 31) summarises the definitions by stating that heritage is 'what we inherit from the past and use in the present'. In this sense, Franco and Vanzella (2022) emphasise that heritage protection essentially involves two concepts: preservation and conservation. Although heritage is protected, it is possible to make some changes, as long as they do not harm the integrity of its analyses and interpretations (Harrison, 2010).

In the context of tourism, heritage assets gain greater value when they are considered tourist attractions. The tourism sector is highly segmented, which allows trade operators to define their target audiences more precisely. Among these segmentations is heritage tourism, which refers to tourist activity focused on the contemplation of buildings, monuments and other elements that represent a locality's past. However, many of these heritage sites are abandoned, which requires a more detailed analysis to assess aspects such as fragility, market potential and the socio-cultural value of the property, in order to enable sustainable use (Franco & Vanzella, 2022).

THE LOSS OF HERITAGE AND TOURIST OFFER

Listed by the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN) in 2009, the Historic Centre of the city of João Pessoa, the capital of Paraíba and known as the city where the sun rises first, has a rich history. Founded in 1585 on the banks of the Sanhauá River under the name of Filipéia de Nossa Senhora das Neves, the city began constructing its first buildings three years after its foundation, buildings that reflected the power of the Portuguese Crown and the Church (Vanzella & Brambilla, 2022). For a long time, the city remained concentrated in the area that is now known as the Historic Centre, covering an area of 370,000 square metres, divided into two sectors: Cidade Baixa and Cidade Alta.

The region of João Pessoa's Historic Centre is of high value, not only for its historical character, but also for its artistic value, making it an important attraction for the development of tourism in the city (Franco, et al., 2024).

The research carried out by Franco and Vanzella (2022) revealed that the management and conservation of heritage in the historic centre was, in the view of tourists, fragile. This fragility is significant because it often influences the value and treatment of heritage assets.

Figure 5: Current state of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro

Source: Public domain

Within this context, the deplorable situation of the once prestigious Hotel Luso Brazileiro stands out. The state of abandonment and neglect, combined with the inertia and incompetence of the public sector, including the State, the City Hall and the authorities responsible for preserving heritage, has contributed to the deterioration of the property.

Its poor state represents a significant loss for the city's history, heritage and tourist potential. In this context, it is possible to draw a parallel with another hotel which, despite having been built in 1929 - 13 years after the inauguration of the Luso Brazileiro - had a more favourable fate when it was embraced by public authorities, the press and society.

The Hotel Globo also faced the drama of oblivion and ostracism between the 1970s and 1990s. However, its fortunes changed when it was listed as a historical heritage site in 1978. It subsequently underwent its first full restoration between 1990 and 1994, the first work carried out as part of the João Pessoa Historic Centre Revitalisation Project. Today, the Hotel Globo stands out as a symbol of the 'feeling of revitalisation' of the Historic Centre, standing out as a vibrant place of great cultural relevance to the city (Gomes, 2023).

Figure 6: Hotel Globo under restoration

Source: IPHAN

Today, following the restoration of the Hotel Globo, the site has become a vibrant centre for events, exhibitions and the Sol Maior Project, which offers the opportunity to contemplate the sunset while enjoying high-quality, free music. The Hotel Globo has become one of the most visited spots in the historic centre of the capital of Paraíba.

The revitalisation of the Hotel Globo not only reinforced its role as an important cultural and artistic asset in João Pessoa, but also encouraged the participation of independent artists, establishing a cultural scene of reference in the city (Gomes, 2023). This revitalisation demonstrated the viability of tourism in the Historic Centre and highlighted the revitalisation potential for other heritage sites in the city.

In this context, the question arises: why didn't the Hotel Luso Brazileiro have the same luck? The comparison between the two hotels shows the importance of proper management and conservation for the preservation of heritage and the development of tourism in the capital of Paraíba. However, there has never been any collective thinking when it comes to revitalising heritage in the Historic Centre or promoting tourism. The experience of the Hotel Globo illustrates how successful interventions can transform the potential of a historic heritage site, offering a model that could be followed to ensure the preservation and valorisation of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, bibliographical reviews were initially carried out to define fundamental concepts related to heritage, tourism and historical accounts pertinent to the object of study: the Hotel Luso Brazileiro. Documents recording information about the Hotel Luso Brazileiro, and the Hotel Globo were then examined in an attempt to understand the circumstances and events associated with these heritage sites.

The research was descriptive in nature, with the aim of mapping and describing the conditions and characteristics of the hotels analysed. In terms of analysis, a qualitative approach was adopted to interpret the data, allowing for a more in-depth understanding of the issues and contexts associated with the hotels' historical heritage.

This process involved a thorough analysis of the available data, with a focus on identifying patterns, differences and possible impacts of conservation and management conditions on the historic value and tourism potential of the properties. Combining these approaches contributes to a more complete and enriching assessment of the issues in question.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The comparison between the Hotel Luso Brazileiro and the Hotel Globo reveals a significant contrast in terms of the preservation and revitalisation of historical heritage. The success of the Hotel Globo, after being listed and restored, illustrates the positive impact that efficient management and institutional support can have on the valorisation of cultural assets. The Hotel Globo has become an example of how integrating historic preservation and encouraging tourism can generate substantial economic and cultural benefits for a city.

Tourism not only contributes to the preservation of heritage sites but is also an important source of income for cities. The revitalisation of historic properties can turn these sites into points of attraction for visitors, stimulating local commerce and creating employment opportunities. The Hotel Globo, after its restoration, has become a vibrant centre for cultural activities and events, such as the Sol Maior Project, which highlights the crucial role of tourism in strengthening the city's economy and culture. This model clearly demonstrates how the valorisation of historical heritage can boost tourism and, in turn, benefit the site's economy.

In contrast, the state of deterioration of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro, resulting from a lack of intervention and care, underlines the urgent need for a more effective approach to the conservation of historical heritage. The abandonment and neglect that marked the fate of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro not only deprived the city of an important tourist attraction, but also reflected a failure in the cultural heritage preservation strategy. The lack of adequate investment in its revitalisation prevented the hotel from becoming a tourist attraction and a source of revenue, like the Hotel Globo.

In order to reverse the situation of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro and ensure the preservation of other cultural assets, it is crucial that robust conservation and revitalisation policies are developed and implemented. This includes the mobilisation of financial resources, collaboration between different spheres of government and civil society, and the creation of strategies that guarantee the maintenance and proper use of historic spaces. Tourism must be a central element in this strategy, recognising its ability to generate revenue and foster the revitalisation of heritage sites.

The experience of the Hotel Globo offers a model to be followed, demonstrating that with the right commitment and strategic vision, it is possible to transform heritage sites into cultural and tourist reference points. It is therefore essential that the Hotel Luso Brazileiro and other heritage sites in similar situations receive the necessary attention to be restored and integrated into the cultural and tourist development of João Pessoa. The revitalisation of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro would not only restore an important part of its historical heritage to the city but would also contribute to strengthening João Pessoa's cultural and economic identity, promoting a positive cycle of appreciation and attracting visitors.

Investing in the restoration of the Hotel Luso Brazileiro could revitalise a significant area of the Historic Centre, providing an increase in tourism and generating new economic opportunities for the city. The area is full of buildings with excellent tourist potential, and some investors have opened restaurants there, but they face many obstacles due to a lack of incentives and public investment in security. Tourism does take place in the Historic Centre, but it is limited to three or four isolated spots. The revitalisation of historical heritage sites should therefore be seen not only as a preservation obligation, but as an intelligent strategy to promote tourism and boost the site's economy.

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STRUCTURAL STABILITY OF TURKISH TOURISM

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ABSTRACT: *Tourism is a rapidly developing sector in the world. Tourism in Turkiye has also gained great momentum in the last thirty years. Behind this rapid growth in Turkiye lies the development of the tourism infrastructure. The structural change in the Turkish economy has affected the tourism sector. Turkiye is a competitor of the countries in the Mediterranean basin due to its geography and climate. There are many variables that affect tourism other than price. For example; terrorism, epidemics, natural disasters, economic crises. Turkish tourism has faced all these factors in the last sixty years.*

KEYWORDS: *Tourism, Structural Stability, Turkish Economy.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been one of the fastest growing sectors in the world in the last century. Especially after the Second World War, various developments have led to an increase in tourism activity. The increase in annual leave periods in working life and the increase in transportation opportunities have facilitated long-distance travel. International agreements made to make the world safer have rapidly increased tourism activity. The increase in income has also positively affected tourism. While the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased approximately 9-fold, the population has increased 1.5-fold in the same period. Today, when the world's population is approaching 8 billion, the number of international tourists has reached 1.5 billion. The income generated because of tourism activities was 1.481 trillion dollars in 2019.

These developments in tourism have increased the share and importance of tourism in many countries' economies. Turkiye is one of these countries. The number of tourists has increased from 900 thousand to 52 million in the last fifty years. Its share in GDP has increased

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from 0.1% to 4%. Its importance in the country's balance of payments has increased. It is important to know the stability of a model to be established for tourism demand. In this study, the stability of the tourist flow function to Turkiye will be investigated.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURISM SECTOR IN TURKIYE

The income-generating effect of the tourism sector in Turkiye began to be understood in the 1980s. The structural reforms in the economy in 1980 created a suitable environment for tourism. The import-substitution development model was replaced by an export-led growth model. The country's foreign trade regime, exchange rate determination, monetary policy, and incentive practices changed.

There were three elements of structural transformation that directly affected tourism. The first was liberalization in foreign trade. Imports of goods consumed by tourists were liberalized. The second was the Turkish lira convertible by amending the Turkish currency protection law. The way was opened for tourists to use foreign currency freely within the country. The third was the enactment of the tourism incentive law. Tourism infrastructure (airport, port, highways, communication) and accommodation facilities in Turkiye were built with incentives.

The average tourism revenue between 1970-80 was 177 million dollars. This figure became 1,419 million dollars between 1980-90. There is an approximately 8-fold increase between the ten-year averages. The share of tourism revenue in GDP increased from 0.48 to 1.77 in the same period.

In this context, the 1980s are considered as the years of tourism development. However, it should not be forgotten that the effects of structural transformation will take time to produce results. For this reason, two sections were created in the study, up to 1990 and after. It is worth investigating whether there is a significant change in the parameter of the price variable affecting the tourist flow between these two periods.

MODEL

The Chow stability test is a method used to examine whether there are differences in the structure of regression models of different groups (Plum and Pan, 2016). If there is no significant difference in the structural parameters of the estimated model, the model is considered stable. If there is a statistically significant difference between the parameters of the estimated model, it means that the parameters change from period to period over time. In this case, the model is considered unstable. In this method, the data belonging to the variables are divided into two parts depending on a feature. The feature sought here is the time when the event expected to cause the structural change occurs.

Two separate regressions can be estimated with data divided into two parts and the parameters of the two regressions can be compared. The aim here is to test the hypothesis that some or all the regression coefficients change on different subsets of data. It is possible to do the same thing using dummy variables.

$$X_t = f(P_t) \tag{1}$$

Here X_t is the number of tourists coming to the country. P_t is used to show the price change in the country. P_t is the ratio of the exchange rate of the country to the consumer price inflation of the country.

The stability of the tourist flow function will be investigated with the following equation.

$$X_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 P_t + \beta_2 D + \beta_3 D P_t + u_t \tag{2}$$

The dummy variable D represents the periods. D=0 indicates the period before the structural transformation, 1963-1990; D=1 indicates the period after the structural transformation, 1990-2022. There are several advantages to applying the Chow test using dummy variables. First, it is sufficient to estimate only one regression. Second, the Chow test does not clearly show which coefficient is different. When a dummy variable is used, it is not only found that the two regressions are different, but also where this difference originates from. Third, pooling the data increases the relative precision of the estimated population coefficients by increasing the degrees of freedom (Gujarati, 2020:513).

DISCUSSION

The number of tourists coming to the country from the data used in the study was obtained from the five-year development plans and the Ministry of Tourism, while the dollar exchange rate and consumer inflation were obtained from the Central Bank. Both variables were used as percentage change. The estimation results of equation number 2 used to estimate the sensitivity of tourist flow to Turkiye to price are given below.

Table 1. Results of the Analysis

Dependent Variable: Q_t
Method: Least Squares
Date: 08/29/24 Time: 12:43
Sample: 1963-2022
Included observations: 60

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
C	13.97326	4.528495	3.085630	0.0032
P_t	-0.102618	0.043551	-2.356239	0.0220
β_2	-2.354740	6.133331	-0.383925	0.7025
β_3	0.104567	0.043783	2.388331	0.0203

R-squared	0.097652	Mean dependent var	12.88503
Adjusted R-squared	0.049312	S.D. dependent var	24.06425
S.E. of regression	23.46343	Akaike info criterion	9.213104
Sum squared resid	30829.82	Schwarz criterion	9.352727
Log likelihood	-272.3931	Hannan-Quinn criter.	9.267718
F-statistic	2.020099	Durbin-Watson stat	2.115957
Prob(F-statistic)	0.121502		

All coefficients are significant except the β_2 coefficient, which shows the difference effect of the constant. The P_t coefficient, which shows the reaction of tourists to the price change in the country, did not meet the expectations. As P_t increases, the number of tourists should also increase. Because the country becomes cheaper for tourists. This relationship can be explained by the status of the tourism sector. The absence of imported goods in the country, the lack of tourism infrastructure, and the oldness of accommodation places caused tourism not to be seen as a luxury good in the period before the structural change. The coefficients also show the elasticities.

The β_3 coefficient shows both how tourists are affected after structural change and whether the model is affected by structural change. To evaluate the stability of the tourist flow model, the date range in which structural change occurred in Turkiye was selected. The periods separated as before and after 1990 show the period before and after structural change. If β_3 is not found as zero, there will be a difference between the two periods. The estimated value of 0.10 is statistically significant. According to the estimation results, the tourist flow function in Turkiye is not stable.

In the post-structural period tourist flow model, the coefficient of P_t is 0.0019 (0.104567 -0.102618). A value that is in line with expectations was found. The fact that the coefficient becomes positive indicates that the structural change has positively affected the tourism sector. The coefficients of P_t in the model can also be read as flexibility.

CONCLUSIONS

Estimating the tourist flow model yielded two important results. First, despite the decrease in prices, the tourist flow to the country did not increase due to the lack of tourism infrastructure. Second, the tourist flow model coefficients are unstable. In other words, they change between periods. The model can be enriched by adding other variables that affect tourism.

The coefficients of P_t in the model can also be read as elasticity. Elasticities are mostly interpreted in economics as being related to supply, demand and income. It should not be forgotten that elasticities are a mathematical relationship. Since the variables in the model here show the percentage change, the elasticity of the decrease in prices to the number of tourists is -0.10 before the structural change and 0.001 after the structural change.

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TOURISM, CIRCULAR TAXATION AND PROPERTY RIGHTS IN THE EU: ALIGNING FISCAL POLICY WITH THE GREEN TRANSITION

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ABSTRACT: *This paper explores the intersection of sustainable taxation, property rights, and the tourism sector in Europe, focusing on the challenges and opportunities presented by the ecological transition. As the European Union advances towards its climate goals, fiscal policies play a crucial role in promoting urban regeneration, reducing carbon emissions, and encouraging sustainable development, especially within tourism, one of the most impactful and vulnerable sectors to climate change. The study analyzes key legislative frameworks, including the Multilateral Carbon Tax Treaty (MCTT) and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which aim to align economic incentives with environmental objectives, specifically addressing the high carbon footprint associated with tourism activities such as aviation and cruise travel.These mechanisms provide structured approaches to carbon taxation, aiming to balance the need for environmental protection with economic competitiveness while directly influencing tourism's operational models. Additionally, the paper examines the impact of targeted tax measures, such as reduced VAT rates for sustainable tourism services and differentiated property taxes for green buildings, on urban renewal efforts and sustainable destination management. It argues that integrating sustainability into fiscal policy can drive positive change in the tourism sector, fostering economic growth while mitigating environmental degradation. However, the implementation of these measures faces significant challenges, including political resistance, the need for international cooperation, and legal scrutiny from trade bodies like the WTO. By highlighting the potential of a circular tax system that incentivizes green practices and discourages harmful behaviors, particularly within tourism, the paper emphasizes the need for a multidisciplinary approach. Ultimately, this study advocates for a fiscal strategy that not only supports public revenue but also promotes social equity, environmental justice, and a resilient, sustainable future for European cities and their tourism sectors.*

KEYWORDS: *tax law, circular taxation, ecobonus, tax capacity, extrafiscal effect, taxation of eco-friendly properties, tourismfiscal policy*

INTRODUCTION

In Europe, the relationship between sustainable development taxation and evolving property rights is becoming increasingly critical as the region faces the challenges of climate change and the need for sustainable growth models. Fiscal tools, including environmental taxation, play a vital role in supporting ecological transition, the circular economy, and future generations, highlighting the need for more effective measures beyond traditional tax credits or bonuses. Tourism is a critical component of the EU's economic and environmental landscape, contributing significantly to GDP, employment, and cultural exchange. According to the European Commission, tourism accounts for approximately 10% of the EU's GDP and employs over 22 million people, making it one of the most influential sectors in the Union. However,

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tourism is also one of the sectors most affected by climate change and environmental degradation, with impacts ranging from increased resource consumption, high energy use, and waste generation to significant carbon emissions, particularly from air travel, maritime transport, and energy-intensive accommodations. These environmental challenges pose a direct threat not only to the sector's sustainability but also to the broader economic and ecological stability of many European regions that depend heavily on tourism. The high carbon footprint associated with tourism - estimated to account for about 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions - underscores the urgent need for systemic change. The overuse of resources, such as water and energy in tourist hotspots, further exacerbates the ecological stress on local communities and natural ecosystems. Coastal areas, mountain resorts, and popular urban destinations are increasingly facing environmental degradation, including coastal erosion, biodiversity loss, and strain on local infrastructure, which threaten the long-term viability of these destinations. Addressing these issues requires integrating circular economy principles into tourism, promoting sustainable consumption, and reducing waste through innovative business models. To align tourism with the EU's green transition, fiscal tools must incentivize sustainable business models and responsible consumer behaviors. Circular taxation strategies, such as eco-taxes on high-carbon tourism activities, including flights, cruises, and car rentals, and tax incentives for sustainable practices, can help shift the sector towards a more regenerative model. For instance, eco-taxes can be applied to tourism services that have a high environmental impact, such as luxury accommodations with excessive energy use, or tour operators that offer carbon-intensive travel packages. These taxes not only help internalize the environmental costs of tourism but also generate revenue that can be reinvested into sustainability initiatives, such as enhancing public transportation in tourist areas or supporting conservation projects in natural parks. Implementing tax benefits for hotels and other tourism-related businesses that invest in renewable energy, water-saving technologies, waste reduction initiatives, and sustainable food sourcing not only reduces their ecological footprint but also enhances their market appeal to an increasingly eco-conscious traveler base. For example, fiscal incentives such as reduced property taxes or grants for hotels that install solar panels, adopt green building certifications, or develop zero-waste programs can significantly lower operational costs while contributing to the broader goals of reducing carbon emissions and conserving natural resources. The EU's policy framework, including the Green Deal and the Transition Pathway for Tourism, emphasizes the need for tourism to transition towards a sustainable and resilient future. Fiscal measures such as reduced VAT rates on sustainable tourism services, tax rebates for eco-certifications, and grants for digitalization efforts are pivotal in supporting the sector's green transition. The adoption of circular economy practices in tourism extends beyond environmental benefits; it also enhances the sector's competitiveness, resilience, and capacity to deliver high-quality experiences that meet the evolving expectations of modern travelers who prioritize sustainability. Moreover, the concept of sustainable tourism goes beyond environmental impact; it includes social and economic dimensions that promote local community engagement, heritage preservation, and inclusive growth. Fiscal policies that support community-based tourism, local artisan markets, and cultural heritage conservation help ensure that the benefits of tourism are widely shared and contribute to the socio-economic development of host communities. For example, tax reductions for businesses that employ local staff, source locally produced goods, or support community-led tourism projects can enhance the socio-economic impact of tourism while preserving local cultures and traditions. In the context of property rights, the tourism sector presents unique challenges and opportunities. Tourist destinations often face pressures from overdevelopment, leading to conflicts between economic interests and environmental preservation. By redefining property rights to incorporate social and environmental responsibilities, fiscal policies can help regulate land use, prevent unsustainable expansion, and promote investments in green infrastructure. Differentiated property taxes, which reward eco-friendly developments and penalize environmentally harmful projects, can guide the tourism sector towards sustainable urban and rural regeneration. The integration of circular taxation in tourism is not just about mitigating environmental impacts; it is about transforming the sector into a force for positive change. By adopting a multidisciplinary approach that combines fiscal policy, property rights reform, and sustainable business practices, tourism can lead the way in demonstrating how industries can align economic growth with ecological integrity. This transformation requires coordinated efforts across multiple stakeholders, including governments, businesses, and local communities, to build a tourism ecosystem that supports the EU's vision of a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive economy. The proposal for a Multilateral Carbon Tax Treaty (MCTT) aims to establish a global carbon tax system, ensuring carbon is taxed at its source and harmonizing fiscal policies to minimize tax evasion and emissions. The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), part of the European Green Deal, complements these efforts by preventing carbon leakage and ensuring a level playing field for EU producers facing stringent environmental regulations compared to foreign competitors. The CBAM is designed as an environmental tax integrating fiscal, environmental, and trade policies, with exceptions for countries with aligned environmental standards. The measure reflects the EU's commitment to sustainable development, balancing economic, social, and environmental objectives. However, challenges remain in integrating property rights and taxation within this framework. Property rights, traditionally seen as individual economic freedoms, must be reinterpreted to incorporate social and environmental responsibilities. This paper explores how sustainable taxation and redefined property rights can shape consumer behavior, drive innovation, and promote a fairer distribution of resources, emphasizing the urgent need for coordinated and harmonized policies across Europe to address the ongoing climate crisis.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach, integrating legal, economic, and environmental perspectives to examine how sustainable taxation and property rights can drive urban regeneration and support the ecological transition in Europe.

1. **Policy and Document Analysis**: The research critically reviews key EU directives and regulations, such as Directive (EU) 2022/542 on sustainable VAT rates, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), and the Multilateral Carbon Tax Treaty (MCTT). This analysis evaluates the impact of these policies on sustainable development goals.
2. **Comparative Legal Analysis**: The study compares fiscal and regulatory frameworks across EU member states, identifying best practices and challenges in implementing environmental taxation and redefined property rights.
3. **Case Studies**: Real-world examples, including Italy's excise duty reforms and EU energy efficiency initiatives, illustrate the application and effectiveness of fiscal measures in promoting sustainable urban development.
4. **Theoretical Framework**: The study draws on concepts like "circular taxation" and the "polluter pays" principle, proposing a shift in tax burdens from productive activities to environmentally harmful ones to encourage sustainable practices.
5. **Stakeholder Impact Analysis**: The analysis examines the economic, social, and environmental impacts of proposed fiscal measures on governments, businesses, and citizens, ensuring that policies promote sustainability while maintaining economic balance.

This methodology provides a holistic understanding of how fiscal tools can be leveraged to align taxation and property rights with environmental and social objectives, fostering a sustainable and equitable future in Europe.

RESULTS

1.Impacts of Climate Change

The European landscape is witnessing severe climate impacts, including record temperatures, wildfires, and floods, underscoring the urgent need for effective fiscal policies to mitigate environmental damage. The Multilateral Carbon Tax Treaty (MCTT) addresses this by defining carbon taxation across the entire fossil fuel supply chain, thereby reducing emissions. The European Green Deal and other initiatives aim to promote a circular economy and achieve climate neutrality by 2050, in line with the Paris Agreement. The European Commission's proposals, such as revising energy taxation and eliminating fossil fuel subsidies, align with the "polluter pays" principle. Notable measures include the reduction of single-use plastics and the introduction of taxes on non-recycled plastic waste, although implementation has faced delays, as seen with Italy's postponed plastic tax. The European fiscal system's shift towards environmental taxation aims to reduce the tax burden on labor, promote sustainable behaviors, and drive economic recovery aligned with climate goals.

Tourism's impact on climate change is multifaceted, with significant emissions originating from various sources such as transportation, energy use in accommodations, and waste generation from tourists themselves. Transportation, particularly aviation and cruise ships, is among the largest contributors, accounting for approximately 75% of tourism's total carbon footprint. Air travel alone contributes to a substantial share of greenhouse gas emissions, exacerbating global warming due to high-altitude emissions of CO_2, water vapor, and nitrogen oxides. Cruise tourism, often perceived as a luxurious mode of travel, also presents severe environmental challenges due to the extensive use of heavy fuel oil, a major source of sulfur oxides and particulate matter, which significantly impact air and water quality in port cities and along popular cruising routes. In addition to these emissions, energy-intensive tourism accommodations, such as large resorts, contribute to high levels of energy consumption, especially in regions heavily dependent on air conditioning and heating. Many popular destinations also suffer from water scarcity due to high tourist demand, further stressing local ecosystems already burdened by overuse. Waste generation is another critical issue, with single-use plastics, food waste, and discarded tourist goods adding to the environmental pressures. Destinations experience direct consequences of climate change, such as coastal erosion, rising sea levels, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and loss of biodiversity, all of which threaten the viability of key tourist attractions like beaches, coral reefs, and natural parks.

Climate Change Impacts on specific Tourism Destinations: Iconic European tourist sites, including the Mediterranean coastline, Alpine ski resorts, and UNESCO World Heritage sites, are increasingly vulnerable to climate-induced damage. For example, Mediterranean destinations face the dual threat of rising sea levels and heatwaves, which not only deter tourists but also damage infrastructure and natural habitats. Ski resorts in the Alps are grappling with shorter winter seasons and unpredictable snowfall, prompting a shift towards artificial snowmaking, which is both costly and environmentally harmful. These climate impacts have profound implications for the tourism sector, threatening revenue, jobs, and the cultural and natural heritage that define Europe's appeal as a destination. In response, the EU's fiscal strategies aim to mitigate these impacts by integrating sustainability into the core of tourism operations. Environmental taxes, such as levies on single-use plastics commonly used in tourism, can drive reductions in waste generation by encouraging businesses and consumers to shift towards reusable alternatives. Carbon taxes on aviation and cruise sectors incentivize the development and use of sustainable fuel alternatives, such as sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs) and electrification of short-haul flights. The taxation of high-carbon activities is a critical tool in aligning the tourism sector with the EU's climate objectives, as it directly targets the behaviors and business models that contribute most to emissions.

Incentives for Sustainable Tourism Infrastructure: To support the transition towards greener tourism infrastructure, the EU offers a range of financial incentives, such as grants, tax rebates, and low-interest loans aimed at retrofitting hotels and other tourism facilities to meet nearly zero-energy building (nZEB) standards. These retrofitting efforts include upgrading insulation, installing solar panels, integrating smart energy management systems, and replacing traditional heating and cooling systems with energy-efficient alternatives. Such fiscal measures not only help reduce the sector's carbon footprint but also enhance the long-term sustainability and resilience of tourism destinations, ensuring they can continue to thrive in a changing climate.

Waste Reduction and Circular Economy Practices: Waste management remains a significant challenge in tourism, particularly in popular destinations where infrastructure often struggles to cope with the surge in visitor numbers. Fiscal policies that promote circular economy practices - such as subsidies for businesses that implement comprehensive recycling programs, compost organic waste, or engage in waste-to-energy projects—are essential in transforming how waste is managed in tourism hotspots. For instance, major cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam have adopted waste reduction strategies that involve taxing nonrecyclable waste and rewarding businesses that achieve high recycling rates, thereby encouraging the tourism sector to contribute actively to the circular economy.

Public Transportation and Sustainable Mobility: To reduce the dependency on high-carbon transportation options, fiscal measures have been directed towards enhancing sustainable mobility in tourist destinations. Redirecting revenue from environmental taxes into green tourism initiatives, such as investments in electric buses, bike-sharing programs, and pedestrian-friendly urban designs, creates a virtuous cycle of investment that benefits both the environment and the economy. Cities like Paris and Copenhagen have significantly expanded their cycling infrastructure and introduced low-emission zones, making sustainable transport more accessible and attractive to tourists. These efforts are not only reducing local air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions but also improving the overall quality of the tourist experience.

Supporting Nature-Based Solutions: Beyond technological fixes, nature-based solutions are gaining traction as an essential element of sustainable tourism. Fiscal policies that fund the restoration of wetlands, mangroves, and forests in tourist areas serve a dual purpose: they enhance biodiversity and provide natural defenses against climate impacts like flooding and storm surges. For example, tax incentives for tourism businesses that support conservation efforts or engage in rewilding projects help to restore ecosystems that are critical for maintaining the natural beauty and resilience of tourist destinations. These initiatives align closely with the EU's biodiversity strategy, which aims to protect 30% of Europe's land and sea by 2030.

The Role of Tourism Taxes in Mitigating Climate Impacts: Many European countries have introduced tourism taxes, such as overnight stay taxes and environmental levies, specifically designed to fund sustainability initiatives and mitigate the environmental impacts of tourism. For instance, the Balearic Islands in Spain levy an eco-tax on tourists, with the revenue allocated to projects that protect natural areas, promote sustainable water use, and support cultural heritage preservation. These tourism taxes create a direct financial link between the environmental costs of tourism and the funding of projects that aim to offset those impacts, ensuring that the sector contributes to its own sustainability.

Climate Resilience and Destination Management: Enhancing the climate resilience of tourist destinations requires an integrated approach that combines fiscal incentives with robust destination management strategies. This includes investing in climate adaptation measures, such as flood defenses for coastal resorts, water-saving technologies for drought-prone areas, and diversifying tourist offerings to reduce seasonal vulnerabilities. For example, mountain resorts are increasingly promoting year-round activities, such as hiking and mountain biking, to offset the decline in winter tourism. By aligning fiscal policy with climate adaptation goals, the EU can support the long-term viability of its diverse tourism destinations, safeguarding jobs and local economies that depend on tourism. Moreover, the EU's Green Deal and the Fit for 55 package call for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030, placing tourism under increased pressure to innovate and adapt. These ambitious targets necessitate rapid decarbonization across all sectors, including tourism. Financial incentives, such as grants for upgrading to low-emission vehicles, tax breaks for eco-certified businesses, and public funding for sustainable tourism development, are vital in supporting this transition. The availability of green finance instruments, including green bonds and sustainability-linked loans, further provides tourism operators with the capital needed to invest in sustainable infrastructure and operations.

Promoting Digitalization for Sustainable Tourism: The digital transformation of tourism also plays a crucial role in reducing the sector's environmental footprint. Smart technologies, such as AI-driven energy management systems, predictive analytics for resource use, and digital platforms that promote sustainable travel options, can optimize the environmental performance of tourism businesses. Fiscal measures, including tax credits for digital upgrades and subsidies for tech-based sustainability solutions, encourage the adoption of digital tools that enhance efficiency and reduce environmental impact.By leveraging these fiscal policies and integrating sustainability into the very fabric of tourism operations, the EU can help mitigate the sector's environmental impact, enhance its resilience, and ensure that tourism remains a valuable and sustainable pillar of the European economy. These measures not only support the immediate reduction of carbon emissions but also foster a broader cultural shift towards responsible and sustainable tourism practices, setting a global benchmark for how tourism can evolve in the face of climate change.

2. Challenges of Sustainability and the Ecological Transition

2.1 Current Challenges for Sustainability, Particularly Related to Environmental Taxation

Sustainability requires a balance between economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection, but the transition to a circular economy faces regulatory and cultural barriers.

The tourism sector's transition to sustainability is hindered by regulatory challenges, fragmented governance, and cultural resistance among businesses accustomed to traditional profit-driven models. However, integrating circular economy principles into tourism can provide a pathway to overcoming these barriers. Fiscal policies, such as reduced property taxes for businesses that adopt green certifications like LEED or BREEAM, can incentivize hoteliers and other tourism operators to invest in sustainable infrastructure. Additionally, the EU's Circular Economy Action Plan specifically targets the tourism sector by promoting sustainable consumption patterns, such as encouraging tourists to choose eco-certified accommodations and services. Tourism also has the potential to enhance biodiversity protection and landscape conservation through fiscal incentives that promote nature-based tourism. For instance, tax deductions or grants for eco-tourism operators that contribute to local conservation efforts can create a direct link between economic activity and environmental stewardship. Furthermore, the EU's strategy emphasizes reducing the sector's material footprint by encouraging practices such as recycling programs, waste-to-energy conversions, and the use of biodegradable products. Aligning fiscal measures with these goals can drive the adoption of best practices across the tourism value chain, ultimately reducing the sector's environmental impact and contributing to the EU's circular economy objectives." Environmental taxation, or "circular taxation," aims to discourage harmful practices and promote sustainability through fiscal measures like reduced VAT rates for eco-friendly products and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). This approach contrasts with traditional taxation, which often fails to consider the environmental impacts of taxed activities. To drive meaningful change, taxation must function as a tool for sustainable development, transcending national boundaries and integrating ecological priorities into the fiscal system.

2.2 Directive (EU) 2022/542 on Reduced VAT Rates

Directive 2022/542 allows EU member states to apply reduced VAT rates to eco-friendly goods, aligning fiscal policies with the European Green Deal's sustainability goals. The directive supports the transition to a green economy by promoting the consumption of sustainable products while phasing out tax benefits for environmentally harmful supplies. For the tourism sector, the Directive (EU) 2022/542 presents a significant opportunity to mainstream sustainable practices by lowering VAT rates on eco-friendly tourism services and products. This includes everything from sustainable accommodations that meet specific environmental criteria to low-impact travel options like cycling tours and electric vehicle rentals. By making these green alternatives more financially attractive, the directive encourages consumers to make environmentally responsible choices. Furthermore, the tourism industry can leverage these fiscal advantages to market itself as a sustainable sector, thereby attracting a growing segment of eco-conscious travelers who are willing to pay a premium for environmentally friendly experiences." The directive also supports the development of local green economies by prioritizing VAT reductions on regionally sourced, sustainable food and beverage options served in tourist facilities. This can help reduce the carbon footprint of food supply chains and promote local agriculture, enhancing the overall sustainability of tourism destinations. By aligning fiscal policy with consumer demand for sustainable tourism, the EU can foster a market-driven approach that accelerates the adoption of green business models in the sector. Set to take effect in 2025, the directive encourages member states to harmonize their tax systems to support environmental objectives, though concerns remain about the accessibility of green alternatives, potential tax evasion, and the need for continuous support for low-income families. The directive represents a significant move towards integrating sustainability into European fiscal policy, demanding careful implementation to balance environmental and economic stability.

2.3 Regulation (EU) 2023/956 on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

Regulation (EU) 2023/956 establishes the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) to address carbon emissions from imported goods with high CO2 content, such as cement, steel, aluminum, fertilizers, and hydrogen. Aligned with the European Green Deal, the CBAM aims to prevent "carbon leakage," where companies relocate production to countries with less stringent environmental regulations, undermining the EU's decarbonization efforts. By ensuring that imported goods face a carbon price equivalent to that paid by EU producers, the CBAM promotes fair competition and global decarbonization based on the "polluter pays" principle. The CBAM's transitional phase began in October 2023, requiring importers to report emissions data without cost until the end of 2025. From 2026, importers must offset the carbon embedded in imports through the purchase of certificates. The regulation thus functions as an environmental duty on high-carbon imports, effectively extending the EU's climate policies beyond its borders.

2.4 Proposal of Directive COM (2021) 563 Final on the Taxation of Energy Products

The proposed Directive COM (2021) 563 seeks to reform the outdated Directive 2003/96/EC to align energy taxation with the EU's climate ambitions, including a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and achieving climate neutrality by 2050. It proposes higher taxes on fossil fuels to discourage their use and promotes clean fuels like renewable hydrogen and biofuels. The proposal addresses inconsistencies in the current system, where low minimum tax rates cause disparities among member states and hinder the functioning of the single energy market. However, its adoption has been delayed due to disagreements, particularly over tax exemptions for aviation and maritime fuels. Without unanimous agreement among member states, the directive's implementation remains stalled, complicating the EU's ability to meet its Green Deal targets and maintain the coherence of its environmental policies.

2.5 Directive (EU) 2024/1275 on Energy Performance in Buildings

Directive (EU) 2024/1275 revises the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD), reinforcing the EU's commitment to improving energy efficiency in the building sector, which accounts for 40% of the EU's energy consumption and 36% of its emissions. The recast directive continues efforts to promote nearly zero-energy buildings (nZEB) and mandates long-term renovation strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 95% by 2050. New requirements include annual energy consumption reductions for public buildings and enhanced support for smart technologies, electric vehicle infrastructure, and heating system inspections. The directive is part of the broader "Renovation Wave" strategy, which aims to double building renovation rates by 2030, reducing energy demand and reliance on fossil fuels. By integrating these measures, the directive supports the EU's overall goal of a 55% reduction in emissions by 2030, as outlined in the European Green Deal, helping to create a more sustainable, decarbonized building sector across Europe.

2.5.1 Minimum Energy Performance Standards and Progressive Renovation Pathways

Directive 2010/31/EU (EPBD 2010) introduced the concept of nearly zero-energy buildings (nZEB) and mandated Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) for the sale or rental of buildings. This directive required member states to meet nZEB standards by 2018 for public buildings and by 2020 for all new buildings, pushing for high energy efficiency. The 2018 revision [Directive (EU) 2018/844] strengthened these measures by requiring member states to develop long-term renovation strategies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 80-95% by 2050. The revision also introduced new regulations to promote smart technologies, electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, and the Smart Readiness Indicator, which assesses a building's capacity to improve energy efficiency and adapt to occupants' needs. With the European Green Deal (2019) underscoring the urgency of climate action and the critical role of buildings in achieving a 55% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030, the EPBD was further revised. Buildings are significant contributors to climate change, accounting for 40% of the

EU's energy consumption and 36% of its related emissions. The "Renovation Wave for Europe" strategy launched in 2020 seeks to double renovation rates over the next decade, improving energy efficiency and reducing the EU's dependence on fossil fuels.The Energy Efficiency Directive (EED) mandates that central governments renovate at least 3% of their buildings annually to meet nZEB standards, with the 2023 revision extending this requirement to all public entities and imposing an annual reduction of 1.9% in the final energy consumption of public buildings. The EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), revised in 2021, now covers buildings and road transport, increasing the cost of GHG emissions and incentivizing the decarbonization of the building sector. The directive requires member states to establish minimum energy performance standards (MEPS) for non-residential buildings, aiming to upgrade the 16% least efficient buildings by 2030 and 26% by 2033. For residential buildings, national pathways aim to reduce primary energy consumption by 16% by 2030 and by 20-22% by 2035, focusing on the worst-performing structures. From 2030, all new buildings must be zero-emission, and public buildings must comply by 2028. A zero-emission building is defined as one with no on-site fossil fuel emissions and high energy performance, with energy demand within national limits. The EPBD also prohibits financial incentives for the installation of stand-alone boilers powered by fossil fuels from January 1, 2025, with some exceptions. Member states must submit national renovation plans by the end of 2025, detailing strategies for the decarbonization of heating and cooling systems, with a goal to phase out fossil fuel boilers entirely by 2040. These provisions, along with new EED restrictions, aim to phase out subsidies for fossil fuel boilers, gradually eliminating them through future revisions of ecodesign regulations for heating systems.

DISCUSSION

Aspects of the Multilateral Carbon Tax Treaty (MCTT)

The Multilateral Carbon Tax Treaty (MCTT), spearheaded by Tatiana Falcão and supported by international experts, represents a groundbreaking global initiative to reduce carbon emissions through a structured and equitable fiscal system. The treaty's primary aim is to establish an international legal framework for carbon taxation that directly supports the Paris Agreement's climate targets. It is composed of 31 articles that outline specific obligations for contracting states, focusing on taxing carbon emissions at the extraction, refining, and consumption stages of fossil fuels. This multi-stage taxation system ensures that carbon emissions are accounted for and taxed comprehensively, thereby reducing the overall environmental impact. The MCTT introduces three key rules for taxation allocation: the primary rule taxes carbon emissions at the extraction stage, the secondary rule at the refining or processing stage, and the tertiary rule at the point of consumption. By taxing emissions as close as possible to their origin, the treaty aims to capture the full carbon impact of fossil fuels early in their lifecycle, minimizing the potential for tax evasion and ensuring that the environmental cost of fossil fuel use is fully accounted for. Revenues generated from the carbon tax are intended to fund research and development in new carbon-free energy technologies. The treaty proposes the creation of a common carbon fund to facilitate financial and technical cooperation among contracting states, redistributing resources to support countries with lower capacities. The MCTT's governance structure includes oversight by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), ensuring compliance with international trade and environmental standards. Disputes arising under the treaty would be resolved through the WTO dispute resolution mechanism to maintain transparency and uphold international law.The MCTT also recognizes the political and practical challenges associated with implementing global carbon pricing and proposes a gradual approach to its adoption. The treaty's long-term vision includes a 50-year fiscal program with periodic reviews aligned with the Paris Agreement's update cycle, offering stability and predictability for policymakers and investors. This approach is designed to harmonize carbon rates across different countries, supporting a globally consistent and transparent carbon pricing system.

a) Economic and Political Implications

The MCTT's taxation rules are designed to balance the economic interests of different countries, ensuring that both developing and developed nations contribute fairly to global emission reduction efforts. Non-OECD countries, which often have lower economic capacities, benefit most from extraction-based taxation, capturing revenue early in the fossil fuel lifecycle. Conversely, the tertiary rule favors high-income, fuel-consuming countries, allowing them to tax emissions generated within their own economies. The treaty aligns with World Trade Organization (WTO) regulations, allowing carbon taxes and border carbon adjustments (BCAs) to prevent competitive imbalances and promote global adherence to clean air standards.

b) Differentiated Taxation and Incentives

The MCTT adopts a tiered approach to carbon taxation, with differentiated rates based on national income levels, adhering to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. The tax rates are indexed to a composite of the US dollar and euro, with potential adjustments for emerging market currencies. To maintain the treaty's effectiveness, it prohibits negative incentives like tax credits and subsidies that could complicate the carbon pricing system. However, a limited tax credit is allowed for non-combustion uses of carbon, such as in plastics, with a view to encouraging the adoption of biodegradable materials. The binding nature of the MCTT differentiates it from the Paris Agreement, which sets broad aspirational targets. The treaty's mandatory carbon taxation policies standardize implementation globally, reducing competitive distortions and ensuring equitable contributions to emission reductions. Ratification challenges include navigating domestic political processes, which vary widely among countries, and overcoming opposition from industries that may face increased costs. To counter resistance, the MCTT uses international pressure and the potential loss of fiscal revenues as key motivators, demonstrating how non-participating countries could be disadvantaged in global trade. The MCTT emphasizes a direct carbon tax, favoring predictable pricing on emissions over complex market mechanisms like Emissions Trading Systems (ETS). However, the treaty allows other carbon pricing tools, such as ETS, to complement the tax, providing a cohesive framework for reducing emissions across multiple sectors. Many countries, especially in Europe, already employ a combination of carbon taxes and ETS, setting a minimum carbon price through taxation and dynamically adjusting prices within specific industries via ETS. The MCTT's approach allows for a flexible yet unified carbon pricing system adaptable to evolving climate policies. The MCTT is a foundational step toward creating a standardized global approach to carbon taxation, setting clear, enforceable rules that support international climate targets. By fostering global cooperation and integrating fiscal, environmental, and legal measures, the treaty seeks to drive substantial progress in carbon reduction, technological innovation, and the broader transition to a low-carbon economy. Though it is an initial effort, the MCTT lays the groundwork for future negotiations to build on its framework, establishing more ambitious and stringent carbon management policies as international consensus strengthens. The treaty's implementation would mark a significant advance in global climate action, demonstrating unprecedented cooperation in addressing carbon emissions. By aligning national fiscal policies with global environmental goals, the MCTT aspires to create a transparent, fair, and effective system for reducing emissions worldwide, setting the stage for future climate agreements that push the boundaries of international environmental governance.

c) Multifunctionality and Tax Design of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is a multifunctional tool designed to address climate change, eliminate unfair competitive advantages for high-emission industries, reinforce EU climate leadership, and generate public revenue. CBAM combines regulatory, environmental, and fiscal elements, functioning as a carbon pricing tool on imports and a strategic support for EU climate and economic goals. The CBAM also influences the tourism sector by adjusting the cost of carbon-intensive imports used within tourism, such as high-emission fuels for transport or materials for construction. By reflecting the true environmental cost of these inputs, CBAM can drive the sector towards greener alternatives, encouraging tourism operators to adopt sustainable fuels and materials that are either locally sourced or less carbon-intensive. This aligns with the EU's broader efforts to decarbonize tourism supply chains and promote local production as part of a sustainable tourism strategy. CBAM's approach highlights the interconnected nature of global supply chains in tourism, making it essential for operators to consider the carbon footprint of their entire value chain. For instance, cruise operators might need to reassess their fuel choices or routes to minimize environmental impact, while hotels might prioritize building materials that comply with the EU's environmental standards. By internalizing carbon costs, CBAM ensures that tourism businesses contribute fairly to the EU's decarbonization efforts, thereby supporting the sector's transition to a low-carbon future. Although some critics argue that CBAM may conflict with its aims of promoting fair competition and aligning with the Paris Agreement, its overall benefits are seen as outweighing these concerns. The CBAM's legal foundation under Article 192 of the TFEU focuses on environmental policy rather than fiscal matters, avoiding the need for unanimous tax-related votes and allowing it to be framed primarily as environmental regulation. CBAM aims to prevent carbon leakage by imposing a carbon cost on imports equivalent to the costs EU producers face under the Emissions Trading System (ETS). This ensures imported goods carry a similar environmental burden, pushing foreign industries towards more sustainable practices in line with EU standards. The financial structure of CBAM includes a levy on imported products based on their carbon content, functioning essentially as a carbon tax on imports. This levy reflects the emissions costs faced by EU producers, adhering to the principles of "polluter pays" and "contributive capacity," thereby leveling the playing field between EU and non-EU producers while addressing global emissions. Revenues from CBAM certificates will contribute significantly to the EU budget, with 75% of the income earmarked to manage EU debt from COVID-19 recovery and support economic revitalization. This dual role highlights CBAM's multifunctionality, integrating environmental and fiscal objectives.

d) Tax Design and Customs Perspective of CBAM

From a tax design perspective, CBAM is viewed as a sui generis border tax. Although it shares characteristics with customs duties, it differs by focusing specifically on carbon emissions. Currently in a transitional phase, CBAM emphasizes monitoring rather than direct financial charges, with full tax measures set to begin in 2026. During this period, CBAM's structure incorporates elements common to taxation, including establishing tax obligations, assessments, payments, and enforcement mechanisms, though many procedural details remain to be fully developed in the definitive phase. CBAM underscores the renewed importance of borders in the regulatory landscape, reflecting the EU's ambition to integrate environmental goals into trade policies. However, its classification as a carbon tax on imports raises potential legal challenges from the WTO and objections from trading partners who may view it as protectionist. Concerns have been voiced by countries like Russia, China, Turkey, and Australia, who argue that CBAM could unfairly burden their exports. The EU defends CBAM as compliant with international trade laws, emphasizing that it targets products rather than countries and maintains non-discriminatory standards between EU and non-EU goods.

e) Environmental and Economic Impact of CBAM

CBAM combines regulatory, environmental, and fiscal functions, positioning it as a key component of the EU's broader climate strategy. Its implementation aims to reduce global emissions by incentivizing non-EU industries to align with EU standards, thus extending the reach of EU climate policies internationally. By placing a carbon cost on imports, CBAM ensures that imported goods reflect their true environmental impact, reducing carbon leakage and supporting EU emissions targets. Economically, CBAM generates significant revenue through the sale of carbon certificates, supporting the EU's environmental and economic recovery efforts, including pandemic-related expenditures. Its integration into the EU's fiscal framework illustrates a commitment to leveraging taxation for environmental and economic goals. However, CBAM's success depends on balancing its multiple functions—enforcing environmental compliance, managing trade disputes, and fostering international cooperation—without compromising its core objective of reducing carbon emissions. Ultimately, CBAM represents an innovative approach to integrating environmental concerns into fiscal policy, setting a precedent for using taxation to drive sustainable behaviors and global climate action.

Its effectiveness will test the EU's ability to lead in combating climate change while maintaining economic competitiveness and adhering to fair trade principles.

CONCLUSIONS

Enhancing property value through taxation with a focus on urban regeneration and environmental impact is increasingly recognized as a critical issue in today's European context. This approach reflects a broader understanding that fiscal policy is not merely a tool for revenue collection but also a strategic instrument to promote sustainable urban development, environmental protection, and social equity. The integration of contributive capacity within the fiscal framework allows policymakers to design tax systems that reward sustainable behaviors and discourage harmful practices, aligning economic incentives with environmental goals. The Multilateral Carbon Tax Treaty (MCTT) exemplifies the need for a global, coherent approach to carbon taxation that supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. By establishing a structured and binding framework, the MCTT aims to standardize carbon pricing worldwide, ensuring that all countries contribute fairly to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This approach promotes environmental justice by holding high-emitting industries accountable and encouraging cleaner production methods globally. However, the treaty's success hinges on securing broad international support, especially from major carbon-emitting countries, and managing the economic impacts on industries and global competitiveness. Similarly, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is a key component of the EU's strategy to integrate environmental considerations into its fiscal and trade policies. By imposing a carbon cost on imports that reflects their environmental footprint, CBAM aims to prevent carbon leakage and ensure that EU climate efforts are not undermined by higher emissions abroad. While CBAM has the potential to reshape global trade dynamics by encouraging other countries to adopt similar carbon pricing mechanisms, it faces legal scrutiny from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and challenges from countries that perceive it as a trade barrier. The EU's defense of CBAM emphasizes that it targets products based on their emissions rather than discriminating against specific countries, aligning with international trade rules if implemented without export discounts or internal discrimination. The integration of environmental taxation mechanisms like MCTT and CBAM into European fiscal policy can lead to significant progress in reducing emissions and promoting environmental justice. By embedding these principles into broader tax reforms, the EU can reinforce its leadership in global climate policy while setting a precedent for other regions to follow.

However, achieving these ambitious goals requires overcoming political and economic obstacles, including the need for greater consensus on harmonizing energy and electricity taxes within the EU. Urban regeneration offers another critical application of environmentally focused fiscal policy. Enhancing property value through targeted tax measures that promote green buildings and sustainable development aligns with the principles of contributive capacity and environmental justice. Differentiating tax rates for "green" versus non-sustainable properties can incentivize investments in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and environmentally friendly construction practices. This approach not only promotes urban renewal but also supports a broader shift towards low-impact, sustainable urban living. Taxation can thus serve as a powerful tool to drive urban regeneration, encourage sustainable investments, and reduce environmental degradation. By strategically leveraging tax incentives and penalties, governments can influence private sector behavior, guiding capital towards projects that enhance urban areas and align with public policy goals. For example, fiscal policies can support large-scale infrastructure projects that improve urban quality of life while adhering to stringent environmental standards. These projects can generate economic growth, create jobs, and enhance community resilience, provided they are implemented with a balanced approach that considers both private sector interests and public benefits. The role of the European Union in shaping national fiscal policies towards sustainable urban regeneration is also crucial. Through guidance and funding allocations, particularly in the post-pandemic recovery context, the EU can promote systematic, long-term approaches to urban renewal that prioritize environmental sustainability and social equity. This aligns with broader EU initiatives such as the Green Deal and circular economy principles, which aim to transform Europe into a more sustainable and competitive economy. Ultimately, fiscal policy must evolve to reflect a more integrated, multidisciplinary approach that addresses the complexities of sustainability and climate change. Tourism stands at the crossroads of economic opportunity and environmental responsibility, making it a critical focus of the EU's green transition. Fiscal policies that align tourism with circular economy principles can drive significant improvements in sustainability across the sector. By incentivizing green investments, reducing taxes on sustainable products and services, and penalizing environmentally harmful behaviors, the EU can transform tourism into a model of sustainable growth. This not only enhances the sector's resilience against climate change but also contributes to broader social and economic objectives, including job creation, community development, and the preservation of Europe's natural and cultural heritage. " The future of tourism in Europe depends on its ability to adapt to and drive forward the green transition. With the right fiscal frameworks, tourism can lead by example, showing how economic success and environmental stewardship can go hand in hand. As the EU continues to refine its fiscal policies to support sustainability, tourism's evolution towards a circular and regenerative model will not only benefit the industry but also set a benchmark for other sectors seeking to align with the EU's climate goals. The shift towards a circular tax system that incentivizes green practices and penalizes environmental harm represents a transformative step in how governments can harness fiscal tools to achieve societal goals. By embedding sustainability into the core of fiscal policy, governments can not only generate necessary public revenues but also foster a culture of environmental responsibility, supporting the transition to a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable future. In conclusion, the integration of MCTT, CBAM, and environmentally oriented fiscal policies into the broader economic framework represents a forward-looking approach to addressing global climate challenges. These mechanisms provide a structured pathway for countries to meet their climate commitments while promoting fairness and accountability in carbon reduction efforts. For urban areas, aligning property taxation with sustainability goals can drive regeneration that is economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally sound. By adopting these innovative fiscal approaches, policymakers can create a synergistic effect that supports economic development, environmental stewardship, and social equity, setting the stage for a more sustainable and just society.

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THE IMPACT OF THE ACCELERATED URBAN DYNAMICS ON TOURISM. THE MUNICIPALITY OF BUCHAREST (ROMANIA) AS A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT: *Heritage buildings represent valuable resources for urban tourism due to their multivalent character (historical, architectural, cultural, symbolic, spiritual, educational, aesthetic, scientific). Moreover, in the current context marked by the rapid urban development, the economic value of heritage buildings is increasingly accentuated as various forms of conversion are associated with them. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the impact of intensive urban development on the tourist activity in municipality of Bucharest, the capital city of Romania. The authors identified three models of reuse of historical monuments as a result of the manifestation of the accelerated development of services and real estate pressure including on protected built-up areas that represent the most attractive zones for urban tourism. The three models identified are: positive represented by the appropriate conversions of historical monuments that support the development of cultural tourism; the indifferent model characterized by abandoned historical properties with the potential to be culturally valued and implicitly touristic; the negative models that refer to the forms of reuse less compatible with the status of heritage buildings and which affect the appearance of the traditional urban fabric.*

KEYWORDS: *cultural heritage, restauration, tourism infrastructure, economic value, adaptive reuse*

INTRODUCTION

It can be appreciated that both the stages of the urbanization process and the evolution of tourism have been thoroughly studied over time, due to the fact that the connection between these two phenomena is closely interconnected (Brouder, Eriksson, 2013; Gohar, 2021; De Man, 2017). Earlier periods have been less studied from this perspective because the corresponding societies lacked many of the social structures necessary to focus solely on leisure (De Man, 2017, p. 605).

Urban tourism has been practiced since ancient times due to various travel motivations: cultural (desire to discover new places), psychological (health care and rest) (Gârbea, 2013; Varadzhakova, 2017), religious influence (pilgrimages) (Gârbea, 2013; de Man, 2017). Travels

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abroad made to satisfy personal curiosity were commonly made by the British from the 1600s and especially in the 1700s (Gyr, 2010; De Man, 2017). Later, other Europeans (French, Germans) had the same motivation to travel. Although the movements registered a progressive dynamic, they were carried out by the elites (de Man, 2017). For this period, it can be appreciated that tourism was seen above all as a means of education, instead of a matter of leisure (De Man, 2017). In the early part of the 18th century, young aristocrats traveled to the European cultural centers to spend several years there, completing their studies. The interest of the young nobles was also to visit the cultural objectives that represented characteristic elements of the European capital cities (Gârbea, 2013) and the classical sites of Italy, the latter representing the peak of their travels (De Man, 2017). The "educational journeys" (*Bildungsreisen*) were an important stage in the development of tourism (Gyr, 2010). These early modern forms of leisure, recorded as long journeys, became known as the "Grand Tour" (Duarte, 2016; Gyr, 2010; De Man, 2017). Imitation by the wealthy members middle class soon followed (Gyr, 2010; De Man, 2017). After the Napoleonic wars, the number of tourists not only increased exponentially, but their profiles diversified, and their interest opened up to modern forms of tourism (health tourism, recreation tourism in seaside resorts) (Duarte, 2016; De Man, 2017).

In the 19^{th} and 20^{th} centuries, the technological advances have a great impact on the urban development, reflected by the modernization of building structures, and by infrastructure development, i.e. mobility systems (paths, roads, railways, steam navigation, air transport, and transit systems), public space, and water and power supply - as an essential component of the urbanization process (Gohar, 2021). The term "tourism infrastructure" is sometimes used equivalent with "tourism urbanization," and both make reference to the built facilities, such as resorts, hotels, service points, information centers, airports, travel stations, and tourism ports (Gohar, 2021, p. 100). These transformations have strongly influenced the development of tourism. Although railways created greater mobility, the use of railways and the popularization of tourist routes and destinations only began later with the construction of mountain railways towards the end of the 19th century (Gyr, 2010, p. 16). It is considered that the railway had a significant contribution to the emergence of modern mass tourism (De Man, 2017). The new means of transport allowed both the increase in transport capacity and the reduction of costs (De Man, 2017).

After World War II, most Western societies developed regular travel and holiday habits (De Man, 2017). At the same time, after the Second World War there was a concern to develop and modernize cities and to improve living conditions (De Man, 2017). Numerous architects and urban planners made significant contributions, creating new architectural styles, in many European cities modern neighborhoods were built next to the old historical centers (Minea, 2016), which positively influenced the touristic image of the cities. In the last 150 years, the development of tourism was also influenced by factors such as economic globalization (De Mat, 2010; Sadowski, 2018), political changes, scientific and industrial progress (De Mat, 2010). These factors also determined an accelerated urban development, and in this context, there is an increasing emphasis on the economic value of heritage properties (e.g. the potential sale price as real estate of heritage buildings) (Merciu et al., 2023).

Due to the particular characteristics of the material cultural heritage, multiple possibilities of reuse are associated with it (Boussa, 2011; Merciu, Petrişor and Merciu, 2021; Merciu et al., 2023; Pintossi et al., 2023; Vardopoulos, 2023) which explains an increasing interest in evaluating the economic value of historical monuments. The economic value is often measurable with great meticulousness as a result of identifying use values: those related to the real estate market, or those that take multiple forms (for example, housing, shops, offices, commercial spaces or public services); the second category is represented by tourist usage values, either directly (for example, visits to historical sites, museums) or indirectly (for example, accommodation, restaurants, etc.) (Kabil et al., 2022; Ost, 2012 quoted by Merciu et al., 2023). Accelerated urban development has caused physical changes (Alnsour et al., 2023), especially if heritage buildings are not restored (Boussa, 2011; Merciu, 2021), changes in construction materials and color, negative impact on the structure format and internal configuration (Alnsour et al., 2023; De Noronha Vaz et al., 2012) and even destruction of heritage buildings (Sadowski, 2018; Merciu, 2020; Merciu, 2021). Often, the preservation of urban cultural heritage is seen as a barrier to urban development (Fairclough et al., 2008; Merciu, 2021; Pendlebury, 2013), particularly in the case of interventions in protected built-up areas that are based on strict rules that limit the demolition, reconstruction or substantial modifications of historic buildings or on the range of their conversion (Alnsour et al., 2023; Bade, 2020). The local context and cultural meaning of the historic building must be taken into account in an adaptive reuse project (Sowińka-Heim, 2020). These strict rules also generate high costs of preserving heritage properties (Bade, 2020).

This paper is focused on the analysis of the impact generated on the tourism by the accelerated urban development of Bucharest, the capital city of Romania, in the post-socialist period. The authors identified different impacts of urbanization on heritage buildings from the point of view of conservation, of the forms of reuse, in current context marked by the rapid development of services, real estate pressure, increasing housing demand, etc.

METHODOLOGY

Various methods have been applied for the elaboration of the paper. The analysis of the specialized literature was necessary for a documentation of the existing trends in different countries regarding the relationship between the urbanization process and tourism, especially from the perspective of the impact generated by urban development on the historical monuments that represent the main attractions for cultural tourists.

The method of analysis and synthesis was useful to investigate the measures taken for the development of tourism in the capital city of Romania. A detailed analysis of the situation of municipality of Bucharest involved several field campaigns in the last five years in order to highlight the way of conservation and tourism valorization of historical monuments. At the same time, based on field campaigns, the authors highlight the trends manifested within the direct influence of the urban development process on heritage buildings and implicitly on tourism.

RESULTS

The analysis of the influence of urban dynamics on tourism in the city of Bucharest highlighted three models of reuse of historical monuments as a result of the manifestation of the accelerated development of services and real estate pressure including on protected built-up areas. Of particular importance in the selection of the models was the analysis of the changes in the interior configuration and how the forms of reuse of heritage buildings reflected the way of conservation and the highlighting of patrimonial values (architectural, historical, cultural). The three models identified are: positive represented by the appropriate reuses of historical monuments that support the development of cultural tourism; the indifferent model represented by abandoned historical edifices with the potential to be culturally valued which could positively influence the development of tourism; the negative models that refer to the forms of conversion less compatible with the status of historical buildings and which affect the appearance of the traditional urban fabric. The case studies were selected from several protected built-up areas, including the historical center of Bucharest, which are the most representative for cultural tourism.

Positive models are more limited in number due to the fact that historical monuments that have lost their original function are numerous and require high costs for conservation. As a rule, these positive models are based either on projects carried out with public or European funds for their transformation into cultural or public institutions, or on private projects that meet the strict conservation requirements correlated with the planning rules. The authors highlight both cultural uses of some historical buildings (figs. 1, 2), as well as reuses registered in the sphere of services (restaurants, hotels, cafes) (fig. 3) that support the development of cultural tourism in Bucharest. An extensive cultural project was started by the Bucharest City Hall with the support of the Ministry of Culture, which consisted in the restoration and expansion of the former Gabroveni Inn to be transformed into the Bucharest Cultural Center (ARCUB), between 2009 - 2014.

Figure 1. Bucharest Cultural Center: exhibition center located on Lipscani Street, within the limits of the historical center (May 2024). Source: Merciu C.

The historic building hosts a 200-seat performances, a workshop hall and a 50-seat studio hall each, exhibition and conference rooms. ARCUB hosted a particularly important exhibition-event "The Universe of Salvador Dalí" between December 2023 and May 2024. The exhibition presents 170 works – sculptures, graphics, engravings, lithographs, gold miniatures, rubies, diamonds, emeralds, sapphires and glass, surrealist furniture that illustrates the genius of the extravagant Salvador Dalí (fig. 1 b, c, d). Illustrating the variety of themes and symbols that form the distinct universe of Salvador Dalí's creation, the exhibition attracted a large audience, including foreign tourists, which led the curators to extend the visiting period until September 2024.

Other positive example is the conversion of Cesianu-Racoviţă Palace as an art gallery and auction house dedicated to art objects, a monumental building, whose architectural value has been well preserved (fig. 2 a, b).

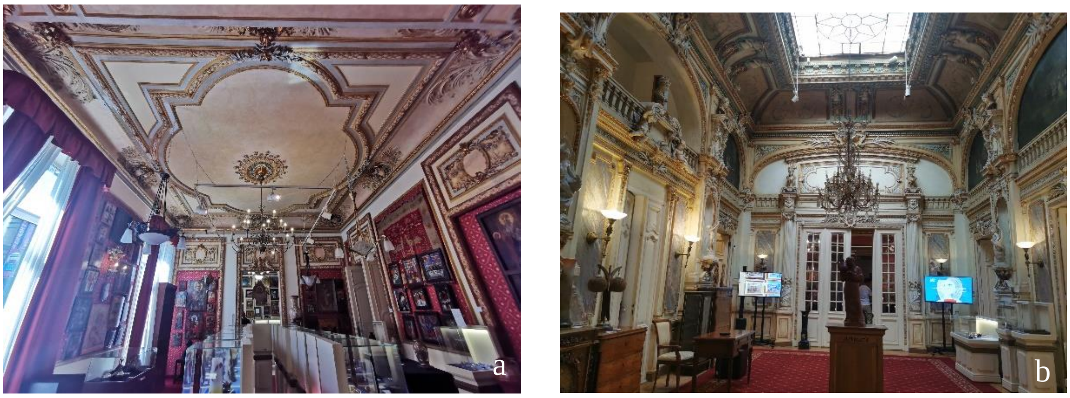

Figure 2 a, b. Cesianu-Racoviţă Palace (C.A. Rosetti Street, Bucharest): art gallery and auction house dedicated to art objects. Source: Merciu C.

The development of cultural tourism has stimulated the creation of various types of restaurants or shops with culinary products and wines specific to certain regions in different European countries, set up in the central area of Bucharest, in historic buildings, whose arrangement highlights the architecture and charm of old buildings (fig. 3 a, b, c).

Figure 3 a, b. Restaurants arranged in historical buildings (Brezoianu and Nicolae Golescu Streets) **c.** Wine shop and bar (George Enescu Street). Source: Merciu C.

The city of Bucharest presents a large stock of historical buildings as a result of its long evolution. Many of these present different degrees of degradation, although they are located in protected built-up areas. This situation is explained as a result of high conservation costs or property problems (many being claimed by the heirs after the forced nationalization carried out during the communist period). These buildings are included in the indifferent model because they have a high potential for cultural or tourist conversion.

Figure 4. Historical buildings with degraded masonry structures in the central part of of Bucharest with potential for cultural or tourist reuse; **a.** property located on Lascăr Catargiu Boulevard; **b.** building located on Visarion Street. Source: Merciu C.

At the same time, the current context marked by the accelerated development of services has an impact on the appearance of historical buildings. In the current period under the impact of tourism development, the conversions of heritage buildings as hotels do not comply with the planning regulations (only the main facades are preserved, the construction of the new buildings having a pronounced modern character) (fig. 5 a, b).

Figure 5 a, b. Modern hotels built in the protected built-up areas being in contrast with the traditional urban fabric generating a visual pollution. Source: Merciu G.-L.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the new buildings have a larger size, in order to make better use of the land, which has a high economic value. This pattern of using historical buildings through conversions that do not comply with the planning rules were included in the category of negative models.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

An increasing attention is paid to ways of capitalizing on cultural heritage, especially for tourism, an action correlated with preserving the valences it incorporates (historical, cultural, architectural, artistic, social, symbolic). Moreover, heritage buildings have a certain economic value that overlaps with socio-cultural values. This fact justifies the variety of the historical buildings' conversion with particular tourist, cultural and commercial services, reflecting the influence of the tourism on the ways of reusing the historic properties. The main results obtained in the study highlight the fact that although there are cultural conversions of historical monuments, there is a pressure exerted by the accelerated dynamics of services, including tourism, as a result of the fact that Bucharest is one of the most important tourist cities in Romania. At the same time, the relatively small share of cultural conversion of heritage buildings draws attention to the need to comply with rigorous regulation planning regarding their preservation and adaptive reuse.

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CHARACTERISTIC OF THE NATURAL TOURISTIC POTENTIAL OF NORTH PART OF BLACK SEA REGION

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ABSTRACT: *The touristic industry is one of the leading sectors of Bulgarian economy. The main part of the activities is concentrate along the Black sea coastal area. The investigation the potential for development and optimization of the tourism is basic element in sustainable use of the resources and diversification the touristic product. The first part of the research is related with investigation of the parameters of the nature conditions. The second part included complex evaluation of the nature conditions (relief, climate, waters, biological and landscape diversity), determination of the different zones and spatial modeling of the investigated region – north part of Black sea region in Bulgaria.*

KEY WORDS: *touristic potential, Black sea, evauation*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a major structure-determining industry in the present national economy of Bulgaria. It forms about 14% of GDP at the moment, but in the time before the COVID pandemic (2019) it reached 19% with real opportunities for growth.

The importance of tourism is considered by Buchvarov, Tonchev (1996) in several aspects - health, economic, social, cultural, environmental and political. With different types of tourism, there is a different influence and impact both on the individual person and in terms of the economic, social and cultural development of certain settlements, regions and communities. Different aspects of similar researches are presented by Nekova (2018), Popova (2012) and Varadzhakova et al. (2023).

The phenomenon of tourism forms new economic activities and professions, has an impact on the demographic picture of the regions and leads to changes in functional and cultural identification. Tourism is a real prerequisite for the development of many other branches of the

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national economy such as transport, agriculture, construction, light industry, food industry, culture, education and healthcare.

Through tourism, policy platforms can be developed and a country's natural and cultural-historical features can be positively presented. Tourism is possible to develop only in regions that are not affected by military conflicts and the object of terrorism. It is an effective tool for regional development and raising the standard of living.

The tourism industry is a prerequisite for the development of ecological activities and environmental protection, as it is possible to carry out in a preserved environment and good environmental quality parameters.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN EVALUATION OF TOURISTIC POTENTIAL

The tourist potential is formed by the natural and anthropogenic tourist resources. Natural recreational resources are leading in the formation of the main tourist activities (around 60% globally). They are related to the features of relief, climate conditions, waters, vegetation, animals, degree of protection and preservation of the landscape and biological diversity. Anthropogenic resources are historical-archaeological, anthropogenic-ethnographic, socio-cognitive, corporate, religious, scientific, sports and cultural objects and events.

Emphasis is placed on natural and tourism resources in the present study. To assess the tourist potential, a five-point scale is applied, both in relation to regions with developed tourism and those with a lesser degree of development. The five degrees of rating scale are defined by the following levels:

Level 5 – Very good – regions with optimal natural features for tourism development (suitable topography – sands and picture rocks, climate, waters – sea, wetlands and mineral springs, biological and landscape diversity).

Level 4 - Good – regions in which one or two of the basic natural components have a lower degree of opportunities for tourism development.

Level 3 – Average – regions in which the majority of the basic natural components are unsuitable for tourism development.

Level 2 – Bad – regions where only one component has certain potential opportunities for tourism development.

Level 1 – Very bad – includes disturbed or highly polluted regions unsuitable for tourism development.

RESEARCH AREA – GEOMORPHOLOGICAL AND LANDSCAPE PECULIARITIES

The region of the present study includes the northern part of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast between the Bulgarian-Romanian border in the north and the valley of the Hadzhiiska River in the south (Figure 1). The western border line of investigated region is determined by the regulation regime in the Low for Black sea coastal area (https://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/documents/2021-07/zakon_za_ustroystvoto_na_chernomorskoto_kraybrezhi_27, 2008) .

In the aspects of morphostructure and depending on the manifestation of modern vertical movements. Kanev (1990) differentiated the Bulgarian Black Sea coast into the following areas: the Dobrudzha Plateau, the Varna Bay (estuary), the Avrensko Plateau, the Kamchya Estuary, the Eminska Mountain and the Burgas Plain. Investigations related with evaluation of the relief and climate conditions are presented by Daneva (1983) and Tishkov (1976).

In landscape aspects, Velchev et al. (2011) singled out the Black Sea region in the Pontic Province, noting that the Black Sea coast has specific differences in terms of landscape types, genera and types.

The specific border that divides the Bulgarian Black Sea coast into north and south in terms of geomorphology and landscape can be drawn along the valley of the Hadzhijska River, south of Eminska Mountain.

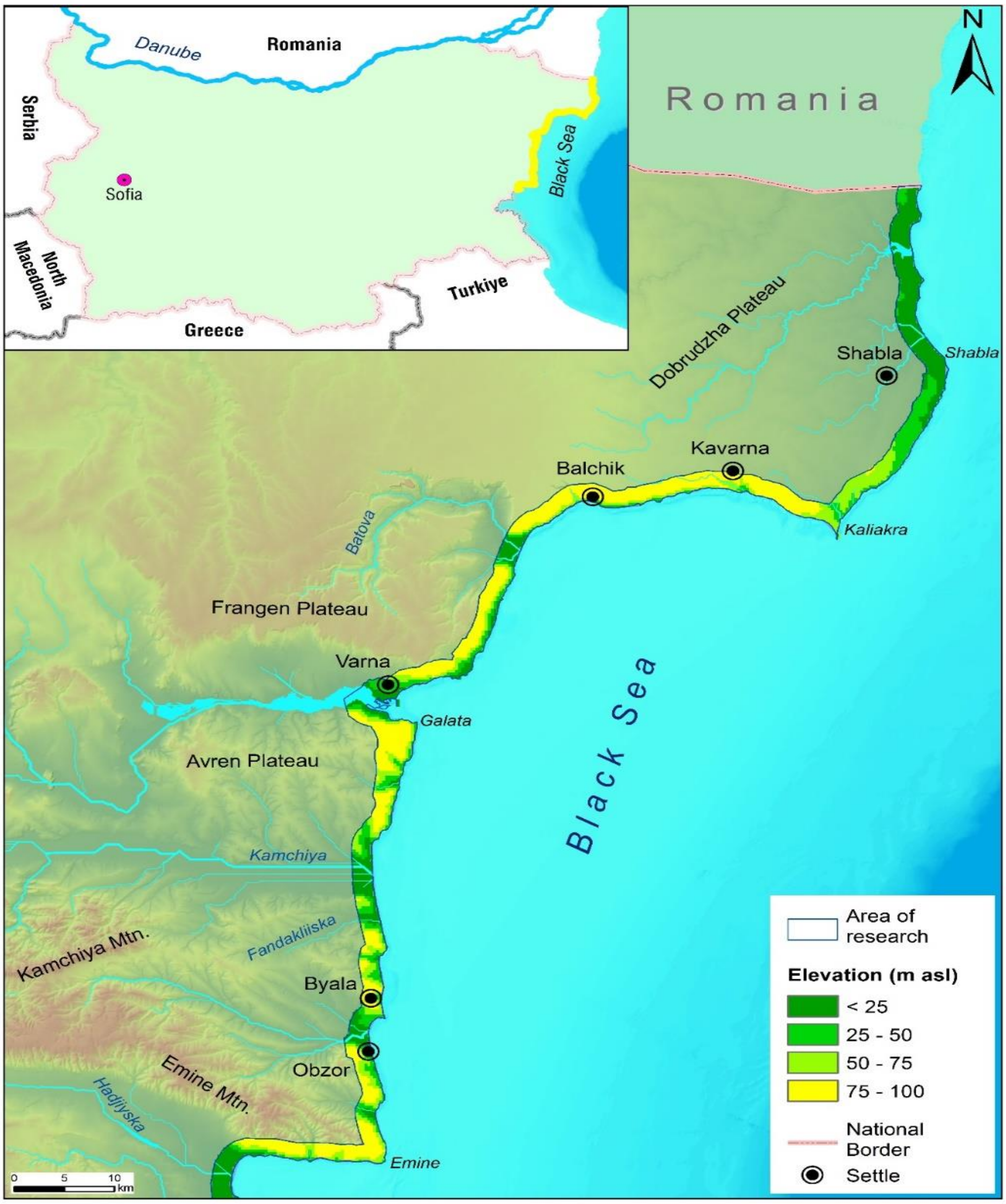

Figure 1 Micrographic model of Northern part of Black sea area in Bulgaria

EVALUATION OF THE NATURE CONDITIONS IN NORTH PART OF BLACK SEA REGION IN BULGARIA

The evaluation of the natural features of the northern part of the Black Sea coast was made on the basis of a complex analysis of the leading natural components.

In aspect of relief, these are the presence of sandy beaches and rock landmarks.

In aspect of climate conditions, the presence of favorable climatic indicators for the development of sea tourism and recreation.

Quality of water resources – marine and freshwater, including mineral springs.

Quality and safety of specific and diverse biodiversity, creating prerequisites for the development of ecological tourism and additional attractions for traditional marine tourism.

The studied region of the northern part of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast from the Bulgarian-Romanian border to the valley of the Hadzhijska River is divided into seventeen parts, which are evaluated according to the five-scale system (Figure 2).

The first part is in the region of the Bulgarian-Romanian border (Cape Kartal) next to Cape Sivriburun and Camping "Cosmos". It includes the Border Beach and, due to its border peripheral character, remains outside the tourism development zone. There is a good potential for development and opportunities to link tourism activities in the Romanian town of Mangalia.

The second part is in the coastal area between Cape Sivriburun and the village of Krapets. It included an extensive beach strip. The Durankulak wetland system with its specific landscape and biological diversity can also be included in the region. There is also the possibility of integrating the open space of the Great Island into the lake, a Neolithic settlement dating from 5300-5250 BC – the oldest stone architecture in Europe.

The third part near the village of Kratsets is relatively smaller given for tourist development, but a good prerequisite is its proximity to the two large beaches in the northern and southern directions.

The fourth part includes the region between the Dobrudzha campsite and Cape Shabla (the easternmost point of Bulgaria). The Shablensko-Ezeretska wetland system and the Shablenska tuzla can be integrated here. Additional favorable conditions for a complex tourist product are also created by the presence of mineral springs with built infrastructure along the eastern shore of Shablensko lake.

The fifth part south from Cape Shabla to Cape Chairburun has a rocky character with unique landscape complexes near the village of Kamen Bryag, including Cape Kaliakra. Here are located the archaeological reserve "Yailata", the Bolata area and the nature reserve "Kaliakra" with steppe plant formations, including part of the sea water area.

The sixth part has very good conditions and includes the region of the city of Kavarna with a developed complex tourist product - marine, spa and cultural-historical. The seventh part is the region south of Cape Chirakman covering a rocky coast with relatively little opportunities for tourist activities, determined as medium.

The eighth part includes the coastal area of the city of Balchik with a developed complex tourist product - marine, spa (Balchishka tuzla) and cultural and historical heritage.

The ninth part is developed south of the town of Balchik and includes more limited possibilities due to the high coasts and poorly developed beaches.

The tenth part is at touristic resort complex "Albena", the mouth of the Batova river to the village of Kranevo. Here the Baltata reserve with its specific longoz plant formations (flooded forests) can be integrated. The potential for tourist activity of this part is very good and has been utilized to the greatest extent with the development of touristic resort complex "Albena".

The eleventh part covers a small section with a steep coastline south of the village of Kraneto.

The twelfth part covers the region up to the town of Varna along the Frangensko plateau. It includes an area with high potential and intensive tourism. Here are the large touristic resort complexes "Golden Sands", "Sunny Day", "St. St. Constantine and Elena", mineral springs near the seashore, rock monasteries, botanical garden, etc.

The thirteenth part is developed south of the city of Varna. It is assigned an average rating due to the development of the Varna port and the high rocky coastal structures.

The fourteenth part is at the mouth of the Kamchya River. It has very good conditions due to its long beach and preserved specific landscape and biological diversity, including longoz forest formations (one of the most presentative in Bulgarian flora).

The fifteenth part includes the regions near the towns of Byala and Obzor where there is a developed tourist product, but the parameters of the natural and cultural-historical features are smaller compared to the highest rated regions.

The sixteenth part includes a region with rocky shores and small beaches south of the town of Obzor to Cape Emine. The nature in the region is preserved with small sand beaches like "Irakli" creates development opportunities for ecological tourism and camping.

The seventeenth part is developed from Cape Emine to the Hadzhijska river valley and covers a region with very good conditions for the development of tourism, which are very well developed. These are the region from touristic resort complex "Elenite", the town of St. Vlas, touristic resort complex "Sunny Beach" to the town of Nessebar.

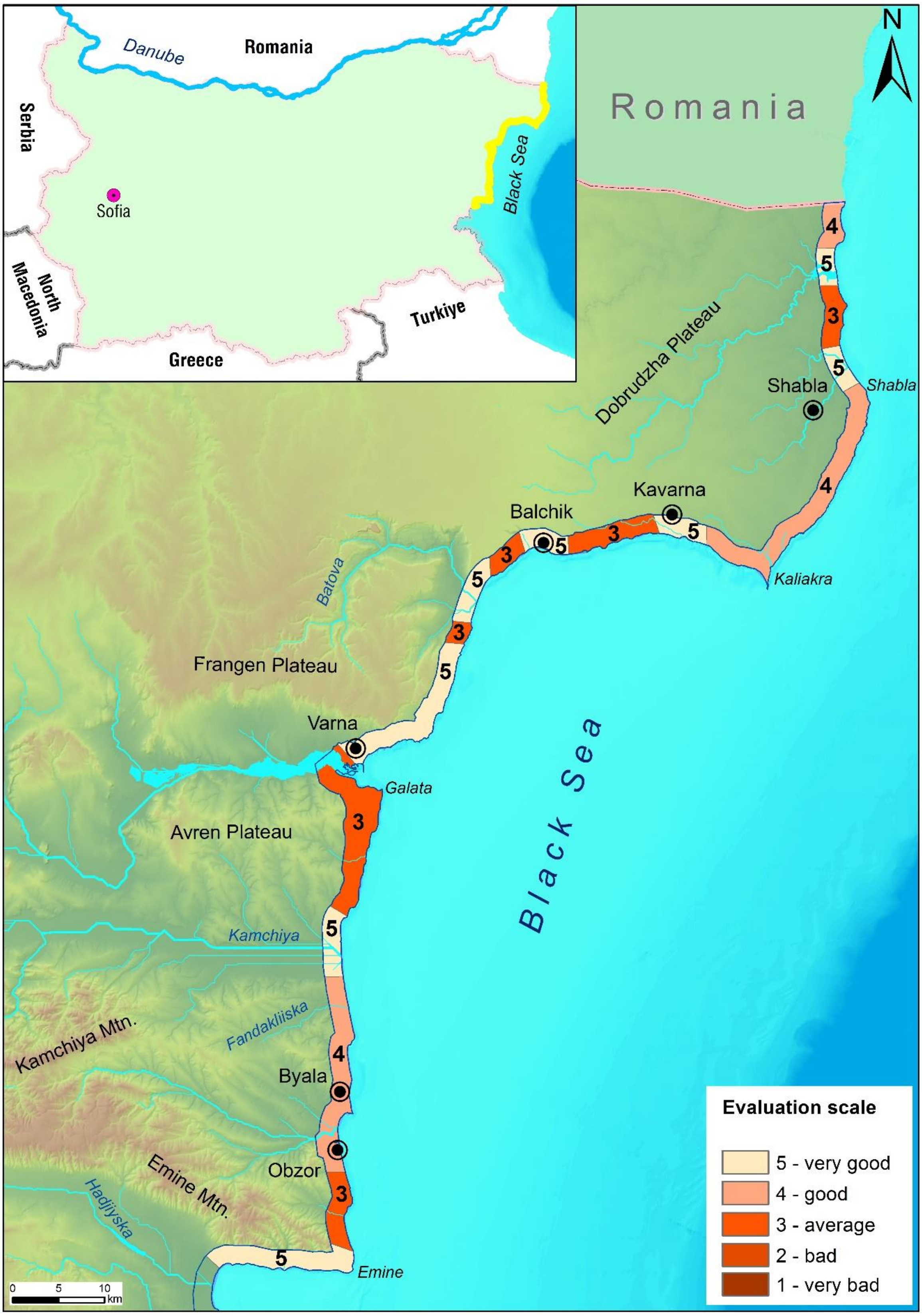

Figure 2 Spatial model with the evaluation scale of the natural touristic potential of North part of Black sea region

CONCLUSIONS

One of the main conclusions of the research shows that in the region of the northern Black Sea coast there are no parts with very bad and bad conditions for the development of tourism, and in particular the leading marine tourism.

The highest indicator are certain regions with developed seaside resorts near the town of Varna and touristic resort complex "Golden Sands", touristic resort complex "Albena", the towns of Balchik and Kavarna, the region between the Hadzhijska River and Cape Emine, The second group of areas are regions with potential opportunities for development such as those near the village of Durankulak and Durankula wetland system, the town of Shabla and Shablensko-Ezertska wetland system and the mouth of the Kamchya River.

One unit lower in the score are certain regions also with developed tourism near the towns of Byala and Obzor, Cape Kaliakra and the village of Kamen Bryag, but the region of the coastal zone north of the village of Durankulak, between Cape Sivriburun and Cape Kartal at the Bulgarian-Romanian border. Here there is a potential opportunity for the development of a cross-border tourist axis to the Romanian resorts near the town of Mangalia.

Average indicators in terms of natural features are certain regions with rocky and hard-to-reach parts of the coastline.

The clear evaluation of the nature potential is key element in the processes of regional development, nature protection and increasing of the life quality in the regions. They can be applying in the development of the regional strategy platforms and decision making.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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BRAZILIAN HOSTING COMPANIES' RESPONSE STRATEGIES AWARDED BY "TRAVELERS' CHOICE 2023" TO NEGATIVE REVIEWS ON TRIPADVISOR

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ABSTRACT: *In the tourism and hospitality sector, online reputation has become a valuable intangible asset, and has come to be considered as one of the main competitive differentials for companies. On the one hand, positive comments can attract new consumers and boost sales, manage negative reviews, and decide whether, when and how to respond to them, it is still a challenging task for companies in this sector. This study aimed to verify how the Brazilian hosting companies that won the "2023 Travelers' Choice" award from Tripadvisor usually respond to negative comments posted by consumers. The qualitative approach research used the thematic content analysis technique for the treatment of data collected on this platform. In total, 212 corporate responses published on the profiles of the 25 best Brazilian hotels were analyzed. It was found that companies tend to respond to most negative comments, and usually present an accommodating and personalized posture, as well as include the promise of corrective action, whether immediate, continuous, or future. The language used in the answers is usually more formal and professional, and companies identify those responsible for this function. Despite the positive practices, some companies still respond to only a few negative comments, contrary to the recommendation of the literature to prioritize the responses to these complaints, especially on platforms with high volume of reviews. It was found, in general, that the investigated companies understand the importance of online reputation management and invest in strategies to deal adequately with negative electronic word-of-mouth.*

KEYWORDS**:** *Negative reviews; Response Management; Reputation; Hotels; Tripadvisor*.

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal relations and consumer practices have changed rapidly with the emergence of the Internet and the development of information and communication technologies. As explained by Morais Nunes (2019), this context contributed to the intensification of access and exchange of information, ideas, knowledge, and opinions among consumers in the virtual environment.

Thus, the evaluations of products and/or services published by customers in digital channels, also called "electronic word-of-mouth" (e-WOM), would help to reduce perceived risks, whether they are the same real ones or not (Kamalul Ariffin, Mohan and Goh, 2018). In

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contrast, the pressure on companies in the tourism and hospitality sector to continuously monitor the e-WOM propagated in social media, virtual communities, travel comment sites, among other online relationship spaces, has increased as Web 2.0 has facilitated the distribution of experiences among customers (Fu, Ju and Hsu, 2015).

By performing a literature systematic review on the strategies of companies' responses to consumer reviews (webcare), Lopes et al. (2023) found that it is essential for organizations to understand how and when they should be engaged in this activity. In turn, Kim and Kim (2019) report that managing e-WOM has become critical to maintaining a positive corporate reputation, being this function strategic for the marketing and sales area in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Webcare was analyzed in different studies identified in several countries. Xie, So and Wang (2017) examined how the management of responses to published comments could affect the financial performance of hotel enterprises. Li, Cui and Peng (2017) evaluated how this same management could contribute to greater consumer engagement. In the study by Liu, Schuckert and Law (2015), the effects of the responses on the company rankings were analyzed. Lee and Song (2010) studied the effects that complaints could have on consumer behavior. In turn, Sparks, So and Bradley (2016) examined how the responses of hosting enterprises affected consumer confidence.

In Brazil, only one research was identified that addressed the management of responses to negative comments. Gondim and Araújo (2020) analyzed how the hosting companies in the city of Natal (RN), with different star ratings, were conducting the management of negative electronic word of mouth (N-e-WOM) responses on the site Booking.com.

From this context, the following research question was raised: *what would be the strategies of responses to negative comments adopted by the best hosting companies in Brazil?*

Every year, the choice of travelers who use the site Tripadvisor to search for information and/or suggestions of destinations, attractions, and tourism companies for planning their trips results in an award that became known as "Travelers' Choice Awards". This award honors hotels that are considered travelers' favorites, considering the reviews published around the world (Tripadvisor.com, 2019).

Thus, the study aimed to verify how the 25 Brazilian hosting companies that won the Tripadvisor 2023 Travelers' Choice award usually respond to negative comments posted by consumers.

The research seeks to bring theoretical and practical contributions from the survey of webcare strategies adopted by hosting means in several Brazilian locations. For this, the methodological procedures adopted in the research are initially described. Continuing, the data collected are presented and the results of the research are discussed considering the theory on the subject. Finally, the main conclusions are discussed.

METHODOLOGY

First, bibliographical research was carried out to identify the publications that addressed the theme "management of corporate responses" (webcare), especially those with a focus on negative comments. The data collection was carried out on the website Tripadvisor in the period between 29 and 31 December 2023. Negative reviews published by consumers were collected, as well as the respective answers given by hotel enterprises, which were available in the profiles of the 25 best hotels in Brazil, considering the 2023 Tripadvisor' Choice Award.

Through the filters available on the site, only negative comments were selected, taking into account those classified as "bad" or "horrible". When the hotel had a number of less than ten negative reviews, all existing ones were collected. In the case of those who had a quantity that exceeded this value, only the ten comments and their most recent responses were collected. In the collection of numerical data, a structured form was adopted as a research instrument.

The study followed a qualitative approach, since this approach was considered as fundamental to unveil the complexity of social phenomena, allowing an in-depth understanding of variables, the relationships between them and the underlying social processes (Roberto Jarry Richardson et al., 2008). For the treatment and analysis of data, the thematic content analysis technique was used, following the method proposed by Bardin (2008).

The categories and subcategories were defined, mainly based on the conceptual model of responses to e-WOM developed by Lopes et al. (2023), with some additions. In summary, the following was analyzed: the frequency of responses (Li, Cui and Peng, 2017); response management (whether they respond to negative, positive or both comments) (Lopes et al., 2023); corporate response scenarios (defensive or accommodative webcare) (Lee and Song, 2010; Lopes et al., 2023); the respondent's voice style (professional or humanized) (Sparks, So and Bradley, 2016); the response adaptation to the comment or evaluator (personalization or adaptation) (Lopes et al., 2023); the respondent's action framework (corrective action already taken, promise of future correction, continuous improvement or not mentioned) (Sparks, So and Bradley, 2016; Gondim and Araújo, 2020); and the source or responsible for the response (general manager, customer relationship manager, team of the enterprise, undefined responsible, two options for respondents or no identification) (Sparks, So and Bradley, 2016; Gondim and Araújo, 2020; Lopes et al., 2023).

For the categorization and treatment of data, automation software was not used, and the analysis was undertaken manually and through "double blind review" by two researchers. The data were presented through tables, allowing a better visualization and organization of the survey data.

RESULTS

Among the 25 best hotel projects in Brazil, according to the award in question, companies are located in Gramado (RS); in Maceió and Maragogi (AL); in Natal (RN); in Foz do Iguaçu (PR); in Aquiraz and Taíba (CE); in Poços de Caldas (MG); in São Paulo, Ilhabela and Dourado (SP); on the island of Camandatuba (BA); in Ipojuca, Porto de Galinhas and Recife (PE); and in Cabo Frio (RJ).

Subsequently, the collection of information about the amount of comments and responses processed a total of 2,046 negative comments, being divided into "bad" and "horrible", in a universe of 115,246 reviews, representing thus a percentage of 1,78% of the total number of reviews that were posted by guests. The low percentage of negative reviews compared to the total number of reviews was confirmed, as expected, since the 25 best hotels in Brazil are being analyzed according to the award from Tripadvisor.

Concerning the response attitudes of the projects analyzed, 17 hotels (68%) usually respond only to a few comments, while five (20%) responded to all reviews regardless of their valence (positive, neutral, or negative). It was also found that two hosting means (8%) responded to all negative comments, but only a few positive and neutral comments. And one company (4%) that did not have negative comments at the time of data collection adopts the strategy of responding to only some positive reviews.

In the data categorization stage, 212 negative comments and their respective responses were analyzed, since 20 companies had more than ten such assessments in their profiles (and this was the limit established by enterprise), two received five unfavorable comments each, and two had only one. It is worth recalling that only one hotel had not received negative comments until the time of the survey, and for this reason the total analyzed by category in this stage of the study was 24 companies (Table 1).

Table 1. Categories and subcategories identified in the responses

Categories	Subcategories	Total	%
Scenarios of corporate responses to negative comments	Defensive webcare	2	8.3%
	Accommodative webcare	15	62.5%
	Predominance of defensive responses	1	4.2%
	Predominance of accommodative responses	6	25.0%
Respondent voice style	Professional voice	16	66.7%
	Human conversational voice	8	33.3%
Adaptation of the response to the comment or the evaluator	Personalized response	19	79.2%
	Adapted response	5	20.8%
Respondent action framework	Promise of future correction	1	4.2%
	Continuous improvement action	3	12.5%
	No corrective action mentioned	1	4.2%
	Future promise, continuous action or corrective action already taken	19	79.1%
Source or Responsible for the answer	General manager or business owner	6	25.0%
	Quality manager	1	4.2%
	Executive assistant	1	4.2%
	Business team/team/family	6	25.0%
	Two options of responsible parties	8	33.3%
	Undefined responsible party (several)	2	8.3%

Source: Research data (2024).

Checking the content of responses collected from the hosting means to negative comments, 15 companies (62.5%) usually adopt an accommodative posture in all their feedbacks. In addition, six other organizations (25%) presented this attitude predominantly, although in some cases they refuted the criticism in a more defensive way. Meanwhile, two (8.3%) presented a defensive posture in all their responses, and one (4.2%) responded this way in most of its reactions to negative comments.

The data analysis showed that the accommodative responses also presented a more formal writing attitude, which Sparks, So and Bradley (2016) designated as "professional voice". This style predominated among the responses of 16 hotel enterprises (66.7%). In contrast, the "humanized voice" style was present in the responses of eight companies analyzed (33.3%). This communication format would have as a particularity to be less formal and cozier (Sparks, So and Bradley, 2016).

The survey also revealed that 19 companies (79.1%) adopted as a predominant standard the personalization of their responses to negative guest reviews. Meanwhile, the other companies (20.8%) adopted a posture of adaptation of their responses.

Regarding the acts after the complaints, 19 hotel companies (79.2%) usually reiterate in their responses some kind of future promise, continuous action or mention any corrective action already carried out. There is, in this case, only one of these reactions, but alternating responses and consistent with the problem detected in each evaluation. Three other enterprises (12.5%) usually report some kind of continuous improvement action in their feedbacks. Moreover, one company adopted as a standard the promise of future correction, and another did not outline any kind of corrective action.

About the responsible for the responses, all the hosting means studied usually mention the position exercised by who manages the online comments. The main respondents were: general managers or owners of the projects (25%); the team of the project (25%), without the definition of a single responsible; and in most situations more than one position exercised this webcare function (33.3%).

Regarding companies that had "two options of responsible" were mentioned: general manager, operations manager, quality manager, assistant general manager, team or customer relationship manager, commercial manager, or marketing manager. In the option "undefined manager" were registered several employees of the same company exercising this function, including: owner, general manager, customer relationship manager, marketing manager, reception manager, commercial manager, customer service department or hosting manager.

DISCUSSION

In relation to the response rate to N-e-WOM and webcare, and considering the classification proposed by Park and Lee (2013), it was found that most of the companies analyzed would be considered "infrequent respondents", that is, they usually react only when they consider necessary. And few can be considered "frequent respondents".

Liu, Schuckert and Law (2015) demonstrated that the practice of responding to online assessments can generate significant benefits for enterprises. Therefore, it is more prudent for companies to respond consistently to N-e-WOM, since previous studies, such as that by Xie, So and Wang (2017), have shown that this attitude could positively affect financial performance.

Concerning the scenarios of corporate responses, the result showed the predominance of an accommodating posture in webcare, which was corroborated by the research conducted by Gondim and Araújo (2020). The study revealed a correlation between the classification of the means of hosting and the response strategy adopted. In the aforementioned study, higher category hotels (4 and 5 stars) showed a greater propensity to adopt an accommodative posture, while establishments with lower rating (2 and 3 stars) presented a prevalence of defensive responses.

As the hosting enterprises analyzed in this research are on the list of the awarded by Tripadvisor as being the best hotels in Brazil in 2023, and the data show that most follow the standard of accommodative webcare, it can be inferred that this posture followed may be contributing to the achievement of positive effects in the general evaluation they maintain.

Thus, this more accommodative attitude in the responses analyzed may be contributing to a good corporate reputation of the investigated companies. This is because, as Lee and Song (2010) clarify, the practice of providing accommodative responses to consumer complaints is directly related to a more positive evaluation of the company. The following response demonstrates this behavior of greater receptivity to negative evaluations by companies:

> "Hello, [guest name]. Thank you very much for your review, your experience is very important. We are flattered that you have chosen the [name of the project]. We would also like to thank you for your comments. This feedback is essential for our continuous improvement. We were happy for the opportunity to have accompanied your stay and know that the other services were satisfactory. We look forward to welcoming you back. Sincerely, Customer Experience Team" [sic].

As presented, only two hosting sites adopted defensive responses to all received criticism or complaints, and one had this stance in most of its feedbacks. The following is an example of a response that follows this more defensive posture:

> "Hello Mr. [guest name]. We appreciate your review as we take the opportunity to clarify some points. The hotel has a parking lot where our messengers can pick up and drop off your vehicle, located in the basement of the building. Whenever our guests make reservations, they are informed on the voucher that if they want to use the garage and want to book a space in advance, they just have to send the message to our Operations Manager [name of employee]. Among the hotels on the waterfront of [name of the city] we are one of the most covered parking spaces. As we talked to [name of the collaborator] by phone, where you acknowledge all the quality service received, we hope to be able to welcome you back and also to reconsider your review about our hotel. Thank you and feel always welcome" [sic].

Analyzing the defensive responses, it was also found that commonly the respondent seeks to convince the client to change their assessment on the platform, given the negative impact that this may have on other potential consumers and/or on the overall evaluation of the company. Another attitude often identified was the invitation to the guest to return to the hotel, giving the opportunity to the company to reverse its previous negative experience.

As Lopes et al. (2023) explain, from the literature review they conducted on webcare, e-WOM management, and especially N-e-WOM, requires personalized, detailed, and timely responses. Although it is preferable to give accommodative responses to maintain a favorable corporate reputation, in some cases, the defensive webcare increases sales when applied to e-WOM that reflects incompatible preferences, unrealistic or occasionally irrational expectations" (Lopes et al., 2023, p. 11).

Regarding the style of voice of the respondent, there was a predominance in the adoption of a more professional writing. However, in the research conducted by Sparks, So and Bradley (2016), guests were more positively inclined to responses that they understood to be a more humanized conversational language. According to these authors, the "professional voice" would represent a more standardized response, following a respectful style, formal, task-oriented and limited in affective content. Whereas the "human voice" would be considered more colloquial, characterized by openness, frankness, or a friendly conversational tone.

Concerning the adaptation of webcare to comments, although most adopt personalization, there were still cases of companies using adapted answers. Although feedbacks were generally more accommodative, such adapted responses were replicated with little (or no) change in the text produced, and directed to all criticism received, without considering its content, or the specific complaints of the customer who posted the negative review. This attitude can convey the feeling of "neglect" by the company regarding the shared feelings or disappointments expressed by its consumers.

As recommended by Lopes et al. (2023), effective webcare should go beyond mere reaction, seeking to solve customers' problems and restore brand trust. Thus, in situations of large volume of e-WOM, companies can prioritize the personalized responses to N-e-WOM, since, in this case, such an attitude could minimize the negative impacts of criticism on corporate reputation.

Regarding the actions taken after the criticism received, most companies opted to present individualized solutions, that is, the measures varied between future promises, continuous improvements or corrections already made. In the study by Sparks, So and Bradley (2016), customers expressed indifference with respect to the time of corrective action, having no relevance if the respective company has already solved the problem, if it is providing the necessary improvements, or if the question will be solved in the future.

However, as Lee and Song (2010) point out, despite the indifference regarding the time given for corrective action, it is relevant that the company clarifies that negative comments are relevant to the improvement of its services. This is because, as discussed, the accommodative responses would cause more timely results in the face of negative situations.

Analyzing the webcare managers, in the hotels studied, there is an effective participation of the general managers or owners of the company in the management of responses to N-e-WOM, being these the only responsible for webcare in six analyzed enterprises. It was also possible to note the delegation of this function, in the rest of the cases, to specialized managers (from the commercial, marketing, quality or relationship sector), as well as the existence of teams focused on managing the experience with customers in some enterprises.

This reflects a greater appreciation of webcare on the assessment site in question by these companies, something that was reinforced by Lopes et al. (2023) as being a desirable attitude, so that feedbacks are personalized and agile, not exceedingly more than 24 hours without response. This is important because, as Liu, Schuckert and Law (2015) have shown, by responding to negative reviews, organizations demonstrate proactivity and commitment to continuous improvement.

CONCLUSIONS

The research showed that the webcare standards predominantly adopted in N-e-WOM cases by the best hosting companies in Brazil, as the award of Tripadvisor 2023, were: to give accommodative answers, whenever possible; use a more professional (formal) voice posture in the construction of the text; customize the feedbacks; present some corrective action (already done, ongoing or future); and inform who was the respondent (identification with name and/or position). Moreover, most of the Brazilian organizations investigated were considered as "infrequent respondents" in general, although they usually respond more regularly to negative comments.

In short, the research showed that the companies analyzed generally adopt a more proactive, accommodative, and personalized posture when they need to respond to negative electronic word of mouth. Therefore, such webcare strategies can be considered as key elements for the success of N-e-WOM responses, and for maintaining a good online reputation, and may be adopted by other hosting companies that pursue the same purpose.

However, it is necessary to recognize the limitations of the research carried out. Although the research has revealed a panorama of the management practices of responses to negative comments of Brazilian hosting companies, its results cannot be generalized to other realities.

This said, it would be interesting to carry out future studies that allow the comparison of the results obtained with groups of companies from other countries (or the world), and/or other categories of accommodation (such as budget hotels, lodging, hostels, etc.). This would allow knowing the different webcare practices adopted, and whether these response patterns were related to the company ratings or even to the types of existing accommodations.

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BEACH TOURISM IN CONDE-PB:
A STUDY ON ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE SENIOR AUDIENCE

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ABSTRACT: *This study aimed to analyze accessibility conditions for senior citizens in restaurants and bars located at the beaches on the south coast of Paraíba, in Conde County. To this end, a checklist was drawn up as a research instrument to verify accessibility in public spaces, especially in food and beverage establishments that serve senior citizens and people with disabilities (PWD). The checklist was drawn up based on the criteria established by ABNT (Brazilian Association of Technical Standards) NBR 9050 of 2020, which presents measures on accessibility and tools for public managers and entrepreneurs. Subsequently, an analysis was carried out of establishments listed in the Registry of Tourist Service Providers (Cadastur) of the Ministry of Tourism, which plays an active role in the region's tourism, as well as in the Brazilian Association of Bars and Restaurants (Abrasel). 27 establishments were identified at the beaches of Jacumã, Tabatinga, Coqueirinho, Tambaba, and Carapibus to assess whether these establishments meet the needs of the senior citizens in terms of accessibility. Thus, through a bibliographical analysis of books, magazines, and scientific articles on seniors, this study is characterized as exploratory and descriptive research, through a quantitative/qualitative analysis carried out through field research in restaurants and bars of the southern coast of Conde-PB, emphasizing cultural tourism and accessibility in the location researched. The results obtained indicate a significant deficiency in public access and in the establishments surveyed, since one of them met 45% of the standards, while three did not meet any of the requirements set out in NBR 9050/2020. Therefore, the research seeks to raise awareness among managers of the food and beverage sectors, as well as public administration, so that they can meet the regional potential and be aware of serving the diverse public, especially the senior citizens. Thus, avoiding tourist, urban, and social neglect.*

KEYWORDS: *Accessibility, Senior Citizens, Restaurants*

INTRODUCTION

Senior citizens have expressed an increasing desire to embrace new habits that provide enriching experiences. In this context, travel has evolved as a significant activity, to make new social connections and explore hospitality services. This phenomenon has a direct impact on a variety of sectors, including restaurants, bars, hotels, and cultural events, which are adjusting to fulfill this new demand.

These practices can have an inclusive denotation of seniors, as they treat them as individuals who belong to the environment since they are present, heard, and valued. It goes

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further a mere dynamic of fun and becomes a tool for senior citizens to perceive different aspects of their personalities, the environment in which they live, how they interact with others, and the world around them (ASHTON, et al. 2015).

It is on this basis that the present research, entitled "Tourism on the beaches in Conde-PB: a study of accessibility for the senior audience", aims to analyze accessibility for senior citizens in restaurants and bars located on the south coast of Paraíba, in Conde County (Paraíba State, Brazil). The beaches in Conde have become popular with tourists, especially senior citizens seeking a welcoming environment and, certainly, special care. Accessibility is an essential component of hospitality and can be noticed in food and beverage establishments, where attention to senior citizens can be differentiated through care and leisure, including moments of fraternization, diverse gastronomic experiences, and adapted environments.

Thus it is essential to note that food and beverage establishments, such as bars and restaurants, must be accessible to the target audience, whether they are seniors or people with disabilities (PWD), which requires the same infrastructure conditions, such as equipment, signage, accessible menus, accessible means of access and exit and access to adapted restrooms. It is therefore crucial that establishments learn how to create a pleasant experience where the absence of these actions compromises customer hospitality.

THE INCLUSION OF SENIOR CITIZENS IN TOURISM AND ACCESSIBILITY

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2022), the number of people aged 60 or over has increased in percentage during the last twelve years, from 2012 to 2022, representing 10.9% of the population, up 57.4% in 2010.

In this scenario, which predicts a progressive increase in the longevity of the population, it is essential to understand how senior citizens experience old age, their concrete reality, in which the maintenance of well-being and quality of life depends on access to material living conditions, such as health services, education, and leisure, the social and emotional relationships they establish with other members of their community, their bonds of affection and with the different social spaces (RIBEIRO; CARVALHO, 2020).

The participation of senior citizens in tourism should be encouraged as it is one of the most complete forms of leisure expression. From the perspective of social tourism, each trip should mean a fertile experience in terms of revitalization, improvement, and human interrelationship (ROZENBERG, 1996).

As a result, the tourism sector has recognized and invested in this segment of seniors as a potential audience for tourism, without the need to develop new destinations, services, and so on, but only adapt some to better meet their needs (BARROS et al., 2022).

However, senior citizens can experience difficulties daily. Simple activities such as crossing a street, walking in a square, sitting on public benches to contemplate the landscape, climbing a ramp, opening a door, reading a signpost can become difficult tasks or often impossible when there is no accessibility (VANZELLA et al. 2021).

This is where the discussion on accessibility comes in and must be remembered: disabled people, senior citizens, and other groups with specific vulnerabilities should receive special attention from the authorities, companies, and tourism professionals (SENA; GONZÁLEZ; ÁVILA, 2007).

According to Gomes and Alves (2023), some standards, such as NBR 9050 (2020), were developed to improve accessibility by adapting places, access to public roadways, and circulation in general, thereby reaching senior citizens, disabled persons, and those with limited mobility. In general, the standard specifies criteria for buildings that advise about locomotion dimensions, visual and tactile alerts, and urban equipment, ensuring equitable access for the divided group.

Thus, some definitions proposed by NBR 9050 (2020):

Accessible: spaces, furniture, urban equipment, buildings, transport, information, and communication, including their systems and technologies or elements that can be reached, operated, used, and experienced by anyone;

Adaptable: space, buildings, furniture, urban equipment, or element whose characteristics can be altered to make it accessible;

Ramp: slope of the floor surface, longitudinal to the direction of walking, with a gradient equal to or greater than 5%;

Accessible route: a continuous, unobstructed, and signposted path that connects the external or internal surroundings of spaces and buildings, and can be used safely and independently by all people, including those with disabilities and reduced mobility. Parking lots, lowered sidewalks, crosswalk lanes, floors, corridors, stairs, and ramps are some examples of accessible routes.

In addition to the NBR 9050 standard, there is the NBR 15.599/2008 standard, which is concerned with communication accessibility, promoting the use of tools aimed at leisure, safety and ensuring the information accessed by the target audience, such as the senior citizens and people with disabilities (PCD). NBR 15.599 stands out for focusing on those with visual and hearing impairments, as well as those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), by showing alternative modes of communication.

Promoting the effective inclusion of these activities requires the involvement of various sectors of society, such as national, state, and municipal government bodies, private organizations, and civil society, because adapting services and products for people with disabilities (PwDs) is a matter of awareness, respect for diversity and social responsibility (SOUZA, 2018).

This allows one to comprehend the competitive advantage applied to tourism sites, as well as the advantages of one nation over another because each country's political-legal system is incorporated into this context. Similarly, applied to the private sector in terms of competition among hotel establishments, tourism companies, and tourist destinations (LEAL et al., 2018).

TOURISM TO THE SOUTH COAST OF CONDE – PB

Tourism in Paraíba state focuses on both natural beauty and cultural experiences. It mainly promotes the beauty of its sea, cliffs, coral reefs, and sands, as well as its gastronomy, cultural traits, and people, their receptivity, local accent, and serenity. The promotion of the state is limited to the coastline strip, primarily focusing on the city of João Pessoa and surrounding towns (OLIVEIRA, 2014).

Thus, the regional promotion or experience already carried out in the state presents the southern coast of Paraíba, specifically in the county of Conde, where the local commerce, urban space, and gastronomy are focused on sun and sea tourism.

To reach the beaches in Conde from João Pessoa, the capital of Paraíba, it is recommended to take the BR-101 highway south. The drive takes about twenty minutes, covering a distance of 20 kilometers. Visitors should follow the roundabout to the right until reaching the town of Conde. From there, take the PB-008, guided by the signs for the beaches they are interested in, such as Jacumã, Carapibus, and Tabatinga, among others.

In general, the Conde coastline is made up of Barra do Gramame, Praia do Amor, Praia do Jacumã, Praia de Carapibus, Praia de Tabatinga, Praia de Coqueirinho and Praia de Tambaba. Each of them has its own boundaries which, when added together, result in 20 kilometers of breathtaking landscapes.

Nóbrega (2022) mentions Coqueirinho Beach as one of the beaches with a lot of activity among visitors and traders, due to the inns, restaurants, and bars that offer buggy rides, local dishes, and of course, environmental leisure, such as cliffs, canyons and crystal-clear waters. As well as Tabatinga Beach, with its fresh and warm water baths, reefs, and corals.

It can be seen that as tourism and all its related structures aim to bring people closer to nature as an attraction, the landscape will change to fulfill the needs of the tourism sector. Natural richness and the landscape, culture, local habits, and the economy itself are progressively being exploited by these actors, the market, and tourism policy (BRITO, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This is a quantitative/qualitative study that includes bibliographical, exploratory and descriptive research, as well as field research. It was based on books, magazines and scientific articles, as well as documentation on the subjects of the senior, cultural tourism, accessibility, and the south coast of Conde-PB. After compiling the references, the second stage was on-site research. At first, a checklist was drawn up with the items to be evaluated. The checklist aimed to meet the given objectives by paying special attention to the participants throughout the research. In this manner, its applicability was analyzed and possible errors were corrected. The checklist was created using specific standards and legislation, including NBR 9050 of 2015 (ABNT, 2015), Statute of the Senior, United Nations Principles for Senior Citizens, Decree No. 5.296 of 2004 (BRAZIL, 2004), Decree No. 5.934 of 2006 (BRAZIL, 2006), Law No. 8.842 of 1994 (BRAZIL, 1994) and Law No. 13.146 of 2015 (BRAZIL, 2015).

1. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Initially, a survey was conducted on the websites of ABRASEL (Brazilian Association of Bars and Restaurants) and CADASTUR (Ministry of Tourism's Registry of Tourist Service Providers), to identify bars and restaurants located in the southern coast of Paraíba, specifically on the County of Conde-PB. As a research tool, a checklist was created and applied, containing accessibility items following the NBR 9050/2020 standards, where 27 criteria were observed, including accessibility at the entrance to the establishment, available parking, access to tables, availability of accessible restrooms, flooring used in the establishments, safety signage, and availability of menus in Braille and with enlarged characters, among other elements that could facilitate the visit and stay of senior visitors in the bars and restaurants that took part in the research. The research instrument was applied to 27 establishments on the south coast of

Paraíba: 12 at Jacumã Beach, 3 at Carapibus Beach, 1 at Tabatinga Beach, 8 at Coqueirinho Beach, and 3 at Tambaba Beach. A total of 27 restaurants were visited and the checklist was followed up by the person in charge of the establishment.

The research was conducted by scholarship holder Idizário Alves Dantas, who began in March 2024 and successfully achieved the project's proposed objectives in August 2024, following the guidelines given by Adriana Brambilla, the lecturer and project coordinator, presenting the deadlines and objectives.

Table 1 shows the results achieved during the visits in increasing percentages, highlighting the 27 food and drink establishments that met the 24 items analyzed in ABNT's NBR 9050 (2020).

Table 1: Percentage of adaptation and accessibility points observed

Criteria	Criteria analysis	Yes (%)
1 nº	Accessible routes include.	70%
2 nº	Non-slip flooring in slippery areas, with different textures and contrasting colors.	70%
3 nº	The menu has bright, easy-to-view colors.	66%
4 nº	Accessible tables with a height between 0.75 m and 0.85 m from the floor.	48%
5 nº	Non-slip and anti-vibration floor	48%
6 nº	Has a directional space with a minimum width of 1.20m	40%
7 nº	Accessible tables are linked to an accessible route	22%
8 nº	They are linked to accessible routes	11%
9 n°	Support bars	7%
10 n°	Has the minimum quantity required by law	7%
11 nº	Accessible restrooms	3%
12 nº	The accessible route includes access to the accessible restroom.	3%
13 nº	Has properly trained staff for this service.	3%
14 nº	The parking spaces have horizontal accessible signs	3%
15 nº	The parking spaces have vertical accessible signs	0%
16 nº	Carpets and doormats are fixed or embedded	0%
17 nº	The menu has text with enlarged characters	0%
18 nº	Menus in Braille	0%
19 nº	Visual alarm at the emergency exit	0%
20 nº	Visual and audible emergency signs on the escape route	0%
21 nº	Hygienic chair available	0%
22 nº	Signage, Braille, and tactile flooring in stairwells	0%
23 n°	Tactile signage and differentiated chrome on the floor	0%
24 nº	Audible alarm at the emergency exit	0%

Source: Survey data, 2024.

Table 2 shows the percentage of standards for restaurants and bars, as well as the beaches of Conde, delimiting the establishments that met the accessibility requirements set out in the checklist. There is one establishment with 45% compliance with the standards, while the other three did not meet any of the accessibility requirements set out in NBR 9050/2020.

Table 2: Ratio among percentage, compliance with the standard, establishment, and beaches

Percentage of the NBR 9050/2020 standard met	Establishments with regulations	Beaches in Conde-PB
45%	01	TABATINGA
41,6%	12	JACUMÃ
29,2%	08	COQUEIRINHO
12,5%	01	TAMBABA
0	03	CARAPIBUS

Source: Survey data, 2024.

Based on this statement, it can be concluded that most of the establishments assessed at the beaches in Conde County have a significant deficiency in compliance with the accessibility standards established by NBR 9050/2020. The presence of only one establishment that met 45% of the requirements indicates that there is a considerable gap in terms of compliance with accessibility guidelines. This suggests the urgent need for interventions and improvements to ensure that all establishments provide an accessible and inclusive environment for all people, regardless of their mobility conditions. Furthermore, the situation highlights the importance of awareness-raising and enforcement actions to promote the effective implementation of accessibility standards in the region.

Table 3 shows the percentage of accessibility in the 27 F & B establishments surveyed on the south coast of Paraíba, considering the area, number of seats, and service capacity by standard 9050/2020. In a group of 14 small establishments, 10 did not meet the space requirements for accessibility, with a score of 28%. The medium-sized group has 8 units, which represents 62% of the space available to receive senior visitors. The large-sized group, with 5 establishments, has 80% accessibility at reception. As a result, the small-sized group needs to intervene on accessibility in their space, by raising awareness and implementing the 9050/2020 incentive standards.

Table 3: Compliance with accessibility standards by size of F&B establishments at the beaches in Conde-PB

Size of the establishment	Number of establishments assessed	Average compliance on accessibility
Small-sized	14	28%
Medium-sized	8	75%
Large-sized	5	80%

Source: Survey data, 2024.

CONCLUSION

The beaches on the south coast of Conde-PB have a high tourist potential, and hospitality services are integrated into the region's physical and cultural aspects. However, as a tourist destination, the region requires essential conditions for the general public, particularly senior visitors and people with disabilities (PWD). These are legal measures that prioritize access for accessibility because even if these individuals are healthy, spaces must be suitable for accessibility, thus avoiding risks that compromise their health and even their tourist performance.

Therefore, the results highlight the need to acquire knowledge about public administration, prompting food and beverage managers to train their staff in serving the senior visitors, as well as in applying the tools established in the standards for establishments.

The lack of planning for accessibility in food and beverage establishments may harm local tourism, alienate senior visitors, and hinder economic and urban progress. For this reason, restaurants and bars must be included in the process of adapting their spaces to ensure accessibility and the well-being of those involved.

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IMPACTS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON TRAVEL AGENCIES: A STUDY BASED ON THE PERCEPTION OF AGENTS

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ABSTRACT: *The travel agency sector has suffered several impacts since its emergence and is facing new challenges with the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence. The research aimed to identify the impacts of artificial intelligence on the agencies sector from the perception of agents. It is a qualitative and exploratory research. For the data collection, we chose to conduct interviews with agents online and used the snowball technique to compose the sample. Ten agents were interviewed. For data treatment, the thematic content analysis technique was used. The results showed that most agents have used one or more AI tools in their daily work, and all agreed that they give more efficiency to the work. Regarding the negative impacts, agents pointed to the concern with data security as the main challenge. None of the interviewees consider themselves threatened to lose their jobs due to the adoption of intelligent systems, contrary to previous studies that point to this possibility. The perception of the future with the implementation of AIs in the agency market was positive, and respondents consider that such tools can strengthen and improve efficiency and productivity in the sector, bringing benefits. The study contributed to a better understanding of the use of AIs in the travel agents' sector, and the information found can help them adapt to this reality in their daily work.*

KEYWORDS**:** *travel agencies; artificial intelligence; impacts; travel agent; intelligent system.*

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) play an important role in various sectors of the economy, and its evolution has made it possible to develop several tools that have become part of the daily life of all individuals. Through these tools, the tourism sector has made progress in improving management, communication, innovation, the ability to provide more efficient services, and promote better experiences for tourists (Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari, 2022).

With the continuous development of technologies, it is undeniable the impact of artificial intelligences (AIs) on people's lives and on organizations in the tourism sector. According to Richard Ernest Bellman (1978), AI would be an automation of activities associated with human thought, focused on decision making and problem solving.

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For Xiang et al. (2022), AI can be understood as an intelligent system (algorithm) capable of acting autonomously, thanks to the processing capacity of a large amount of data (big data), aiming to assist in better decision-making.

The fact is that over the years, we have more and more experiences with AIs, and the application of these technologies in the tourism sector grows progressively (Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari, 2022). AI was created with the objective of optimizing various processes and offering solutions to problems in a faster and more automatic way, and such technologies help in the customization of tourist trips, gradually adding more value to the experiences lived (Grundner and Neuhofer, 2021). An example would be the use of robotic automation tools to improve customer engagement in hotels and restaurants (Doborjeh et al., 2021).

Indeed, AIs can help tourists find more relevant information faster and more accurately, improving the consumer decision process, and provide them with better tourism experiences (Xiang et al., 2022). From this context of facilitation for the obtaining of information by tourists, it was awakened to the question about the possible impacts (positive and negative) that AIs can cause in various segments of the tourism sector.

This study is aimed at travel agencies that represent one of the most traditional segments in the sector, and that deal directly with the offer of products and services to tourists. The question arises: what would be the impacts of AIs on the agencies sector? Thus, the objective is to identify the impacts of AIs, whether positive or negative, on the agency sector, and considering the perspective of travel agents.

Studies have been found that talk about the AIs in tourism, but none specifically studied the impact on travel agencies. Some have researched the impacts on tourists, or even for organizations in other sectors, without dealing with travel agencies specifically. As examples can be mentioned: the study by Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari (2022), which consisted of a bibliographical analysis on the theme 'artificial intelligence in tourism'; the book written by Xiang et al. (2022), in which the authors address the impact of AI on the tourism sector in general; and the literature review developed by Tussyadiah (2020), which identified the themes addressed in the research on AI in tourism.

Thus, the study is justified by the increasing use of AIs (or intelligent systems) in the tourism sector, and the lack of studies that strictly analyze the impacts of these technologies in the travel agency sector. The research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the use of AIs in the sector, and collaborate with the qualification of agents, giving them information that can help them adapt to this reality already present in their work sector.

In addition, the study meets one of the seventeen sustainable development goals set by the United Nations (UN) in the 2030 Agenda, as it is aligned with the eighth goal, which deals with decent work and economic growth. This goal guides the promotion of economic growth that is sustainable, inclusive, and generates opportunities for productive jobs for all (UN, 2023). And by collaborating with the identification of the impacts of AIs in the travel agencies sector, this research can help in reaching the said objective.

The article was structured in five main sections: introduction; methodology; description of the research data; discussion of the results and conclusion, including suggestions for future research.

METHODOLOGY

This research has a qualitative approach and is classified as exploratory. The research universe is made up of travel agents, both from traditional physical agencies and online travel agencies (OTAs). The sample was composed of 10 agents from the city of João Pessoa (Paraíba - Brazil) who participated in the online interviews.

The interviews were conducted through Google Meet videoconference or WhatsApp, considering the availability of each agent. The collection occurred from 5 to 14 October 2023. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. To participate in the survey, travel agents agreed with a Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF), and their responses were anonymous. The interviews had a total workload of 1 hour and 32 minutes hours, with an average of 9 minutes per interviewee.

To reach the interviewees who met the profile of the target audience of the survey, we used the snowball technique. This technique allowed the collection of data with the agents, forming the sample from the indications of the participants themselves (Bockorni and Gomes, 2021).

According to Fontanella, Ricas and Turato (2008), in the qualitative studies, the suspension of the inclusion of new participants in the research is defined by theoretical saturation when the data collected are repeated or become redundant, according to the perception of the researcher, and during the analysis of the answers already obtained. Thus, the interviews were interrupted now when the theoretical saturation was observed.

The structured interview with open questions was chosen. The central questions of the research were formulated to identify: 1) the perception of agents on the traditional role of agencies, and how they see evolving in recent years with the introduction of AIs; 2) if they already use some AI tool in their daily lives, and what they would be; 3) what would be the benefits perceived with the use of AI in the workplace, from the point of view of each interviewee; 4) what would be the challenges and/or concerns that have with the adoption of AI in the agency market; 5) how they see the future of the agency sector and the future of working as a travel agent with the growing influence of AIs; and finally, 6) what changes they expect.

Table 1. Positive and Negative Impacts of AIs.

Analysis Categories	Analytics Subcategories	Authors (Years)
Positive impacts	Greater productivity	Juho Pesonen and Neidhardt (2019)
	Efficiency	Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari (2022)
	Marketing your products and services	Tussyadiah (2020); Huang and Rust (2018); Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari (2022)
	Cost reduction	Juho Pesonen and Neidhardt (2019); Claveria, Monte and Torra (2015)
	More relevant and accurate information	Tussyadiah (2020); Huang and Rust (2018)
	Increases employee job satisfaction	Gretzel (2011)
	General well-being of employees	Gretzel (2011)
	Predictive analysis to make estimates about future demand	Huang and Rust (2018)
	Better tourism management	Huang and Rust (2018)
	Understand the profile of tourist demand	Xiang et al. (2022)
	Financial management in the sector	Buhalis and Leung (2018); Gretzel (2011)
	Personalization of the tourist experience	Claveria, Monte and Torra (2015)
Negative impacts	Replacing human labor with robots	Tussyadiah (2020); Huang and Rust (2018)
	Data security and privacy threats	Tussyadiah (2020); Boyd and Holton (2017); Huang and Rust (2018); Jarrahi (2018); Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018)
	Job loss	Tussyadiah (2020); Boyd and Holton (2017); Huang and Rust (2018); Jarrahi (2018); Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018)
	"Low-tech" job loss	Tussyadiah (2020); Boyd and Holton (2017); Huang and Rust (2018); Jarrahi (2018); Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018)
	Loss of control due to	Boyd and Holton (2017); Huang and Rust (2018); Jarrahi (2018); Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018)

Source: Research data (2024).

For the data treatment, the content analysis technique by themes was used (Bardin, 2008). Thus, for the analysis of data, some subcategories were defined a priori, based on the research raised in the theoretical review, belonging to two categories: 1) positive impacts of the implementation of AIs; and 2) negative impacts of the implementation of AIs is available (Table 1).

RESULTS

In all, ten agents were interviewed, aged between 22 and 50 years old, with experiences in the sector ranging from 1 year and 3 months to 13 years, all working in the city of João Pessoa, capital of Paraíba (Brazil). It was possible to capture both perceptions of agents who have already experienced some changes in the sector, and those who are entering now, and facing the most improved sector and with various technological advances.

Most agents have completed the bachelor's degree in tourism or are still in the process of training in the area. Only one interviewee has no training in the area. This shows that the sample is qualified for the sector, having the necessary training. Another important point is that among the interviewees, three work in their own agencies.

When asked about what would be the traditional role of a travel agent and how it has evolved in recent years with the introduction of AIs, the interviewees stated that the agents would be responsible for intermediating all the services offered by their suppliers to customers, and for the elaboration of travel itineraries. And that after the use of AIs, agents became consultants, which has the same characteristics described above, but with the ability to offer a more personalized follow-up, developing scripts that really work for each client profile, giving a complete advice from the moment of planning, until the post-trip period.

Regarding the use of some AI tool, only one agent reported that he does not use any intelligent system in his work. The others mentioned some tools, the most cited being ChatGPT and Midjourney, as well as other systems that the agencies developed for their employees.

Regarding the tasks and/or day-to-day processes that were most affected by the AIs, agents revealed that it was marketing since its use would facilitate the agencies' performance in this field. This result was corroborated by the research of Tussyadiah (2020); Huang and Rust (2018); Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari (2022). It was observed that the agents who most emphasized this impact were those with own agencies. Some of the following responses from agents prove this contribution of AIs:

> *"The main task that affected was marketing, for sure, without a doubt, because it saves a lot of my brain" [sic].*
>
> *"Sometimes I do not have time to create subtitles, to be creating content, ideas of more creative content and ChatGPT, if you know how to use right, you control, register everything in it [...] explain that is a marketing for travel agency and asks him to make a content, he does" [sic].*

> *"The tasks that were affected by the AIs were, without a doubt, the production of content for social networks" [sic].*

When asked about the benefits of using AIs in agencies, agents reported that they had greater efficiency and agility in customer service, from screening to the assembly of the script. In addition, they saved time and optimized the whole process, being these points also emphasized in the studies of Juho Pesonen and Neidhardt (2019), and Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari (2022).

With the use of tools, another benefit cited was access to information from unknown destinations by agents. This consultation became faster and more practical, directly assisting in the decision-making process by customers, thus increasing and streamlining the sales conversion capacity. The following excerpts illustrate this result:

> *"The main benefit was precisely the saving of time, before we had processes that were more time consuming that demanded more from our head, and today I can focus on what really matters, that is to attend my clients with more attention [...] the AI she replaced the bulk of the thing" [sic].*
>
> *"Before a budget/ service that we took around 40 to 50 minutes, today we can assemble in 3 to 4 minutes" [sic].*

Regarding the negative impacts, two points were raised that reflect specific challenges and concerns. The first relates to data security. The respondents cited that they themselves, and customers, are still afraid about the security of data passed online and even about storage in their systems.

This impact was mentioned by the authors Tussyadiah (2020); Boyd and Holton (2017); Huang and Rust (2018); Jarrahi (2018); Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018). In fact, the AIs do not guarantee 100% security in data transmission and storage. The testimonies presented demonstrate this concern of the agents:

> *"One of the biggest difficulties is still the issue of data security, there are still many people who do not feel comfortable with technologies" [sic].*
>
> *"The concern, like any other profession, is about the dependence of data on Artificial Intelligence, that is, what are these data that algorithms take? Where do they get?" [sic].*

The second point described by respondents was the question that AIs are not available only to agents and are freely accessible to all. That is, customers can access and get the information they need and buy autonomously without going through an agency. However, they stressed that people need to know how to use the AIs correctly, and can filter information, and confirm whether it is correct and up to date.

For the interviewees, this would be a fundamental role played by agents, who are professionals with the experience and training necessary for such service. Thus, the AIs would facilitate access to information, but if used in a wrong way, they can cause problems. The quoted passage reflects this question:

> *"It's a concern when people try to do this (use AI) independently without the curatorship of that travel agent, because they can be fooled by artificial intelligence that responds things in a way not as dependable as it seems" [sic].*

In addition to the question about the autonomy that AIs give people to acquire tourism services independently, there is also a question about the survival of agencies from the emergence of these technologies. In relation to this, the interviewees cited that this concern exists, and that it arose soon with the advent of tools. However, all who have entered this subject, were calm about the question of loss of space in the labor market.

Respondents believe that the AIs will not replace agencies, let alone travel agents. This is because there are and always will be consumer profiles for agencies, and that they have always passed more security to their customers. This perception of the research participants contradicts studies by Tussyadiah (2020); Boyd and Holton (2017); Huang and Rust (2018); Jarrahi (2018); Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018), which described the possible loss of employment in the tourism market in general due to the advances of the AIs.

In the present research, focusing on the perception of travel agents, it was found that they do not believe in this loss of space, but in the improvement and improvement of their field of work. The following testimony reinforces this idea:

> *"With the advent of this tool, I think the discussion that is in vogue within the corporate travel agency world is to talk about it being a tool that can take away the work of the travel agent because it is able to do this automation of processes, soon she would be able to in a while, do the agency and such. I do not believe it. I am a person who goes beyond this understanding of what the profession of travel agent is [...]. It is impossible for artificial intelligence to have this capacity to understand the complexity that involves studies of leisure, recreation, and tourism management" [sic].*

Finally, it was asked about how agents see the future of agencies. It was noticed that everyone has a very promising vision of the market with the implementation of AIs, and they realize that those who know how to adapt and use these tools in their favor will endure in the market.

The perception of agents corroborated with the research by Juho Pesonen and Neidhardt (2019), and Claveria, Monte and Torra (2015) that the AIs help directly in cost reduction and higher productivity; as well as, with that of Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari (2022) about the improvement in efficiency. Some answers illustrate this perception:

> *"Travel agents who know how to adapt will save more time, work, costs and will be able to do more with less, which is the economic principle of all business [...] saving time is the main thing, and time is money" [sic].*
>
> *"I think the travel agencies sector has to see the growing, and now uninterrupted influence of artificial intelligence as an ally, right? How everything within the technological world [...] And I have a positive thought that the sector will know yes, adapt, and extract the best things from this new tool so that the profession lasts" [sic].*

About what they expect from the future, agents emphasized that many tools can be improved, and others can still be created, especially those that are useful to assist them in after-sales. Some emphasized that there is a great demand for the monitoring of services sold, to identify why they have had changes, and which will need adjustments. With this, it is evident that they agree and support the use of AIs in their work scope and identify these tools as great allies.

DISCUSSION

From the study carried out it was possible to know the perception that travel agents have on the negative impacts of AIs in the agency market. It was found that a perceived negative impact in the agency sector counteracted what was mentioned in the research of Tussyadiah (2020); Boyd and Holton (2017); Huang and Rust (2018); Jarrahi (2018); and Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018). In these cited studies, the authors analyzed the adoption of AIs in the tourism market in general, and raised the possible threat that these technologies could represent to existing jobs in the sector.

In the survey, respondents do not see this possibility of job loss in the agency sector and stated that the AIs came to help their work even more. They stated that they use the AIs as means of improving and improving the efficiency of their functions in the sector.

Another negative impact observed was that some of the respondents agree that AIs still do not pass as much confidence in the data security issue. This negative aspect of the AIs was recorded in studies developed by Tussyadiah (2020); Boyd and Holton (2017); Huang and Rust (2018); Jarrahi (2018); and Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018).

Already analyzing the agents' responses about positive impacts, most of them agreed with the increase in productivity thanks to the use of intelligent systems (Juho Pesonen and Neidhardt, 2019). In addition, all respondents reported that the AIs would give greater efficiency to their functions, as pointed out by Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari (2022).

Some of the interviewees cited the help of AIs in dissemination and marketing, something suggested by the authors Juho Pesonen and Neidhardt (2019), Tussyadiah (2020), Huang and Rust (2018), and Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari (2022).

The agents also emphasized the cost reduction that AIs provide, corroborating with the findings of Juho Pesonen and Neidhardt (2019), and Claveria, Monte and Torra (2015).

In addition, all admitted that AIs provide the fastest, safest, and most practical access to relevant information, this being a positive impact already recorded by Tussyadiah (2020), and Huang and Rust (2018).

Another point raised was the ease in sales with the use of AI tools, since the visits, consultancies, payments, and contract signatures can be made online, avoiding the need for the customer to move to the agency. In a world where everything is done instantly, this convenience helps in winning new customers, since they realize that they will have a fast and practical service, but with all the security and help of a specialized travel agent.

CONCLUSIONS

In fact, the AIs are changing the whole world market, and it is no different with the tourism sector. The adoption and implementation of AIs in tourism organizations has been growing intensively, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as many innovative technologies were integrated to help the sector survive this global crisis, for example with robots and autonomous machines for public service in various applications in the tourism sector (Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari, 2022).

It is considered that the agencies were also directly impacted due to this greater adoption of AIs in the sector, needing to adapt and improve themselves, so that they can remain competitive in the tourism market. Analyzing the results of the survey, it was found that travel agencies and agents interviewed are already adapting and acquiring their own AI systems to facilitate the work routine.

In general, it was possible to conclude that the agents who participated in the survey view the adoption and implementation of AIs in the sector as predominantly positive, since such tools help them to achieve greater efficiency, more productivity, and, as highlighted by them, they directly help in the creation of content for marketing in general, and for the dissemination on social networks.

Furthermore, it was found that the intelligent systems are perceived by the interviewees as relevant tools for capturing unknown information, in a much faster and more targeted way, since with the use of AIs, the in a few minutes, they claimed to access the data needed for better service of their customers.

However, it is worth recognizing that the data collected should not be generalized, as they reflect the reality of the agents investigated, and that this is an initial exploratory study. Despite its contribution to the travel agency area, it is suggested that future research be conducted to analyze the impacts of AIs in other sectors of the tourism market, allowing a better understanding of the perception of different actors in the tourism and hospitality segment. Another alternative for future study would be the analysis of such impacts of AIs in travel agencies in different countries, to know the perception in different market contexts.

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JOB SATISFACTION AMONG UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY AT UFPB: IMPACTS ON TEACHING QUALITY

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ABSTRACT: *Studies on job satisfaction always contribute to the continuous improvement of organisational strategies, given the incessant search for alignment between corporate objectives and the objectives of employees. This study sought to answer what factors influence job satisfaction among university professors, specifically those linked to the Department of Tourism and Hospitality (DTH) at the Centre for Communication, Tourism and the Arts (CCTA) at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB). This was an exploratory-descriptive study using bibliographical, field and documentary sources. These findings indicate a promising outlook for job satisfaction, as perceptions of satisfaction factors received more favorable ratings than negative ones. However, further research is needed in this field, with a view to creating policies and practices that promote well-being in the academic environment. In addition, the majority of respondents agreed that satisfaction influences motivation to work, and they perceived that the resources, time and structure meet the current needs of the department to which they are attached.*

KEYWORDS: *Job satisfaction. Tourism and Hospitality. Higher education. University professor.*

INTRODUCTION

Among the main challenges faced by human resource management in organizations, the alignment of employees' personal and professional objectives with the organization's strategic objectives must be constantly pursued. It is up to organizations, whether private or public, to provide opportunities for the development of competencies that enable the professional development of their employees for the execution of current and future activities, through incentive plans created for this purpose.

Higher education organisations are no different. With the firm intention of improving their career performance, university professors find continuing education to be the way to achieve their goals, contributing to their personal and professional satisfaction.

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Undoubtedly, personal development is an essential element for employees and companies to obtain competitive advantages, bringing a series of benefits such as increased job satisfaction for employees and increased productivity and lower unit labour costs for the company (Chiavenato, 2021).

In order to better understand the importance of providing opportunities for career development, which makes it possible to acquire benefits and promotions, Chiavenato (2021) points out that the impacts can be felt: 1) within the work environment, such as bonuses, life insurance, social assistance, production awards and others; 2) outside of work, but within the organisation, such as leisure, cafeteria, canteen, transport; and 3) in the community, such as recreation, social, cultural and community activities, among others.

In Brazil, there are more than 600 thousand federal civil servants distributed throughout the country (National People Development Plan, 2023), which suggests the need to provide training and skills development actions that contribute to improving the efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness of the services provided, so that the pre-established government objectives can be achieved. Thus, the National People Development Plan (PNDP) has emerged as a tool that enables continuing training and helps to align the objectives of civil servants with those of the public bodies to which they are linked.

In addition, the PNDP provides a main instrument for fulfilling this objective: the People Development Plan (PDP), formulated annually by each government organisation according to the needs of its internal public, in order to understand what adjustments the plan should make to optimise resources, organise priorities and fulfil the organisation's objective (Janeilza, 2024).

Chiavenato (2021) points out that the origin of social benefits has a relatively recent history, having arisen from the recognition of corporate social responsibility, contributing to the retention of talent and reducing employee turnover, especially those who were looking for appreciation. Nowadays, designed social benefits are to prevent physical, mental and social conditions.

In this way, this study sought to answer what factors influence the job satisfaction of university lecturers, specifically those linked to the Department of Tourism and Hospitality (DTH) at the Centre for Communication, Tourism and the Arts (CCTA) at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), and how this affects their performance in the classroom. To this end, the aim of this study was to identify the job satisfaction factors of these professionals.

Consuni Resolution 36/2013 created the Department of Tourism and Hospitality (DTH), which dismembered the Department of Tourism from the Department of Communication and Tourism (Decomtur), in conjunction with Consepe Resolution 32/2013, which relocated the Hospitality programme to the Department of Tourism and Hospitality. Therefore, on 27 November 2013, the DTH began offering bachelor's degrees in Tourism and Hospitality, linked to the Centre for Communication, Tourism and the Arts.

The Department of Tourism and Hospitality currently has 22 teaching staff and two administrative staff, and this study is aimed at the teaching staff.

Satisfaction studies mainly aim to understand how stakeholders (internal and external) feel about the product (goods or services) or the work environment, allowing for course correction and consequently, in the specific case of this study, improvement in service provision.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological procedures used to achieve the objective proposed for this study included bibliographical, field and documentary research. This is exploratory-descriptive research with a quantitative-qualitative approach.

In order to obtain data and information, the research instrument used was a questionnaire made up of 21 objective questions, drawn up online using the Google Forms application. The answers were received through the application itself and made available for analysis using Google Sheets integrated with Google Forms, which were then distributed in graphs on Canva.

The research sample was obtained by carrying out a census, and the survey instrument was sent to all 22 teachers linked to the DTH, defined as the research subjects, 21 of whom returned the questionnaire.

The script for the survey instrument was defined on the basis of Chiavenato (2021), allowing the topics of the sections to be separated appropriately, based on social benefits, the exercise of work and organisation outside of work.

In addition, the survey instrument used the Likert scale, a methodology recommended in satisfaction surveys, as well as the various contributions of da Costa Júnior et al. (2024) on the adaptations of the application of this tool.

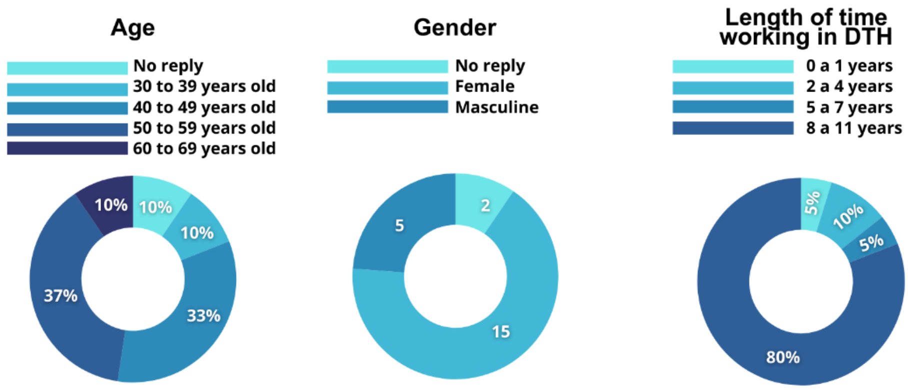
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The satisfaction survey makes it possible, among other things, to identify situations that require the organisation's attention in terms of correcting course, guiding actions, improving processes and redefining strategies, especially with regard to planning training and development actions, providing employees with the opportunity to grow professionally.

Therefore, the research initially sought to ascertain information about the training of the DTH teachers, as follows: one teacher has a specialist degree in Methodological Foundations (UFPB), two teachers have a master's degree, but have a doctorate in progress - one at the University of Aveiro (Portugal) and the other at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (Tourism). Nineteen have a PhD, two of whom have done post-doctoral work.

The survey instrument asked questions about age, gender and length of time working in the Department of Tourism and Hospitality. The results (Figure 1) showed that the majority of teachers are over 40 years old, with 33% of teachers aged between 40 and 49 and 37% aged between 50 and 59. If we add the two age groups together, in other words, those aged between 40 and 59, we find that 70% of DTH teachers are in this age group.

Figure 1



Source: Research by the authors, 2024.

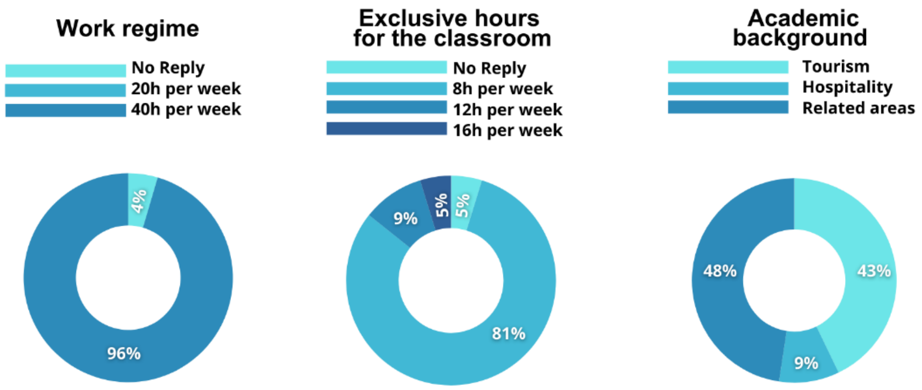
With regard to gender identity, 15 respondents identified as female, while 5 respondents declared that they identified as male. Only two respondents abstained from answering this question.

When asked how long they had been working, 80% of the respondents said they had been part of the DTH for between 8 and 11 years. The documentary research revealed that of the total number of respondents, 70% were already part of the teaching staff at DecomTur/UFPB and joined the DTH when it was created in 2013. Another curious fact found in the documentary research is that 60% of the respondents were students at the Federal University of Paraíba.

Documentary research into working arrangements revealed that 100% of the teachers at the DTH work under the Exclusive Dedication (ED) regime, with a 40-hour workweek. The main characteristic of this regime is that it prevents them from carrying out any other paid activities, whether public or private, although there are some exceptions to this rule, as long as their schedules are compatible.

The field research (Figure 2) revealed that 81% of teachers spend eight hours a week in the classroom (equivalent to two classes), while 9% spend 12 hours a week (equivalent to three classes), 5% spend 16 hours a week, and a further 5% did not answer.

Figure 2



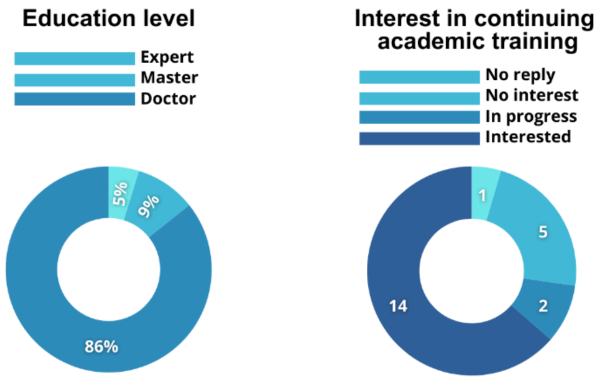
Source: Research by the authors, 2024.

Consepe/UFPB Resolution no. 37/99 establishes in Art. 2, § 3, that an equal number of hours will be set aside for preparing lessons and attending to students, when the activity is undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. Therefore, a teacher with two classes, which is equivalent to eight hours of teaching, will have a teaching load of 16 hours, and the weekly workload will be complemented by research and extension activities, as well as administrative activities (Direction, Headship, Coordination, and Counselling).

According to the documentary research, of the 19 doctors linked to the DTH, four have a PhD in Tourism (UFRN); two have a PhD in Development and Environment (UFPB); one has a PhD in Natural Resources (UFCG); one has a PhD in Environment and Society (Unicamp); three have a PhD in Administration (UFMG, UFPE and UFPB); one has a PhD in Culture and Society (UFBA); one has a PhD in Political Sociology (UFSC); one has a PhD in Cultural Studies (University of Aveiro - Portugal); one has a PhD in Agricultural Science, Technology and Innovation (UFRRJ); one has a PhD in Humanities and Arts (University of Rosario - Argentina); one has a PhD in Geography (UECE); one has a PhD in Letters (UFPB); one has a PhD in Communication Science (UVRS).

With these results (Figure 3), it was possible to infer that only 20% of the teachers continued their training in tourism, while 80% obtained a doctorate in related areas. It should be noted that the documentary research showed that 48% of the teachers obtained their undergraduate degrees as bachelors in Tourism and Hospitality, while 52% of the teachers had basic degrees in related areas.

Figure 3

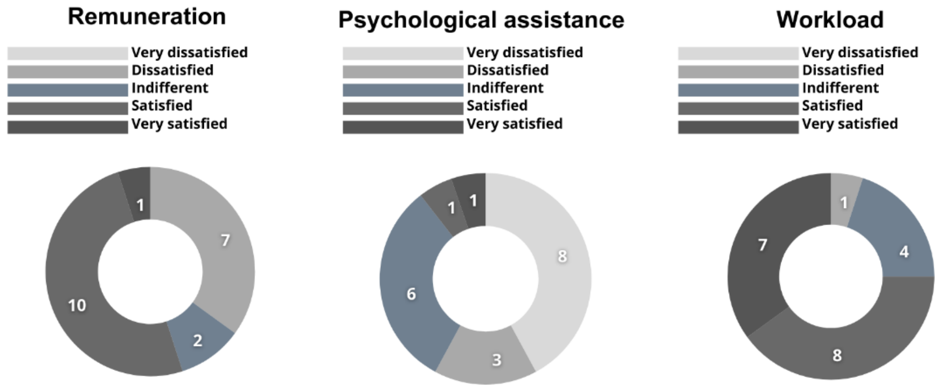


Source: Research by the authors, 2024.

Regarding their interest in continuing their training, according to information taken from the PDP/UFPB 2024, the teachers declared an interest in taking part in academic events as an opportunity to discuss ideas and share knowledge, as well as taking part in short and medium-term training activities, including post-doctoral programmes.

The survey also sought to identify satisfaction factors related to remuneration, psychological assistance and workload (Figure 4). Thus,it was found that one lecturer is very satisfied with remuneration, seven are dissatisfied, two are indifferent and 10 are satisfied with their perceived remuneration.

Figure 4



Source: Research by the authors, 2024.

Discussions about satisfaction with pay are always sensitive, even neuralgic, given that professional categories will always be looking for improvements in pay because it directly affects their purchasing power.

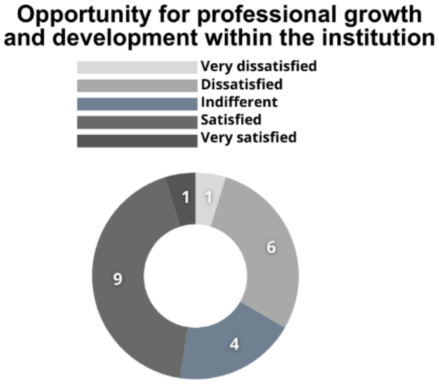
When asked about the psychological assistance offered by the institution, eight teachers were very dissatisfied, six were dissatisfied, three were indifferent, one was satisfied and one was very satisfied. Only one professor did not answer this question.

It should be noted that, although some of the institution's civil servants, including teachers and administrative technicians, are not aware of it, the Coordination of Quality of Life, Health and Safety at Work (CQV), which is linked to the Office of the Pro-Rector for Personnel Management (Progep) and is located in the Rectory building, has the main objective of promoting actions to develop the quality of life, health and safety of the institution's employees (UFPB, 2024).

In addition, in relation to the workload, 15 professors declared themselves satisfied or very satisfied. While four felt indifferent, one was dissatisfied and another refrained from answering.

Regarding the opportunity for professional growth and development at the institution (Figure 05), one teacher said he was very satisfied; nine said they were satisfied; four said they were indifferent; six were dissatisfied and one said he was very dissatisfied. It should be noted that the implementation of the People Development Plan at UFPB has made it possible to programme training and development actions, resulting in the opportunity for professional growth in accordance with the institution's Career Plan.

Figure 5

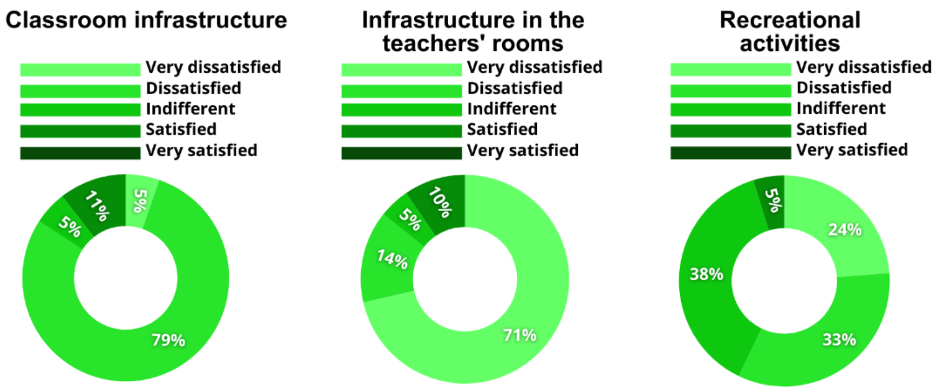


Source: Research by the authors, 2024.

The survey also looked at the teachers' perception of satisfaction with the infrastructure of the classrooms (Figure 06). An average of 79% were satisfied with the infrastructure of the classrooms, while the average assessment of the teachers' room was 71% very dissatisfied. With regard to recreational activities, 24% of teachers were very dissatisfied, 33% were dissatisfied, 38% were indifferent to this variable and 5% were satisfied.

Although the so-called get-togethers usually organised by the professional associations are quite frequent, access to these events is exclusive to members, including at the recreational centres set up for this purpose.

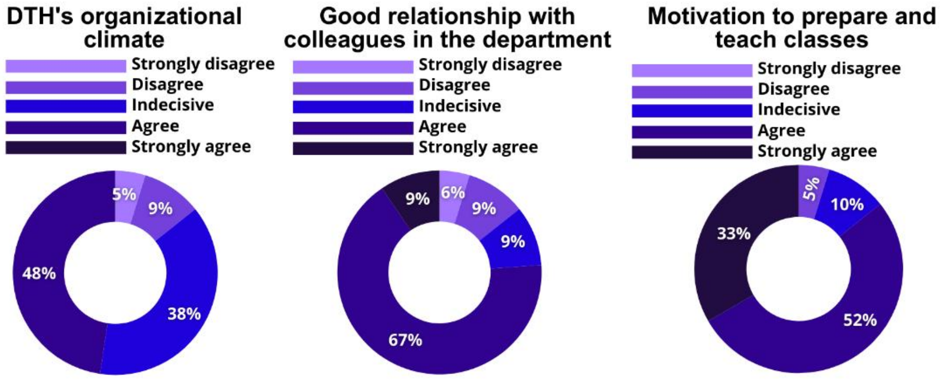
Figure 6



Source: Research by the authors, 2024.

With regard to the perception of satisfaction in the work environment (Figure 7), the results show that 48% of professors replied that the organisational climate is good; 38% were indecisive to this variable; 9% disagree that there is a good organisational climate and 5% strongly disagree. Although the organisational climate varies, the interpersonal relationship with colleagues in the department shows that 67% agree with the good relationship between colleagues and 9% strongly agree with the statement. In addition, the motivation to prepare and teach classes was rated positively by 86% of the respondents.

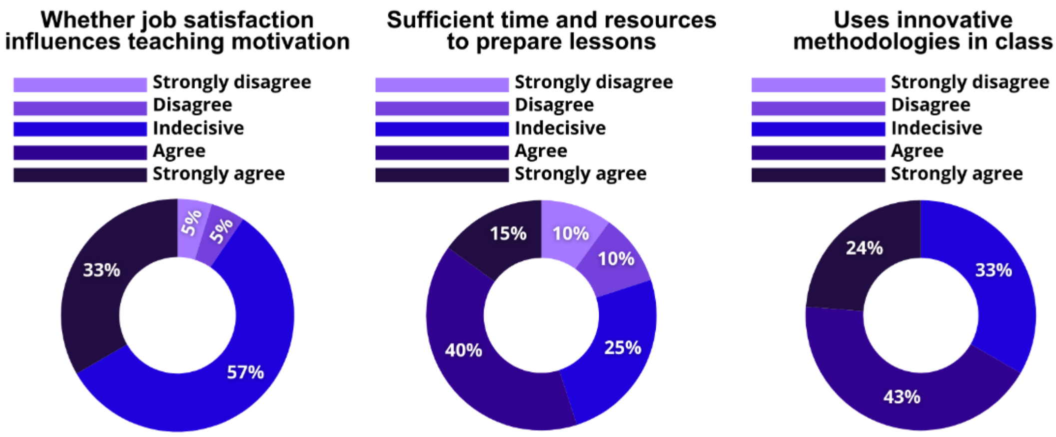
Figure 7



Source: Research by the authors, 2024.

With regard to motivational factors, 90% of the respondents said that satisfaction influences their motivation to teach (Figure 8), while 5% disagreed and the other 5% strongly disagreed with this statement. When asked about having enough time and resources to prepare lessons, the results showed that 15% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement; 40% agreed; 25% were undecided and 20% of teachers were dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied with this variable. Only one teacher abstained from answering.

Figure 8



Source: Research by the authors, 2024.

Regarding the use of innovative (active) methodologies, 33% of those surveyed said they were indifferent; 43% agreed with the use and 24% strongly agreed with using active methodologies.

It is worth emphasising that active learning encourages students to study by listening, talking, asking, discussing, doing and teaching, promoting greater interaction in teaching and learning (Barbosa; Moura, 2013), which should become a constant practice in teaching.

Researchers should always conduct research into job satisfaction to identify the specific difficulties that employees face in their interpersonal relationships, which can help increase motivation within the corporate environment.

CONCLUSIONS

This study presented the results of a survey on job satisfaction among teachers in the Department of Tourism and Hospitality at the Centre for Communication, Tourism and the Arts at the Federal University of Paraíba. These findings indicate a promising outlook for job satisfaction, as perceptions of satisfaction factors received more favorable ratings than negative ones.

Although the average workload dedicated to the classroom is sixteen hours, other research, extension and administrative activities complement the 40 hours a week of exclusive dedication of these professionals.

According to Maciel and Rodríguez (2024), it is expected that at the end of the survey of university professors at a public institution, the results will show that salary factors and promotions have a negative impact on the job satisfaction factor, as well as the relationship with the manager and co-workers being mostly related to higher levels of satisfaction.

The positive correlations found between job satisfaction and certain negative aspects indicate the need for further research in this field, with a view to creating policies and practices that promote well-being in the academic environment. In addition, the majority of respondents agreed that satisfaction influences motivation to work, and they perceived that the resources, time and structure meet the current needs of the department to which they are attached.

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CHANGES IN THE CLIMATE ATTRACTIVITY FOR TOURISM ALONG THE ROMANIAN-BULGARIAN NATURAL BORDER DANUBE

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Abstract: *In the Romanian-Bulgarian border area, tourism is one of the important directions of socio-economic development, benefiting from direct funding but also being a secondary beneficiary of other development directions, like enhanced mobility or reduced air pollution. Tourism may also be seen as a viable solution to the challenges related to climate change in this region, provided that sustainable development paths are implemented. In this context, it is of interest to assess how the climate conditions suitable for outdoor tourism may change in the context of climate change. We approach this issue by using information on the Holiday Climate Index (HCI) in the 'Climate suitability indicators for tourism from 1970 to 2100 over Europe derived from climate projections' dataset available from Copernicus Climate Change service. The focus of the analysis is on the near-future (2021-2040) period in the context of three climate change scenarios (RCP2.6, RCP4.5 and RCP8.5). The results indicate a general increase in the monthly number of days with good conditions for outdoor activities (HCI>70) in all scenarios, particularly with almost 3 days in limited areas in the RCP4.5 scenario, supporting tourism as a relevant development direction in the region.*

Keywords: *tourism, climate change, Danube, cross-border, climate resources*

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural exchange, learning from different visions of life, a better understanding of human history and environment evolution but also stronger local and national economies, working opportunities, and socio-economic development are just some of the outcomes associated with tourism seen as 'a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes' (Glossary of tourism terms | UNWTO, no date). Consequently, tourism has an important contribution to national GDP for many countries and, for economies with a strong tourism industry, this proved to be a factor of resilience in relation to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic period (Navigating Global Divergences, 2023). In particular, for Bulgaria and Romania, in 2019, this contribution reached about 10% in Bulgaria (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024) and about 3% in Romania (Iftimoaei, Gabor and Baciu, 2023), both being significantly affected by the COVID pandemic but recovering in the last years (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024).

Tourism between Romania and Bulgaria has a long history and represents an important aspect of the economy and socio-economic exchanges. The sectoral data from the National Institute of Statistics in the two countries (Romania, National Institute of Statistics, 2024) (Republic of Bulgaria, National Institute of Statistics, 2024) shows that at national level the tourism flux between Romania and Bulgaria is significant and increasing over time; the first year of the COVID pandemic period (2020) is marked by a sudden decrease (e.g. half the arrivals of Romanian tourists in Bulgaria in 2020), after which a slow recovery may be seen from the Romanian statistical data, the corresponding data for Bulgaria not being available (Fig. 1).

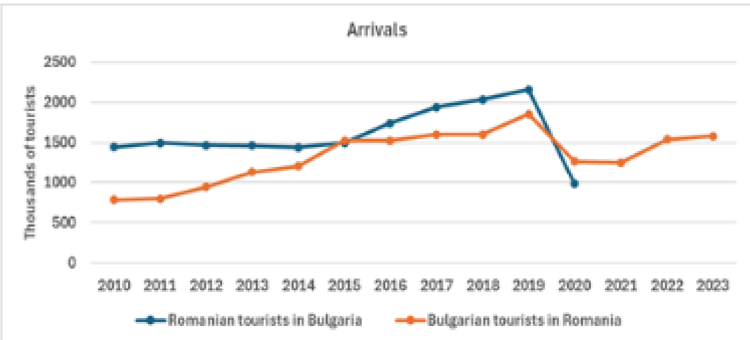


Figure 1. Arrivals of Romanian tourists in Bulgaria (blue line) and of Bulgarian tourists in Romania (orange line) as available from [5] (period 2010-2020) and [6] (period 2010-2023) respectively.

The area of study regards the cross-border region along the Romanian-Bulgarian natural border Danube. It comprises 7 NUTS3 regions (counties) in Romania (Mehedinti, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Calarasi, Constanta) and 8 NUTS3 regions in Bulgaria (Vidin, Montana, Vratsa, Pleven, Veliko Tarnovo, Ruse, Silistra, Dobrich) (Fig.2). Some of these regions include specific types of tourism, like for example beach tourism in Constanta (Romania) and Dobrich (Bulgaria). The tourism flux at the county (NUTS3) level, as expressed by the number of tourist overnights, although not uniformly distributed among the NUTS3 areas in the same country (Fig. 2), still represents a significant socio-economic and cultural facet of the local communities. As expected, the counties at the seaside present the most intense tourism flux, with the largest annual numbers of tourists overnight in both countries. This is also reflected in the revenue from overnights in accommodation units in the NUTS3 regions considered, as available for Bulgaria, where the revenue in the Dobrich area is up to 3 times higher than in the other NUTS3 regions considered (Romania, National Institute of Statistics, 2024).

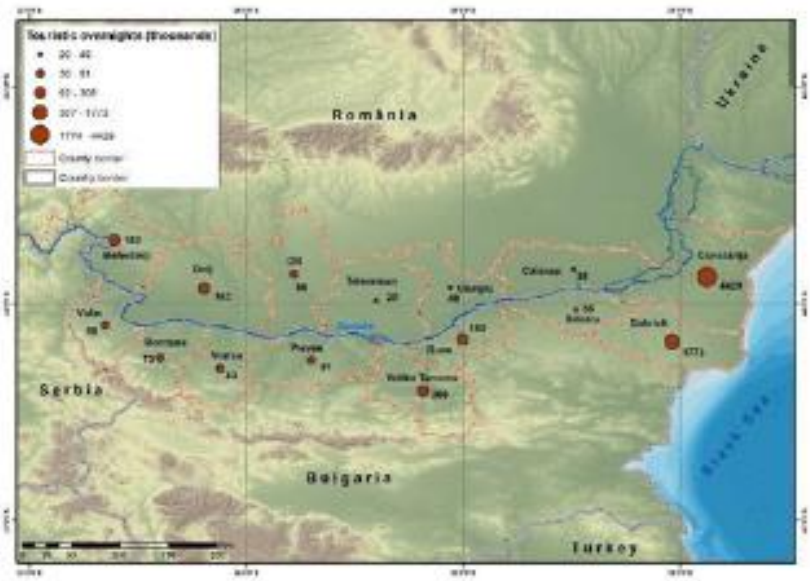


Figure 2. The study area showing the NUTS3 regions in Romania and Bulgaria. The numbers in each NUTS3 region indicate the mean annual number of tourist overnights (expressed in thousands) between 2012-2023 for each NUTS3 region.

The impact of COVID-related restrictions is easily seen in the time-series of touristic overnights for most NUTS3 areas selected (Fig. 3). It is worth noting that in Romania, in 5 out of 7 counties considered, the minimum annual number of overnights was recorded in 2020, while in Bulgaria, 4 out of 8 NUTS3 regions presented the minimum in 2020 and one (Pleven) in 2021, most probably as a consequence of the pandemic period too.

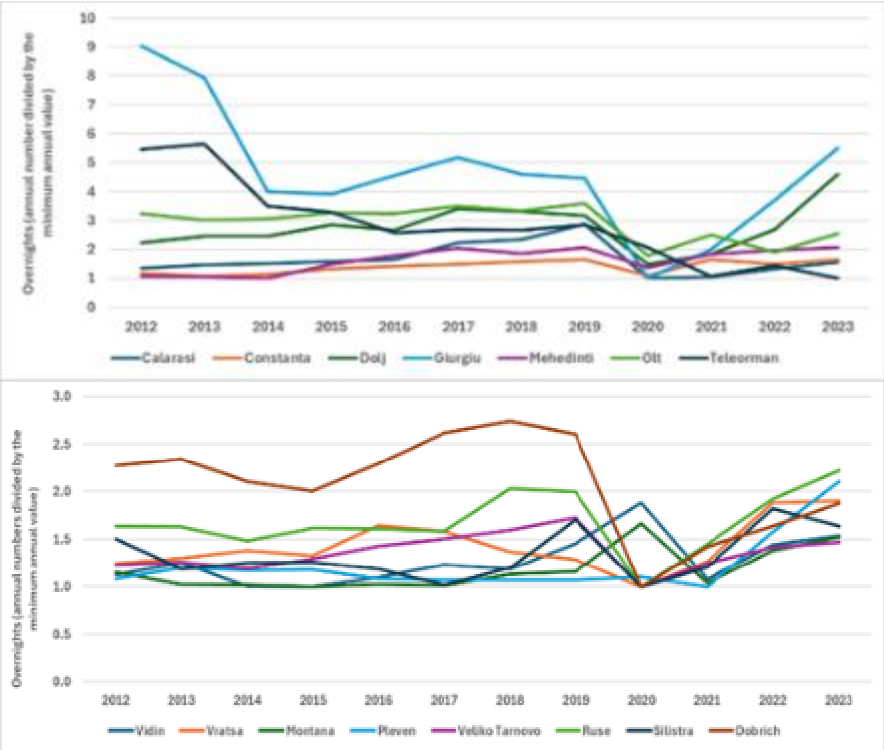


Figure 3. Time-series of the annual number of overnights, divided by the minimum value in each series, for the period 2012-2023, for (a) Romanian NUTS3 regions and (b) Bulgarian NUTS3 regions in the study area. Data source: [5], [6].

During the last decade (2012-2023) the increasing trend in tourism flux was associated with a similar trend in the accommodation establishments in most NUTS3 regions considered. For example, the ratio between the number of accommodation units in 2023 and 2012 varies between 1.03 (Vidin) and 1.71 (Pleven) in Bulgarian counties (Romania, National Institute of Statistics, 2024) and between 1.24 (Dolj) and 4.05 (Mehedinti) in the Romanian counties located in the study area (Republic of Bulgaria, National Institute of Statistics, 2024). The increasing number of accommodation units is expected to be associated with more local employment opportunities and, thus, with the strengthening of the local economy.

The Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border region presents a great interest for other scientific areas, too, due to its importance in the cooperation and socio-economic life of this region. Air pollution monitoring is one of the hot research topics in the cross border area because it affects human health and biodiversity. The studies target various aspects of air pollution in this region, as for example air quality and monitoring networks (Minkova, Zheleva and Filipova, 2023) (Udristioiu, Velea and Motisan, 2023), turbulent diffusion of pollutants (Stefanova et al., 2018), forecasting air pollution episodes (Mghouchi, Udristioiu and Yildizhan, 2024) (Mghouchi et al., 2024). The impact of summer heat extremes in the region on human health is another direction of interest for researchers (Mocanu et al., 2021). Moreover, both countries are interested in collaborating, trying to improve their citizens' life quality and using the solar (Dudáš et al., 2024) and wind (Onea, Rusu and Rusu, 2021) energy potential of both Romania and Bulgaria.

The importance of tourism as a development solution for local communities in the Romania-Bulgaria cross-border area has been recognised through funding opportunities from both national (e.g., national strategies in the tourism sector) and European sources and, in particular by the Interreg Ro-BG program funded through the European Regional Development Fund (Interreg VI a RO-BG - General Data, 2024). Several projects with a direct impact on tourism in the area were financed, like 'E-bike NET' (E-bike Net (ROBG-1), 2016), '6 Reasons to Visit Mehedinti – Vidin cross-border Area' (6 reasons to visit Mehedinti – Vidin Cross-border Area EMS 5, 2016), 'Cross-border Sustainable Employment Mix-Centres in the fields of information technologies, tourism and agriculture' (SEM Centres (ROBG-144), 2016) etc. Other current or forthcoming opportunities like those focusing on enhancing mobility or reduction of air pollution in the cross-border area (Interreg VI a RO-BG - General Data, 2024) are expected to have indirect positive impacts on tourism and, in general, on local economic development. In the framework of some EU projects (Erasmus+, Interregio Romania Bulgaria) focusing on education, students, academics and graduates received joint training, visited economic entities from the cross-border areas, visited a nuclear plant (Kozlodui), participated in job fairs, workshops with employers' participation and conferences organised by the universities and NGOs involved in the implemented projects (e.g. project "A chance for development" (Media, 2017)), travelled to see historical and cultural sites, facilitating tourism in this area.

While the infrastructure development serving the tourism industry (accommodation units, restaurants, transport infrastructure, etc.) is essential for tourism development, climate conditions represent one of the most important natural assets for tourism. Many of the tourism forms in the Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border region are strongly related to outdoor activities (e.g., beach tourism, trekking, and visiting monuments). In this context, it is of interest to investigate how the attractivity or suitability of climate conditions for these types of activities may change in the context of climate change in the area of interest. To this end, the study makes use of the Holiday Climate Index (Scott et al., 2016) as provided by Copernicus Climate Data Store, focusing on the analysis of changes in the number of days with good conditions for outdoor tourism in the context of three climate change scenarios. The analysis targets the entire region of interest and, with more details, four selected touristic locations within this region

(Vidin and Svishtov in Bulgaria, Corabia and Calarasi in Romania). Discussions and conclusions are presented, including the study findings and their practical implications, as well as limitations of the study and planned future research directions.

DATA AND METHODS

The assessment of climate attractivity for tourism is performed with the use of the Holiday Climate Index [(Scott et al., 2016). This index combines information on several weather aspects (thermal comfort, aesthetic, and physical aspects) to characterize how agreeable and/or suitable is the weather for light outdoor touristic activities (e.g., walks). Initially developed for urban tourism, the index was shown to be fit also for rural tourism (Velea et al., 2022) and a version of this index was optimized for beach tourism too (Rutty et al., 2020). The index incorporates data on 5 meteorological parameters (air temperature, relative humidity, cloud cover, precipitation, wind speed). For its interpretation, a 10-classes rating system describes various degrees of climate attractivity/suitability for tourism (Table 1, columns 1 and 2).

Table 1. HCI rating system

HCI values	Climate suitability classes [21]	Categories used in the study [24]
90 ÷ 100	Ideal	GOOD
80 ÷ 89	Excellent	
70 ÷ 79	Very good	
60 ÷ 69	Good	FAIR
50 ÷ 59	Acceptable	
40 ÷ 49	Marginal	UNFAVORABLE
20 ÷ 39	Unacceptable	
0 ÷ 19	Dangerous	

For the purpose of this study, the HCI information is provided by the 'Climate suitability indicators for tourism from 1970 to 2100 over Europe derived from climate projections' dataset available from Copernicus Climate Change service (Copernicus Climate Data Store, 2024), where the climate attractivity or suitability is expressed through 3 categories: good days (HCI >70), fair days (HCI between 50 and 70) and unfair days (HCI < 50) (Table 1, column3). The dataset provides daily and monthly HCI data at about 11 km spatial resolution based on numerical simulations of up to six models. The simulations are performed for the present climate (1986-2005) (labelled as 'historical' or 'HIST') and for the future (2021-2100). The latter are performed in the context of three climate change scenarios related to greenhouse gas concentrations and referred to as Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) climate scenarios: RCP2.6 (which assumes that emissions start declining beyond 2020), RCP4.5 (emissions start declining beyond 2040) and RCP8.5 (emissions continue to rise throughout the century) [24]. In this study, the ensemble mean values at monthly scale are used for 'good days'(HCI>70) in the near future (2021-2040) by comparison with the reference period ('HIST' simulations for 1986-2005). The analysis presents the spatial distribution of the number of good days for the selected area for the mid-season months (January, April, July, and October); furthermore, for 4 touristic destinations in the selected area, monthly changes in the climate attractivity conditions are presented.

RESULTS

The Romanian-Bulgarian border zone benefits from climate conditions attractive for outdoor leisure activities throughout the year (Fig. 4). In January, there are between 8 and 12 'good' days for outdoor touristic activities (HCI>70) in the area close to the Danube, decreasing inland and presenting a slight west-east gradient. As expected, the regions with higher relief in both countries present a smaller number of 'good' days (e.g., in mountainous regions in Mehedinti, Vidin, Montana) - a feature valid all along the year.

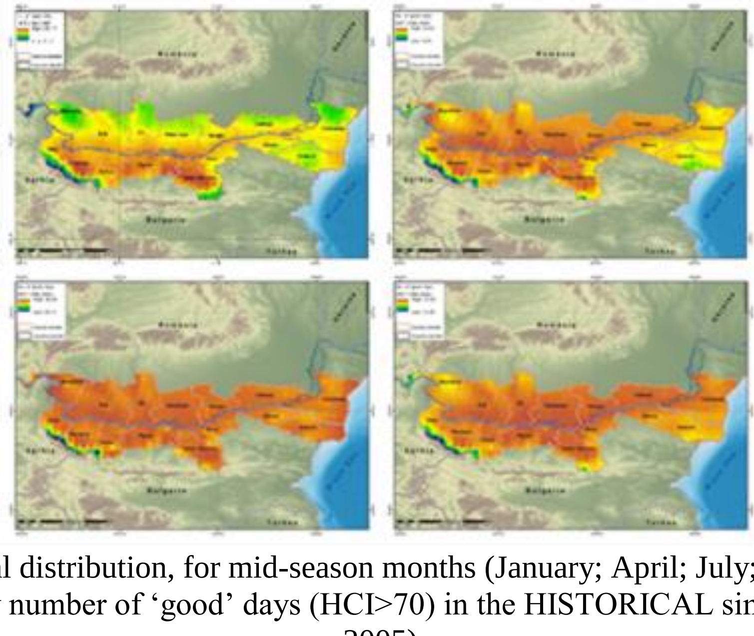


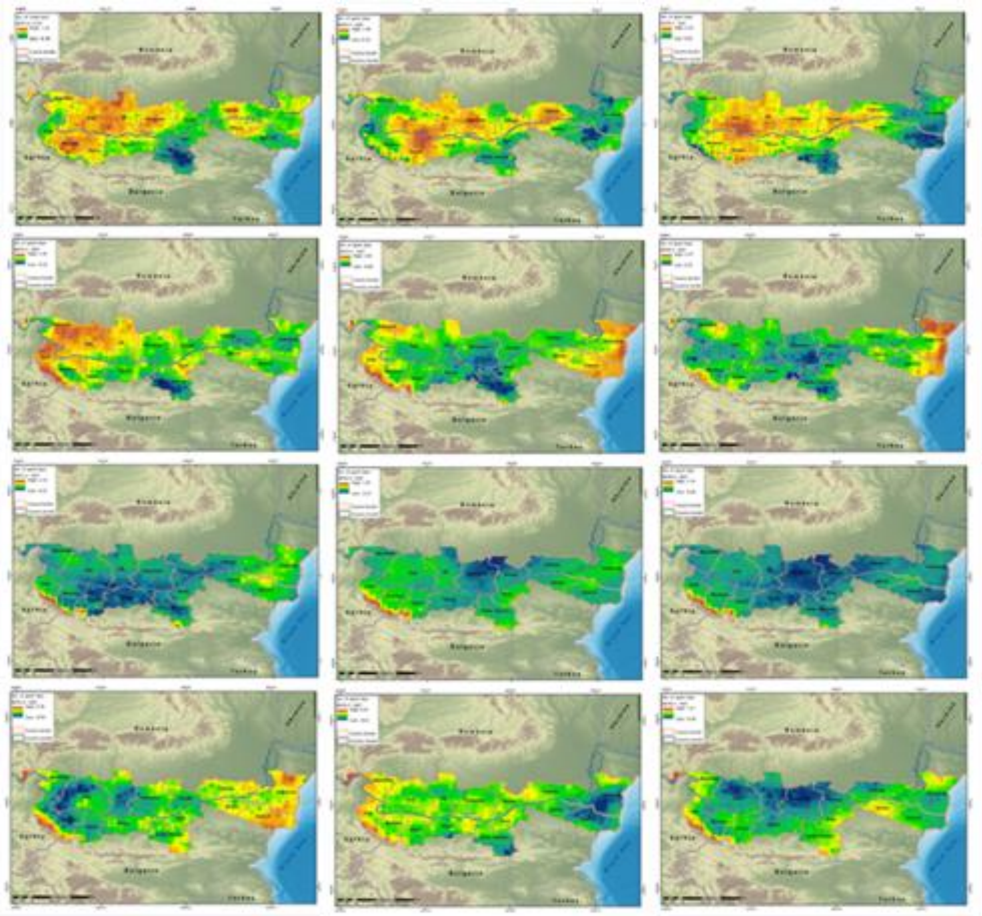
Figure 4. Spatial distribution, for mid-season months (January; April; July; October), of the mean monthly number of 'good' days (HCI>70) in the HISTORICAL simulation (1981-2005).

A similar distribution, but in the range of 18-20 'good days', is found during April. In summer, the spatial gradient nearly disappears, almost the whole region being characterized practically the entire month by 'good days' in July. Autumn is also characterised by attractive climate conditions for outdoor activities; for example, during October, the area close to the

Danube experienced up to 27 'good' days, slightly lower (22-24 days) further inland Bulgaria and on the seaside area. It should be noted, however, that these values may be overestimated to some degree. A previous study (Velea et al., 2023) investigating the changes in HCI in the context of climate change in Romania showed that, compared to observation-based data, the dataset used here overestimates the seasonal mean number of days with 'good' conditions in the southern part of the country, so in the area considered in this study. Nevertheless, it was found that the dataset used here describes reasonably well the distribution of 'good days' for outdoor tourism in the reference period (1986-2005) within the limitations associated with the data and models used in the HIST simulations.

The changes in the number of 'good' days in the near future (2021-2040) compared to the reference (HIST) simulation for the selected months indicate mainly an increase of 'good' days, in all climate change scenarios (Fig. 5). The largest change, of about 2.8 - 2.9 days, is found for April in the RCP4.5 scenario, where the SW part of the region, the mountainous and seas-side areas would benefit from this additional number of 'good' days, and for July, in the RCP8.5 scenario, where the increase is most visible in the mountainous areas. A slight loss of climate attractivity is found for all scenarios on limited areas, but these indicate that, in general, less than 0.5 'good' days may be lost in the context of climate change scenarios; the largest 'loss' is about 0.7 days in October in the RCP8.5 scenario, manifested mainly in the sea-side area (Constanta and Dobrich counties) and further inland (southernmost area of Veliko Tarnovo).

Looking in more detail at four locations along the Danube River (Vidin, Corabia, Svishtov, Calarasi) it may be noticed that winter and spring months would benefit more from additional days with 'good' conditions for outdoor leisure activities in all the selected localities (Fig. 6). The largest increase is in general associated with RCP4.5 scenario, when up to 2.5 additional 'good' days may be experienced at Corabia in December or up to 2 days in March and December at Vidin and Svishtov. Summer months are characterized by small or no increase in the monthly number of 'good' days in all scenarios, and, for August, even a slight decrease (less than 0.5 days) is found in all selected localities. These changes may be due to increasing temperature, which would negatively affect the climate attractivity during summer (possibly becoming too hot for outdoor activities) but with a positive impact on tourism during the cold season (more days with agreeable temperatures allowing outdoor activities). As the HCI index takes into account also cloud cover, precipitation, and winds, these may have a contribution too, for example through reduced amounts of precipitations; even if this would improve the attractiveness of weather for tourism as expressed through the HCI index, it may still have negative impacts on tourism through indirect pathways (e.g., negative impact in agriculture, influencing food prices, further reflected in higher costs of restaurant services which may in turn negatively affect tourism industry).



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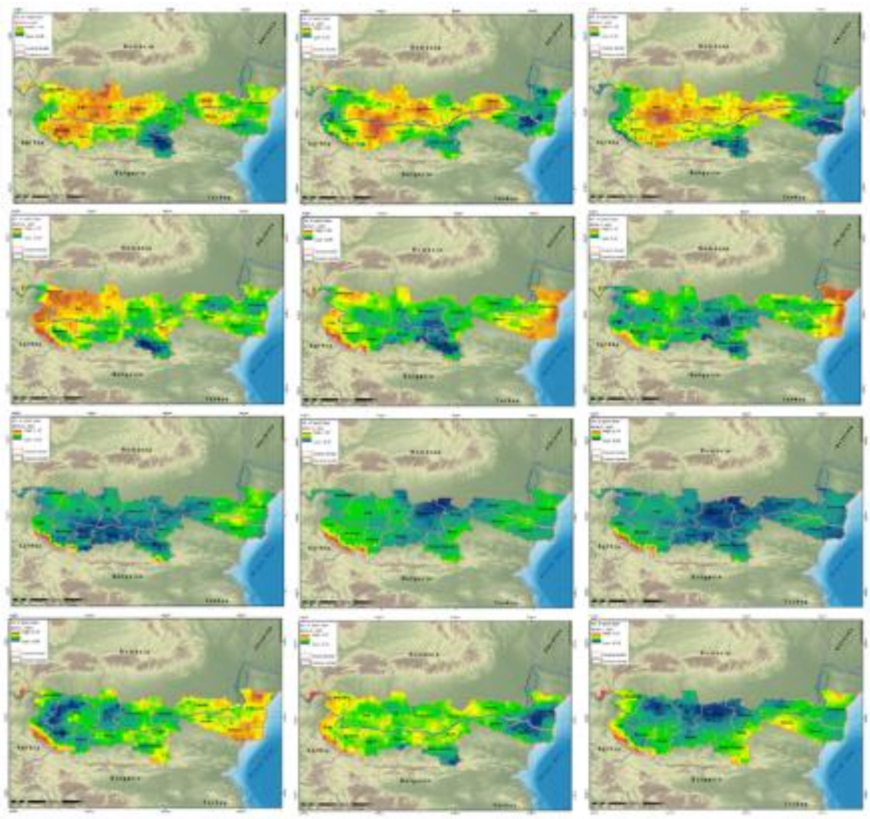

Figure 5. Spatial distribution, for mid-season months (left to right: January; April; July; October) of the difference between (top-down) RCP2.6 scenario and HIST, RCP4.5 scenario and HIST and RCP8.5 scenario and HIST, for the period 2021-20240.

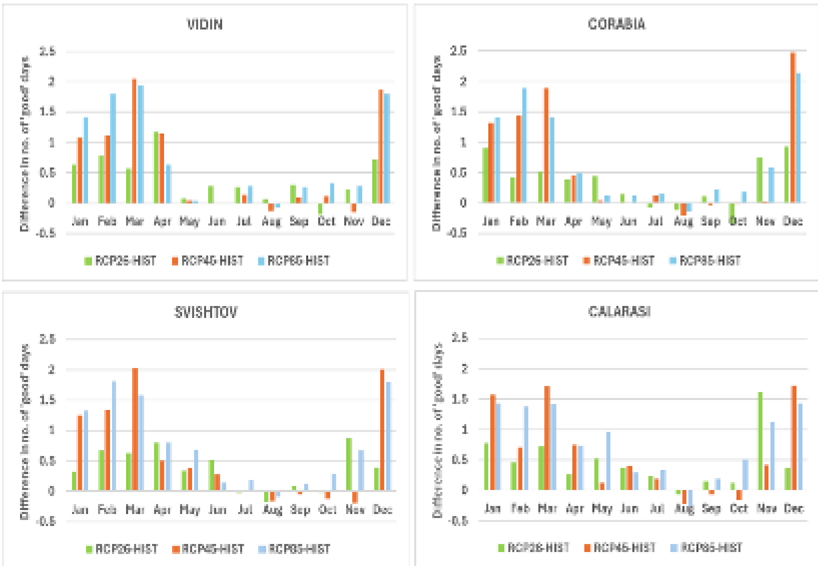

Figure 6. Changes of number of 'good' days (HCI>70) in the context of RCP2.6 (green), RCP4.5 (orange) and RCP8.5 (blue) climate change scenarios compared to HIST simulation (1986-2005) in the near future (2021-2040) for Vidin and Svishtov (Bulgaria; left column) and Corabia and Calarasi (Romania; right column).

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The study presents an analysis of changes in the climate attractivity for outdoor tourism activities in the Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border area, investigated with respect to 'good' days as expressed through the HCI index (i.e., mean monthly number of days with HCI>70) in the context of three climate change scenarios (RCP2.6, RCP4.5, and RCP8.5) in the near future (2021-2040). The results show that, in general, an increase in the number of 'good' days may be experienced in the study area, in all three climate change scenarios considered. The months in the cold season may benefit from the largest increase in the number of 'good' days (up to 2-3 days), while during summer months the increase is very small (around 0.2- 0.3 days). Negative changes in the climate attractivity for tourism are also identified in limited areas, but these are generally low (less than 1 day). These features are also found in four localities characterized by important touristic potential and located near the Danube River (Vidin, Corabia, Svishtov, Calarasi). In these cases, from December to March, the results indicate an additional number of 'good days', in all climate change scenarios. For three of these destinations (Corabia, Svishtov, Calarasi) a loss of 'good' days for outdoor tourism may be seen in August in all climate change scenarios, even if its magnitude is low (-0.25 days). Overall, the results support the national and cross-border initiatives toward developing tourism in this area in the near future and thus exploiting the potential of local climate as a natural resource.

The potential for tourism in the cross-border areas between Romania and Bulgaria is related to the touristic attractions and opportunities these regions offer to tourists. (Terzieva, 2016) emphasizes the importance of developing entrepreneurial initiatives to valorize the potential of this area. (Popescu and Plesoianu, 2019) state the role of tourism for both Romania and Bulgaria for the gross domestic product of the countries. The authors mention the strengths of these two countries: the "cultural and historical heritage, beautiful landscapes, landmarks, tourism forms, service quality and hospitality" (Popescu and Plesoianu, 2019). These touristic assets stand based on various forms of tourism developed in this region. There is ecumenical tourism in the cross-border area, a large number of monasteries and churches being located on both sides of the Danube like, for example at Strehaia (Strehaia Monastery), Maglavit (Maglavit Monastery), Slatina (Clocociov Monastery), Dubova (Mraconia Monastery) in Romania or Vratsa (Bistrețki Monastery; Gradeshki" Sf. Ioan Botezatorul" Monastery) in Bulgaria. The historical sites are also important touristic attractions in the region, like for example the archeological sites located in Vidin region (e.g., Baba Vida Fortress - 2000 years old, Castra Martis Fortress -built in 1st-6th centuries, Kaleto Citadel, ruins of the Roman city of Ratiaria) or near Svishtov (e.g., the medieval fortress Kale, the Roman legionary fortress Novae) or the Romanian side of the cross-border area (e.g., the medieval fortress of Severin, Traian's bridge). From the perspective of natural heritage, Belogradchik Rocks, Magurata and Ledenika caves, Skoklia waterfall (Bulgaria), Dubova cave, and Danube Gorge (Romania) are only a few famous tourist attractions in this region. Gastronomical and wine tourism are also of interest in this region. The influences of the Ottoman Empire come from ancient times and are reflected in the variety of food and sweets in the cross-border region. The warm and dry climate is beneficial for vineyards and implicitly for the production of good quality wines. Tourism-oriented initiatives are developing, and valorizing these assets, like 'Local Gastronomic Points' in the villages Isverna, Eselnita and Godeanu in Mehedinti county (Romania) (AGENȚIA NAȚIONALĂ A ZONEI MONTANE, 2024) or agro-touristic boarding houses located both in Romania and Bulgaria. Cultural tourism has also experienced steady growth in the region, aiming to valorize the national specifics as reflected in music and dance. A relevant example regards the good practice of the city of Svishtov in fostering cultural tourism development, through the promotion of one aspect of cultural tourism as a priority - folklore festivals. Festival tourism is a specialized area within the tourism industry that focuses on visiting different locations to participate in cultural, musical, religious, or other types of festivals. In this case, we are talking about two international folk festivals that take place during the summer months of the year. One is dedicated to folk music (Folkloren izvor (StudioIDD, 2024)) and the other to folk dancing (The Charisma of the horo (Фестивал „Харизмата на хорото", 2024) or the traditional Bulgarian dance - the horo. These festivals are enjoying increasing interest every year and attracting more and more participants and tourists. Similar initiatives are also developing on the Romanian side, as for example the international festival 'Hora mare' (Festivalul de Folclor Hora Mare, 2024) in Calarasi, dedicated to folklore dances or the national contest-festival 'Ponoare Ponoare' (Ponoare, Mehedinti county) dedicated to folklore music (6 reasons to visit Mehedinti – Vidin Cross-border Area EMS 5, 2016). Another interesting aspect of the tourism potential in the Bulgarian Danube area is cycling tourism. It is becoming more and more attractive to tourists from all over Europe. Cycling tourism refers to recreational visits away from home which involve leisure cycling as a fundamental and significant part of the trip. The most popular multi-day cycling event in Bulgaria is the Dunav Ultra Marathon. It covers a distance of 740 km and connects the northwesternmost settlement of the country, the village of Kudelin (Bregovo municipality), with the northeasternmost settlement, the village of

Durankulak (Shabla municipality) on the Black Sea. From Vidin to Silistra the route's trajectory overlaps the transcontinental route Eurovelo 6 (Dunav Ultra, 2024).

The findings of the study are associated with limitations arising from the data (e.g., performances of numerical models used for simulations, relevance of climate change scenarios, HCI definition) and methodology (e.g., focus on a limited area, use of only one category in the HCI rating system). Within these limits, the coherent signal found in all three climate change scenarios indicating a general increasing of climate attractivity (i.e., more 'good' days for outdoor leisure activities) gives confidence for using the findings in the decision-making process related to tourism in this area. The results are in line with other studies at the European level suggesting an improvement in climate conditions attractivity in the Central South European region (European Commission et al., 2009) especially during winter months (Perch-Nielsen, Amelung and Knutti, 2010. However, it should be noticed that a recent study (Publications Office of the European Union, 2023) indicates that at the country level in both Romania and Bulgaria the tourism demand might decrease until the end of the century in the context of climate change. Further research will focus on investigating the relationship between tourism intensity and climate attractivity using more climate-related indices (e.g., Tourism-Climate Index (Mieczkowski, 1985), Climate Index for Tourism (De Freitas, Scott and McBoyle, 2007)) aiming to assess the performances of the indices such that to further use them to characterize the degree of seasonality and provide support for mitigating its effects on tourism industry in this area.

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FORECASTING OF TURKISH TOURISM REVENUE PER CAPITA

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ABSTRACT: *As a developing country, Türkiye is the sixth country that hosts the most tourists in the world. Income from tourism is very important for the Turkish economy. Estimation of the total and per capita income to be obtained from tourism also contributes to the determination of the financing needs for tourism investments planned in the future. On the other hand, this is also necessary to increase the efficiency of investments. Thus this paper aims to estimate tourism income per capita of Türkiye. Data of tourism revenue per capita (2012-2024) were taken from the official website of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK). Time series forecasting is an essential technique used in various fields such as finance, economics, and marketing to predict future values based on past data. This article provides a brief overview of some of the most commonly used forecasting methods: ETS, ARIMA, Prophet, TBATS, NNAR, Holt-Winters, SARIMA, Random Forest, Linear Regression, SVM, and Robust Regression. The results highlight the range of point forecasts and the confidence intervals such as 80% and 95%) for each method. The largest point forecast was observed in the Prophet method with a value of 1099.95 USD per capita, while the smallest was found in the Holt-Winters method with a value of 781.16 USD. For the confidence intervals, the widest range was noted in the TBATS method, indicating the highest uncertainty, while the narrowest range was seen in the Linear Regression method, suggesting higher precision. Point forecast values show that Turkish tourism revenues per capita will be stable during the years. This shows Turkish tourism policy makers should create proactive methods and investments multidimensional.*

KEYWORDS: *Tourism income per capita, Tourism investment, Forecasting methods, Tourism finance, Tourism economics.*

1. Introduction

Türkiye is one of the developing countries and needs more capital to increase its development. Such developing countries experience significant problems in accessing such resources due to the influence of different sources of instability. For this reason, income sources like tourism are very important for these countries.

To get more income flows, these countries need to receive more tourists. Receiving more tourists can cause the Over tourism problem (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Instead of over tourism, higher income per visitor can be best option. This can be support to protect local natural resources and can support sustainable and green tourism. Estimating the annual number of tourists is very useful for the economy (Aslan, et. al., 2008). However, the estimation of income per capita can give more detailed data for economic planning.

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Table 1, shows gross tourism revenues of Türkiye in yearly base. 36.46 million visitors number in 2012 has risen up 57.07 million as of 2023. Tourism revenue was 35.71 billion $ in 2012 and reached 55,87 billion $ at the end of 2023. Some geopolitical problems and important problems such as the covid pandemic have had unforeseen negative effects on both the number of tourists and the total tourism income. In 2020, while the number of visitors dropped to 15.82 million, tourism revenues dropped to 15.16 billion dollars.

Table 1: Tourism Statistics of Türkiye- 2012-2023

Years	Visitors	Gross Income (1000$)	Years	Visitors	Gross Income (1000$)
2012	36.463.921	35.717.337	2018	45.628.673	35.920.910
2013	39.226.327	40.186.327	2019	51.860.042	42.851.778
2014	41.415.070	41.316.834	2020	15.826.266	15.169.371
2015	41.617.530	37.700.923	2021	29.357.463	30.309.722
2016	31.365.330	26.539.007	2022	51.369026	49.857.030
2017	38.620.346	31.253.835	2023	57.077.441	55.874.176

Source: Tuik, Turkish Statistics Institute, Tourism Statistics, https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Turizm-Istatistikleri-I.-Ceyrek:-Ocak-Mart,-2024-53657 (Accessed on 15.08.2024)

Time series forecasting is the process of analyzing historical data to predict future values. It is widely used in various domains such as finance, economics, and marketing to make informed decisions. This article presents an overview of some popular forecasting methods and use them to forecast the spending per touristic person. Time series forecasting is also an essential technique used in various fields such as finance, economics, and marketing to predict future values based on past data. Several methods can be employed for time series forecasting, each with itğs strengths and weaknesses. This article provides a brief overview of some of the most commonly used forecasting methods: ETS, ARIMA, Prophet, TBATS, NNAR, Holt-Winters, SARIMA, Random Forest, Linear Regression, SVM, and Robust Regression (Hyndman et al., 2008; Hyndman and Athanasopoulos, 2021; Brownlee, 2021; Taylor and Letham, 2017; Maronna, et al., 2019).

Choosing the right forecasting method depends on the characteristics of the data and the specific requirements of the forecasting task. ETS, ARIMA, and Holt-Winters are powerful for univariate time series with trend and seasonality. Advanced methods like Prophet, TBATS, and NNAR can handle more complex patterns. Machine learning methods such as Random Forest, SVM, and robust regression provide flexible alternatives for capturing intricate relationships in the data. Each method has its own advantages and limitations, and often, combining multiple methods can lead to better forecasting accuracy. For such reasons, different estimation methods are used to forecast the value of spending per tourist in Türkiye. The following sections are divided for methods and the results produced by the used method. The last section is for conclusion for general comment for the results.

Aim and Data Structure

The dataset presented is structured to capture 'average expenditure per capita' in tourism from 2012 to 2024. It is organized into annual and quarterly figures, providing a comprehensive view of expenditure trends over time. Each year is represented by an 'Annual' entry, which aggregates the data for the whole year. In addition, each year is broken down into four quarters (I, II, III, IV), allowing a more detailed analysis of expenditure patterns over the year. This structure is useful for identifying seasonal variations and trends within each year, as well as for comparing changes between different years. The data can support various analytical methods, including time series forecasting and trend analysis, to understand and predict tourism-related expenditure. Such a structure is typical of financial and economic data, where both annual and quarterly insights are valuable for planning and decision making.

Table 2: Tourism Income Per Capita, 2012 – 2024 - Quarterly

Year	Annual / Quarter	Average Expenditure Per Capita ($)
2012	Annual	**980**
	I	875
	II	851
	III	1 043
	IV	1 067
2013	Annual	**1 024**
	I	1 043
	II	941
	III	1 067
	IV	1 035
2014	Annual	**998**
	I	978
	II	914
	III	1 059
	IV	994
2015	Annual	**906**
	I	944
	II	796
	III	979
	IV	869
2016	Annual	**846**
	I	830
	II	723
	III	966
	IV	780
2017	Annual	**809**
	I	708

	II	657
	III	921
	IV	808
2018	Annual	**787**
	I	742
	II	711
	III	866
	IV	749
2019	Annual	**826**
	I	729
	II	718
	III	918
	IV	831
2020	**-** Annual	**958**
	I	847
	II	768
	III	985
	IV	922
2021	- Annual	**1 032**
	I	1 010
	II	847
	III	1 139
	IV	962
2022	- Annual	**971**
	I	977
	II	883
	III	1 018
	IV	972
2023	**-** Annual	**979**
	I	1 019
	II	951
	III	996
	IV	954
2024	**-** Annual	
	I	975

Source: Tuik, 2024.

2. Exponential Smoothing (ETS)

Exponential Smoothing (ETS) is a family of forecasting methods that model the level, trend, and seasonality in the data. The ETS method includes simple exponential smoothing, Holt's linear trend method, and Holt-Winters' seasonal method. The key idea is to apply exponentially decreasing weights over time, giving more importance to recent observations (Hyndman et al., 2008).

2.1 Formulation

$$\text{Forecast} = \alpha \times \text{current observation} + (1 - \alpha) \times \text{previous forecast}$$

Table 3**: Forecasting the Tourism Income Per Capita When ETS Method is Used**

Quarter	**Point Forecast**	**Lo 80**	**Hi 80**	**Lo 95**	**Hi 95**
2024 Q2	886.6276	816.4470	956.8082	779.2956	993.9596
2024 Q3	1065.2009	968.2323	1162.1695	916.9002	1213.5016
2024 Q4	978.3396	870.6101	1086.0692	813.5815	1143.0978
2025 Q1	962.6849	843.4424	1081.9273	780.3192	1145.0505
2025 Q2	886.6276	759.9117	1013.3435	692.8323	1080.4228
2025 Q3	1065.2009	921.8340	1208.5678	845.9401	1284.4616
2025 Q4	978.3396	827.4207	1129.2586	747.5290	1209.1502
2026 Q1	962.6849	803.2820	1122.0878	718.8992	1206.4706
2026 Q2	886.6276	721.4987	1051.7565	634.0848	1139.1704
2026 Q3	1065.2009	886.9191	1243.4826	792.5425	1337.8593
2026 Q4	978.3396	793.8764	1162.8029	696.2274	1260.4519
2027 Q1	962.6849	771.1666	1154.2031	669.7830	1255.5868
2027 Q2	886.6276	690.2663	1082.9889	586.3189	1186.9362
2027 Q3	1065.2009	857.6089	1272.7928	747.7164	1382.6854
2027 Q4	978.3396	765.3685	1191.3108	652.6283	1304.0510
2028 Q1	962.6849	743.5292	1181.8405	627.5152	1297.8546
2028 Q2	886.6276	663.1816	1110.0736	544.8964	1228.3587
2028 Q3	1065.2009	831.7812	1298.6206	708.2163	1422.1855
2028 Q4	978.3396	740.0810	1216.5983	613.9545	1342.7248
2029 Q1	962.6849	718.8412	1206.5286	589.7581	1335.6116

Note that the abbreviated expressions which are Lo 80, Hi 80, Lo 95 and Hi 95 are Low %80, High %80, Low %95 and High %95 being the confidence intervals at %80 and %95. Some of Tables 1-10 provide the values which are point forecasts and the confidence intervals. Lwr and Upr represent the Lowe and Upper, respectively.

3. AutoRegressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA)

ARIMA models are widely used for time series forecasting. They are composed of three parts: AutoRe- gressive (AR) terms, differencing (I) to make the series stationary, and Moving Average (MA) terms. The model is denoted as ARIMA (p, d, q), where p, d, and q are non-negative integers.

Parameters which are p, d, and q are non-negative integers.

- p: the order of the AR term
- d: the degree of differencing
- q: the order of the MA term

which are components of the regression model (Hyndman and Athanasopoulos, 2021; Brownlee, 2021).

3.2 Formulation

$$Y_t = c + \varphi_1 Y_{t-1} + \cdots + \varphi_p Y_{t-p} + \theta_1 E_{t-1} + \cdots + \theta_q E_{t-q} + E_t$$

Table 4**: Forecasting the Tourism Income Per Capita when ARIMA Method is Used**

Quarter	**Point Forecast**	**Lo 80**	**Hi 80**	**Lo 95**	**Hi 95**
2024 Q2	920.7548	846.7185	994.7911	807.5261	1033.9840
2024 Q3	975.2486	885.3329	1065.1644	837.7344	1112.7630
2024 Q4	939.3832	842.8358	1035.9306	791.7267	1087.0400
2025 Q1	965.1474	865.6048	1064.6899	812.9102	1117.3850
2025 Q2	913.9674	779.2746	1048.6603	707.9725	1119.9620
2025 Q3	970.5709	822.0692	1119.0727	743.4571	1197.6850
2025 Q4	936.1594	781.5302	1090.7886	699.6745	1172.6440
2026 Q1	962.9256	805.4696	1120.3816	722.1174	1203.7340
2026 Q2	912.4362	728.7958	1096.0767	631.5824	1193.2900
2026 Q3	969.5157	774.6672	1164.3642	671.5206	1267.5110
2026 Q4	935.4322	735.4801	1135.3842	629.6319	1241.2320
2027 Q1	962.4244	760.0934	1164.7554	652.9859	1271.8630
2027 Q2	912.0908	688.4156	1135.7661	570.0090	1254.1730
2027 Q3	969.2776	736.1480	1202.4072	612.7367	1325.8190
2027 Q4	935.2681	697.7798	1172.7564	572.0611	1298.4750
2028 Q1	962.3113	722.7806	1201.8421	595.9807	1328.6420
2028 Q2	912.0129	654.1285	1169.8973	517.6127	1306.4130
2028 Q3	969.2239	703.0650	1235.3828	562.1690	1376.2790
2028 Q4	935.2311	665.2309	1205.2313	522.3015	1348.1610
2029 Q1	962.2858	690.4802	1234.0914	546.5950	1377.9770

4. Prophet

Prophet is an open-source forecasting tool developed by Facebook (now Meta). It is designed to handle time series data with various observation frequencies (e.g., hourly, daily, weekly, monthly) that display patterns on different time scales. Prophet is robust to missing data and shifts in the trend, and can automatically detect changepoints in the data (Taylor and Letham, 2017).

4.1 Formulation

y(t) = g(t) + s(t) + h(t) + Et

where $g(t)$ is the trend, $s(t)$ is the seasonality, and $h(t)$ are holidays.

Table 5**: Forecasting the Tourism Income Per Capita when Prophet Method is Used**

Index	**Date**	**Trend**	**Index**	**Date**	**Trend**
1	2022-01-01	1008.7535	32	2024-08-01	853.4868
2	2022-02-01	998.9558	33	2024-09-01	861.8434
3	2022-03-01	990.1064	34	2024-10-01	869.9328
4	2022-04-01	980.3087	35	2024-11-01	878.2924
5	2022-05-01	970.8271	36	2024-12-01	886.3823
6	2022-06-01	961.0295	37	2025-01-01	894.7419
7	2022-07-01	951.5479	38	2025-02-01	903.1015
8	2022-08-01	941.7502	39	2025-03-01	910.6521
9	2022-09-01	931.9526	40	2025-04-01	919.0117
10	2022-10-01	922.4710	41	2025-05-01	927.1016
11	2022-11-01	912.6734	42	2025-06-01	935.4612

12	2022-12-01	903.1918	43	2025-07-01	943.5511
13	2023-01-01	893.3941	44	2025-08-01	951.9107
14	2023-02-01	883.5965	45	2025-09-01	960.2703
15	2023-03-01	874.7470	46	2025-10-01	968.3602
16	2023-04-01	864.9493	47	2025-11-01	976.7198
17	2023-05-01	855.4677	48	2025-12-01	984.8097
18	2023-06-01	845.6701	49	2026-01-01	993.1693
19	2023-07-01	836.1885	50	2026-02-01	1001.5289
20	2023-08-01	826.4012	51	2026-03-01	1009.0794
21	2023-09-01	816.6139	52	2026-04-01	1017.4390
22	2023-10-01	807.1500	53	2026-05-01	1025.5290
23	2023-11-01	797.3914	54	2026-06-01	1033.8885
24	2023-12-01	787.9476	55	2026-07-01	1041.9785
25	2024-01-01	796.2529	56	2026-08-01	1050.3380
26	2024-02-01	804.5595	57	2026-09-01	1058.6976
27	2024-03-01	812.3301	58	2026-10-01	1066.7876
28	2024-04-01	820.6511	59	2026-11-01	1075.1471
29	2024-05-01	828.7189	60	2026-12-01	1083.2371
30	2024-06-01	837.0556	61	2027-01-01	1091.5966
31	2024-07-01	845.1303	62	2027-02-01	1099.9562

5. Trigonometric, Box-Cox, ARMA Trend Seasonal (TBATS)

TBATS is a state space model that handles complex seasonality in time series data. It stands for Trigonometric, Box-Cox transformation, ARMA errors, Trend, and Seasonal components (Hyndman and Athanasopoulos, 2021).

Table 6**: Forecasting the Tourism Income Per Capita When TBATS Method is Used**

Quarter	**Point Forecast**	**Lo 80**	**Hi 80**	**Lo 95**	**Hi 95**
2024 Q2	936.0488	867.7588	1004.339	831.6082	1040.489
2024 Q3	1063.2829	980.6060	1145.960	936.8394	1189.726
2024 Q4	1014.9225	914.3730	1115.472	861.1453	1168.700
2025 Q1	963.9108	859.6734	1068.148	804.4934	1123.328
2025 Q2	918.0006	799.6594	1036.342	737.0133	1098.988
2025 Q3	1059.6789	937.9544	1181.403	873.5174	1245.840
2025 Q4	1018.3888	884.8007	1151.977	814.0834	1222.694
2026 Q1	960.5771	823.7517	1097.403	751.3208	1169.833
2026 Q2	921.2069	774.1099	1068.304	696.2414	1146.172
2026 Q3	1056.5952	906.3802	1206.810	826.8611	1286.329
2026 Q4	1021.3546	862.0097	1180.699	777.6577	1265.051
2027 Q1	957.7247	795.3176	1120.132	709.3445	1206.105
2027 Q2	923.9503	753.3389	1094.562	663.0227	1184.878
2027 Q3	1053.9567	880.3493	1227.564	788.4471	1319.466
2027 Q4	1023.8922	842.7903	1204.994	746.9208	1300.864
2028 Q1	955.2841	771.2126	1139.356	673.7710	1236.797
2028 Q2	926.2975	735.3481	1117.247	634.2655	1218.330
2028 Q3	1051.6991	857.8264	1245.572	755.1964	1348.202
2028 Q4	1026.0634	825.8001	1226.327	719.7870	1332.340
2029 Q1	953.1959	750.0248	1156.367	642.4725	1263.919

6. Neural Network AutoRegressive (NNAR)

NNAR is a neural network-based method for forecasting time series data. It uses a feedforward neural network with lagged values of the time series as inputs (Brownlee, 2018).

Table 7**: Forecasting the Tourism Income Per Capita When NNAR Method is Used**

Year	**Qtr1**	**Qtr2**	**Qtr3**	**Qtr4**
2024	939.6052	954.5550	929.6441	-
2025	932.0185	908.3083	905.2623	890.0917
2026	885.0757	871.8527	864.7151	853.9499
2027	846.5648	836.6559	828.7092	819.6786
2028	811.9994	803.6288	795.7840	785.8430
2029	770.7603	-	-	-

7. Holt-Winters

The Holt-Winters method is an extension of exponential smoothing to capture seasonality. It includes three smoothing equations: one for the level, one for the trend, and one for the seasonal component (Hyndman and Athanasopoulos, 2021).

7.1 Formulation

$$\text{Level}(L_t) = \alpha(Y_t - S_{t-m}) + (1-\alpha)(L_{t-1} + T_{t-1})$$

$$\text{Trend}(T_t) = \beta(L_t - L_{t-1}) + (1-\beta)T_{t-1}$$

$$\text{Seasonal}(S_t) = \gamma(Y_t - L_t) + (1-\gamma)S_{t-m}$$

Table 8**: Forecasting the Tourism Income Per Capita When Holt-Winters Method is Used**

Quarter	**Point Forecast**	**Lo 80**	**Hi 80**	**Lo 95**	**Hi 95**
2024 Q2	871.0007	797.9501	944.0513	759.279499	982.722
2024 Q3	992.1517	909.3784	1074.9251	865.560850	1118.743
2024 Q4	933.4852	837.9973	1028.9731	787.449026	1079.521
2025 Q1	955.2318	844.3859	1066.0776	785.707697	1124.756
2025 Q2	848.5411	704.9688	992.1133	628.966204	1068.116
2025 Q3	969.6921	808.3259	1131.0582	722.903796	1216.480
2025 Q4	911.0255	729.8628	1092.1883	633.961039	1188.090
2026 Q1	932.7721	730.0246	1135.5196	622.696576	1242.848
2026 Q2	826.0814	587.3785	1064.7843	461.016811	1191.146
2026 Q3	947.2324	685.0691	1209.3957	546.288187	1348.177
2026 Q4	888.5659	601.4450	1175.6867	449.452463	1327.679
2027 Q1	910.3124	596.8540	1223.7709	430.919073	1389.706
2027 Q2	803.6217	451.3597	1155.8838	264.883397	1342.360
2027 Q3	924.7727	544.5398	1305.0056	343.256657	1506.289
2027 Q4	866.1062	456.6832	1275.5292	239.947782	1492.265
2028 Q1	887.8527	448.0917	1327.6137	215.296331	1560.409
2028 Q2	781.1620	299.9185	1262.4056	45.163491	1517.161
2028 Q3	902.3130	389.2484	1415.3777	117.648321	1686.978
2028 Q4	843.6465	297.7158	1389.5772	8.717589	1678.575
2029 Q1	865.3931	285.5991	1445.1871	-21.325337	1752.111

8. Seasonal ARIMA (SARIMA)

SARIMA extends ARIMA to capture seasonal effects. It is denoted as ARIMA (p, d, q)(P, D, Q)[m], where P, D, Q are the seasonal components, and m is the number of periods per season (Shumway et al. 2000; Dataaspirant, 2023).

Table 9**: Forecasting the Tourism Income Per Capita When SARIMA Method is Used**

Quarter	Point Forecast	Lo 80	Hi 80	Lo 95	Hi 95
2024 Q2	920.7548	846.7185	994.7911	807.5261	1033.984
2024 Q3	975.2486	885.3329	1065.1644	837.7344	1112.763
2024 Q4	939.3832	842.8358	1035.9306	791.7267	1087.040
2025 Q1	965.1474	865.6048	1064.6899	812.9102	1117.385
2025 Q2	913.9674	779.2746	1048.6603	707.9725	1119.962
2025 Q3	970.5709	822.0692	1119.0727	743.4571	1197.685
2025 Q4	936.1594	781.5302	1090.7886	699.6745	1172.644
2026 Q1	962.9256	805.4696	1120.3816	722.1174	1203.734
2026 Q2	912.4362	728.7958	1096.0767	631.5824	1193.290
2026 Q3	969.5157	774.6672	1164.3642	671.5206	1267.511
2026 Q4	935.4322	735.4801	1135.3842	629.6319	1241.232
2027 Q1	962.4244	760.0934	1164.7554	652.9859	1271.863
2027 Q2	912.0908	688.4156	1135.7661	570.0090	1254.173
2027 Q3	969.2776	736.1480	1202.4072	612.7367	1325.819
2027 Q4	935.2681	697.7798	1172.7564	572.0611	1298.475
2028 Q1	962.3113	722.7806	1201.8421	595.9807	1328.642
2028 Q2	912.0129	654.1285	1169.8973	517.6127	1306.413
2028 Q3	969.2239	703.0650	1235.3828	562.1690	1376.279
2028 Q4	935.2311	665.2309	1205.2313	522.3015	1348.161
2029 Q1	962.2858	690.4802	1234.0914	546.5950	1377.977

9. Linear Regression

Linear regression models the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. It is a simple yet powerful tool for time series forecasting.

9.1 Formulation

$$Y_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{t-1} + \cdots + \beta_k X_{t-k} + E_t$$

where:

- Y_t is the dependent variable at time t.

- β_0 is the intercept term.

$-\ \beta_1, \beta_2, \ldots, \beta_k$ are the coefficients for the independent variables $X_{t-1}, X_{t-2}, \ldots, X_{t-k}$, respectively.

- $X_{t-1}, X_{t-2}, \ldots, X_{t-k}$, are the independent variables at times t-1, t-2, ..., t-k.

- E_t is the error term at time t, capturing the random fluctuations not explained by the model.

In linear regression, the coefficients $\beta_1, \beta_2, \ldots, \beta_k$ are estimated using the least squares estimation method. This method minimizes the sum of the squared differences between the observed values Y_t and the values predicted by the model. The goal is to find the line (or hyperplane, in the case of multiple independent variables) that best fits the data (Maronna et al., 2019).

Table 10**: Forecasting the Tourism Income Per Capita When LSE Method for Linear Regression Model is Used**

Index	**Fit**	**Lwr**	**Upr**
2024 Q2	903.7409	859.2499	948.2319
2024 Q3	903.6985	857.8530	949.5440
2024 Q4	903.6561	856.4441	950.8681
2025 Q1	903.6137	855.0242	952.2032
2025 Q2	903.5713	853.5943	953.5483
2025 Q3	903.5288	852.1551	954.9026
2025 Q4	903.4864	850.7075	956.2654
2026 Q1	903.4440	849.2520	957.6361
2026 Q2	903.4016	847.7893	959.0140
2026 Q3	903.3592	846.3198	960.3986
2026 Q4	903.3168	844.8442	961.7894
2027 Q1	903.2744	843.3628	963.1859
2027 Q2	903.2320	841.8761	964.5879
2027 Q3	903.1896	840.3843	965.9948
2027 Q4	903.1471	838.8879	967.4063
2028 Q1	903.1047	837.3872	968.8222
2028 Q2	903.0623	835.8824	970.2422
2028 Q3	903.0199	834.3739	971.6660
2028 Q4	902.9775	832.8617	973.0933
2029 Q1	902.9351	831.3462	974.5239

10. Support Vector Machine (SVM)

SVM is a supervised machine learning algorithm that can be used for regression challenges. It works by finding the hyperplane that best fits the data points (Boehmke and Greenwell, 2019).

Table 11**: Forecasting the Tourism Income Per Capita when SVM method is used**

Year	**Value**
2024 Q2	962.5716
2024 Q3	956.7137
2024 Q4	950.8601
2025 Q1	945.2074
2025 Q2	939.9129
2025 Q3	935.0935
2025 Q4	930.8268
2026 Q1	927.1544
2026 Q2	924.0865

2026 Q3	921.6066
2026 Q4	919.6774
2027 Q1	918.2470
2027 Q2	917.2536
2027 Q3	916.6307
2027 Q4	916.3114
2028 Q1	916.2314
2028 Q2	916.3316

11. Robust Regression

Robust regression is designed to be less sensitive to outliers in the data. It can provide more reliable estimates when the data contains anomalies.

11.1 Formulation

$$Y_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{t-1} + \cdots + \beta_k X_{t-k} + E_t$$

In linear regression, the coefficients $\beta_1, \beta_2, \ldots, \beta_k$ are estimated by using the robust estimation method (Maronna et al., 2019).

Table 12**: Forecasting the Tourism Income Per Capita When Robust Method is Used**

Index	**Fit**	**Lwr**	**Upr**
2024 Q2	903.8744	859.7687	947.9801
2024 Q3	903.6890	858.2404	949.1375
2024 Q4	903.5035	856.7003	950.3067
2025 Q1	903.3181	855.1494	951.4868
2025 Q2	903.1327	853.5885	952.6769
2025 Q3	902.9472	852.0184	953.8761
2025 Q4	902.7618	850.4399	955.0837
2026 Q1	902.5764	848.8536	956.2992
2026 Q2	902.3910	847.2602	957.5217
2026 Q3	902.2055	845.6601	958.7510
2026 Q4	902.0201	844.0539	959.9863
2027 Q1	901.8347	842.4419	961.2274
2027 Q2	901.6493	840.8247	962.4738
2027 Q3	901.4638	839.2025	963.7252
2027 Q4	901.2784	837.5757	964.9811
2028 Q1	901.0930	835.9446	966.2414
2028 Q2	900.9076	834.3094	967.5057
2028 Q3	900.7221	832.6705	968.7737
2028 Q4	900.5367	831.0281	970.0453
2029 Q1	900.3513	829.3823	971.3202

12. Conclusion

This study provided an overview and comparison of various time series forecasting methods for predicting the average spending per tourist (tourism income per capita). The results demonstrate that different methods yield varying degrees of accuracy and precision. Some methods are capable of performing the forecasting at the period 2029 Q1. The Prophet method produced the largest point forecast, while the Holt-Winters method gave the smallest. The largest value in the "Trend" column is 1099.9562, which occurs on 2027-02-01 at the Prophet method. 781.162 from Holt-Winters method is the smallest value among the Tables 1-10.

Confidence intervals also varied, with TBATS showing the widest range and Linear Regression the narrowest. The TBATS method shows the largest range for the confidence intervals, indicating the highest uncertainty. Specifically, it has the largest 95% CI range in 2024 Q4 with 302.2. The Linear Regression method has the smallest range for the confidence intervals, suggesting higher precision. Specifically, it has the smallest 80% CI range in 2024 Q4 with 89.5. These findings underscore the importance of selecting an appropriate forecasting method based on the specific requirements and characteristics of the data.

Results show the spending tourism per capita will almost remain similar during the next 5 years in Türkiye. The results mean that tourism expenditure per capita will remain almost the same for the next 5 years. This clearly shows that in order to ensure sustainable tourism in the country, policy makers need to produce different policies to change the current trend.

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PUBLIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS DOMESTIC LEISURE TOURISM OF THE RESIDENTS OF SOFIA CITY DISTRICT, BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT: *The current paper presents the public attitude towards domestic leisure tourism (winter and summer) of the residents of Sofia city district in Bulgaria. Sofia is the capital of the Republic of Bulgaria and the district it forms is the most developed and the most populated in the country. The research uses part of the data from a national representative survey and includes descriptive analysis, average values, building frequency distributions, etc. The results show the most common tourism practices of the district residents, as well as the main advantages and disadvantages of the Bulgarian leisure tourism, presented by different indicators. The findings can be used as recommendations for increasing the quality of the country's tourist product.*

KEYWORDS: *public attitude, domestic tourism, leisure tourism, Sofia city district, Bulgaria*

INTRODUCTION

Sofia city district is located in the Southwest region of Bulgaria. It consists of only one municipality, the Sofia municipality. It includes 38 settlements of which 4 towns (Sofia, Bankya, Buhovo and Novi Iskar) and 34 villages on a territory of over 1300 km² (Sofia District Administration, 2022). The district and municipality centre, Sofia, is the capital and the biggest city of the Republic of Bulgaria. Sofia is distinguished by a large concentration of population, production facilities and service activities (Genchev & Gartsiyanova, 2024). The district is surrounded by the mountains Vitosha, Stara Planina, Lyulin, Lozenska Planina. Rila mountain is also very close. The district is situated away from the sea coast.

According to National Statistical Institute (of Bulgaria), as of 31st of December 2022, the population of the district is 1 280 334. Natural population growth rate is negative (-3.4‰). The occupancy rate (people aged 15-64 years) is 78% and the average annual salary is BGN 29

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698 which are the highest in the country compared to the other 27 districts. People between 25 and 64 years with higher education account for 57.3% (highest rate), with secondary education are 38.7% and the other 4% have primary or lower education (lowest rate). Sofia city district is also a leader in foreign direct investment (14 970.753 million EUR) and the share of persons (aged 16-74) using the Internet regularly (every day or at least once a week) – 90.9%.

Transport is very important for all economic sectors development of the districts, including tourism. Transport corridors 4, 8 and 10 pass through the territory of the district, as well as the roads with European categorization E-80, E-79 and E-871. Three highways pass through the territory of Sofia city district, Hemus, Struma and Trakiya. Sofia is the country's most important railway junction and connects with the interior of the country in 5 directions. There are 8 railway stations in the district (Sofia District Administration, 2022). Sofia is the only city in Bulgaria with a subway transport. It has 4 lines with 47 stations (Metropoliten JSC, 2024). Sofia airport is the largest in the country and operates since the early 30s of the 20th century. It consists of 2 terminals (Sofia Airport, 2024). Water transport is not presented in Sofia city district as its rivers are small and not navigable.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses data from national representative survey based on a two-staged random sample stratified by the Bulgarian districts (28) and the residence place type (district administrative center, town and village). It was conducted as a face-to-face tablet assisted personal interview. Part of the data obtained are analyzed in the current paper using descriptive methods, average values, building frequency distributions, etc. Results are presented via several indicators.

RESULTS

The main trends in the public attitudes towards domestic leisure tourism of the residents of Sofia city district are presented with the following indicators: demographic profile of the respondents, domestic leisure tourism practices, main reasons for not travelling in Bulgaria for leisure tourism purposes in the last 5 years, average length of stay, means of transport used, travel arrangement practices, main advantages and disadvantages of Bulgarian leisure tourism, holiday satisfaction degree, competitive advantages of leisure tourism destinations outside Bulgaria.

Table 1 gives information about the demographic profile of the respondents from Sofia city district.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the Sofia city district respondents

Gender	Female	52,9%
	Male	47,1%
Age	18-24	10,6%
	25-34	12,0%
	35-44	22,1%
	45-54	18,8%
	55-64	20,2%
	65+	16,3%
Education	Primary or lower	2,4%
	Secondary	48,6%
	Higher	49,0%

Sofia city district residents that have travelled for purposes of domestic summer leisure tourism in the last 5 years are 2.3 times more than those for domestic winter leisure tourism. It is common, not only for the district residents, but for all Bulgarians who prefer to take their vacation during the summer (Table 2).

Table 2. Domestic leisure tourism practices of the Sofia city district residents

Question	Answer	(%)
In the last 5 years, have you travelled in Bulgaria for winter leisure tourism purposes?	Yes	37.5%
	No	62.5%
In the last 5 years, have you travelled in Bulgaria for summer leisure tourism purposes?	Yes	85.1%
	No	14.9%

The lack of financial resources is the most common reason for not travelling for purposes of domestic leisure tourism. More than 25% of Sofia city district residents do not go on winter holiday because of lack of enough free time (Table 3) which can be explained with the above-mentioned fact that they prefer to take longer holidays during the summer.

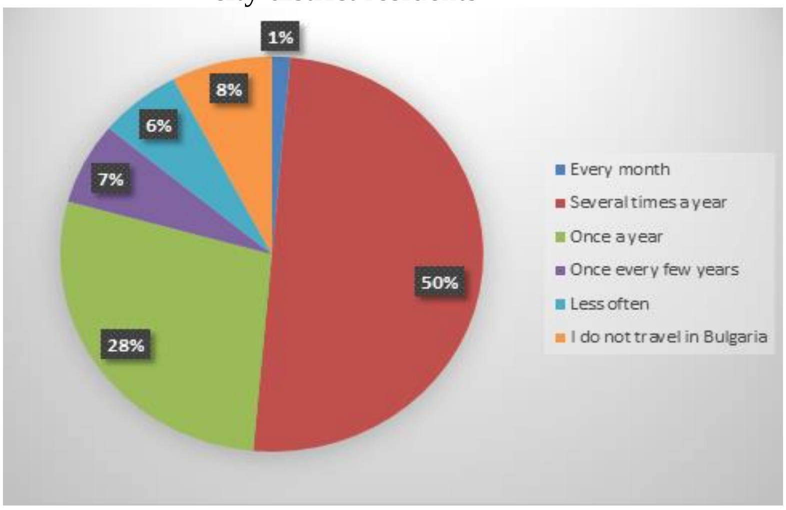
Table. 3. Main reasons for not traveling in Bulgaria for leisure tourism purposes in the last 5 years (Sofia city district residents)

	Winter tourism	Summer tourism
Lack of financial resources	37.7%	54.8%
Family reasons	13.1%	16.1%
Lack of enough free time	27.7%	12.9%
Other reasons	21.5%	16.2%

The average length of stay in winter domestic resorts is 4.56 night and the most preferred periods are five (32.1%) and three nights (23.1%) In summer resorts the average length of stay is 7.47 nights and the most popular periods are seven (34.5%), ten (22.6%) and five (22%) nights. District residents prefer to use their personal vehicles when travelling on a holiday in Bulgaria (75.7%). Train transport is used by 18.8% and bus transport - by 3.9% of the district's population.

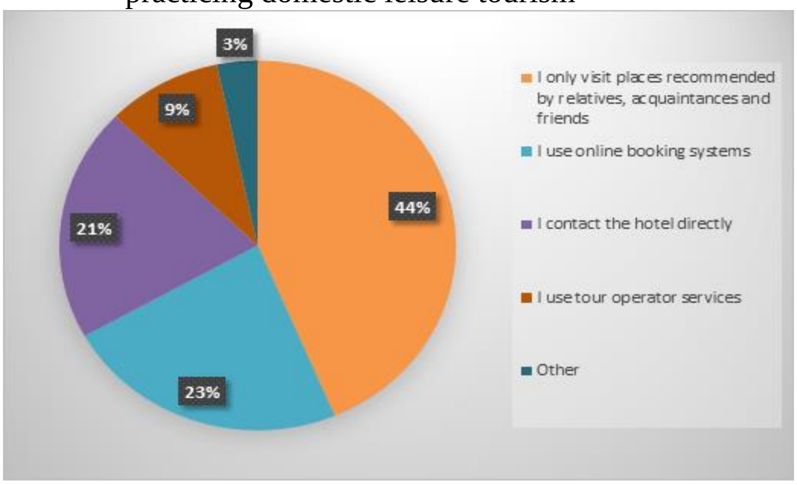
More than ¾ of Sofia city district residents travel for purposes of domestic leisure tourism several times or once a year. People who do not spent their holidays in Bulgaria are almost 8% (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Frequency of travel for purposes of domestic leisure tourism of the Sofia city district residents



Sofia city district residents prefer to visit accommodations recommended by people they trust (43.6%). Less than 10% use tours operator services when booking their holidays in Bulgaria (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Travel arrangement practices of the Sofia city district residents when practicing domestic leisure tourism



Among the main advantages of the domestic winter resorts Sofia city district residents point the attractive natural resources (42.5%), the opportunities to practice different types of tourism and the proximity to home (16.8%). According to them the main disadvantages of the Bulgarian winter leisure tourism are the high prices (46.2%), the low quality of service (18.3%) and the unmaintained road network to and into the resorts (17.3%). Other advantages and disadvantages are present in Table 4.

Table 4. Main advantages and disadvantages of Bulgarian winter leisure tourism according to Sofia city district residents

Advantages		Disadvantages	
Attractive natural resources	42.5%	High prices	46.2%
Opportunities to practice different types of tourism	23.6%	Low quality of service	18.3%
Close to home	16.8%	Unmaintained road network to and into the resorts	17.3%
Attractive prices	13.0%	Unsuitable natural conditions	8.7%
Good accommodation facilities	11.5%	Overconstruction	5.8%
Suitable facilities for practicing winter sports	11.1%	Low quality of accommodation	2.9%
Good opportunities for entertainment, celebration, acquaintances and contacts, new experiences, etc.	7.2%	Insufficient or low-quality facilities for practicing winter sports	2.4%
Attractive settlements	5.8%	Very crowded	1.9%
It is practiced in the country, a familiar environment, no language barrier	5.8%	Inadequate transportation to accommodation places	1.9%
Other	18.1%	Other	16.0%
There are none	0.5%	There are none	9.1%
I don't know/I can't define	12.0%	I don't know/I can't define	20.2%

Sofia city district residents think that the main advantages of the domestic summer resorts are the attractive natural resources (63.5%), the proximity to home (22.1%) and the attractive prices (14.9%). On the other hand, 37% point that the high prices are their main disadvantage. The overconstruction (31.3%) and the bad impact on nature (19.2%) are the next most popular answers (Table 5).

Table 5. Main advantages and disadvantages of Bulgarian summer leisure tourism according to Sofia city district residents

Advantages		Disadvantages	
Attractive natural resources	63.5%	High prices	37.0%
Close to home	22.1%	Overconstruction	31.3%
Attractive prices	14.9%	Harms the environment	19.2%
Good opportunities for entertainment, celebration, acquaintances and contacts, new experiences, etc.	13.9%	Low quality of service	17.3%
Opportunities to practice different types of tourism	10.6%	Very crowded	16.8%
It is practiced in the country, a familiar environment, no language barrier	9.1%	Low hygiene	11.1%
Wide choice of destinations	6.7%	Unmaintained road network to and into the resorts	7.7%
Attractive settlements	6.7%	Insufficient or low-quality free zone on the beach	4.8%
Good accommodation facilities	6.3%	Unsuitable natural conditions	3.8%
Security and safety	5.3%	Many foreign tourists, because of which Bulgarians are neglected	2.9%
Other	23.6%	Other	14.6%
There are none	1.0%	There are none	8.2%
I don't know/I can't define	2.4%	I don't know/I can't define	5.3%

When asked to measure their winter holiday satisfaction in the last 5 years using a 7-grade scale (where 1 means "absolutely not satisfied" and 7 means "absolutely satisfied) Sofia city district residents gave an average degree of 5.1. It is important to mention that none of the respondents gave grades 1 or 2. As per their summer holiday the district population gave a degree of 4.9.

Less than half of the respondents (42.8%) have travelled abroad for summer holiday and the most preferred destination were Greece and Turkey. As advantages of the destinations abroad Sofia city district residents point the higher quality of service (52.4%), the cleanliness of the beaches and the sea water (46.6%) and the distinctive features of the destination (42.3%). Winter resorts abroad were visited by only 2.4% of the respondents, mainly in Austria and Italy, because of the higher quality of service (40.9%), the distinctive features of the destination (34.6%) and the well-maintained transport network, water supply and sewage system (25%) in the resorts.

DISCUSSION

The results of the current research show that Sofia city residents travel more for purposes of summer leisure tourism in Bulgaria than for winter tourism. Also, the length of stay in winter resorts is shorter than in summer ones. The main reason is the tendency for taking longer summer holidays. Another reason is the fact that the district is surrounded by mountains where winter tourism can be practiced. Borovets resort, located in Rila mountain, is the closest winter resort to Sofia (at only 68 km) and is preferred as such by the residents of the Bulgarian capital (Zhelezov, 2023). This proximity results in one day trips to the mountains for skiing, hiking, mountain biking, etc.) without overnight stay.

Vitosha is the other mountain where winter tourism can be practiced. Among the other reasons for not practicing winter tourism, we could mention the fact that the increase of temperatures within the territory of the Sofia Valley caused by the global warming, the active recreational activity of the inhabitants of Sofia and the rapid construction at the Vitosha foothills causes a significant reduction of the areas of natural vegetation (Ivanova-Radovanova & Belev, 2021), leading to the mountain losing its attractiveness. The lack of financial resources is another reason for not going on winter holiday as people try to save money for their summer vacation.

The average satisfaction degree is almost the same for winter and summer domestic holidays, anyway none of the respondents answered "absolutely not satisfied" or "not satisfied" regarding their winter holiday. Even pointing the attractive natural resources as the main advantage and the high prices as the main disadvantage for both types of domestic leisure tourism, when going on holiday abroad, Sofia city residents appreciate the most the higher quality of service they receive.

CONCLUSIONS

Investigating the public attitude towards domestic leisure tourism is the basis of future creation of models of tourist behaviour for overcoming the negatives. The possibilities for tourism in Bulgaria are very diverse and include natural and anthropogenic resources, the potential of which is still developing today (Mancheva-Ali & Kostadinova, 2023). According to the present research natural resources are highly appreciated by the domestic tourists. Having in mind the obtained results, when working on models for overcoming the negatives, the attention should be directed to attractive pricing, raising the quality of service, accommodation and facilities and sustainable development. According to the dynamics of tourism development, those models should be flexible and adaptive (Mancheva-Ali & Prodanova, 2021).

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CRUISE TOURISM DESTINATION BRANDING AS A PATHWAY TO ECONOMIC GROWTH IN PENANG, MALAYSIA: A MULTI-THEORETICAL EXPLORATION

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ABSTRACT: *This research note explores the theoretical alignment between cruise tourism destination branding and economic growth in Penang, Malaysia. This study proposes a Cruise Tourism-Based Destination Brand Equity Pyramid (CTBDBEP) inspired by the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) pyramid. The CTBDBEP is then aligned with the Tourism-Led Growth Hypothesis (TLGH) to highlight the relationship between cruise tourism destination branding and economic growth in Penang. The study provides valuable insights for both academics and stakeholders while paving the way for future research on the correlation between cruise tourism destination branding and economic development in Penang.*

KEYWORDS: *Cruise Tourism Destination Branding, Cruise Tourist-Based Destination Brand-Equity Pyramid (CTBDBEP), Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model, Economic Growth, Tourism-Led Growth Hypothesis (TLGH), Penang, Malaysia*

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INTRODUCTION

Cruise tourism has become an integral part of the global travel industry, providing unique opportunities for leisure and exploration (Lau and Yip, 2020). Unlike other forms of tourism, cruise tourism offers an all-encompassing experience where the journey itself is as significant as the destinations visited. This sector has grown steadily over the past few decades, contributing significantly to the economies of numerous countries. In 2023, the global cruise industry catered to 31.7 million passengers, marking a 6.8% increase from the 29.7 million passengers recorded in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic (CLIA, 2024). This growth underscores the resilience and appeal of cruise tourism despite the challenges posed by the global health crisis. The largest markets, North America and Europe accounted for 18.1 million and 8.2 million passengers, respectively. However, Asia's market saw a significant contraction, with a 37.7% decrease, highlighting regional disparities in cruise tourism recovery (CLIA, 2024).

Malaysia's cruise tourism industry, though relatively nascent, is gaining momentum. The country's strategic location, coupled with its rich cultural and natural attractions, makes it an appealing destination for international cruise lines. In 2023, Malaysia welcomed 29 million international tourists, contributing RM 71 billion to the national economy, with an average expenditure of RM 3540.32 per capita. Cruise tourism, in particular, experienced remarkable growth, with 156 international cruise ships calling at Malaysian ports, marking an 85.71% increase from 2022 (Dermawan, 2024). This growth positions Malaysia as a rising star in the global cruise tourism landscape. The Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal in Penang, in particular, has emerged as a key player, becoming the busiest cruise terminal in the country and one of the most significant in Southeast Asia.

Penang, known for its vibrant cultural heritage and strategic maritime location, is pivotal in Malaysia's cruise tourism sector. The state received 7 million tourists in 2023, including 573,178 cruise tourists, underscoring its growing prominence as a cruise destination (Dermawan, 2024a). The Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal has been instrumental in this growth, solidifying Penang's status as one of Asia's leading cruise ports. Despite these achievements, Penang faces several challenges that could hinder its potential. For instance, the state is yet to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Additionally, Penang experienced a historic budget deficit of RM 514.53 million in 2024, coupled with a rise in unemployment from 2% to 2.7% in 2022 (Leng, 2021; Mok, 2024). These economic pressures highlight the need for strategic interventions to leverage cruise tourism more effectively as a driver of economic growth.

The cruise tourism industry is complex and multifaceted, involving various stakeholders, from cruise lines and port authorities to local businesses and tourists (Dimitrovski *et al.*, 2021). Several previous studies were conducted on the economic impact of cruise tourism in different countries contexts, such as Australia (Dwyer and Forsyth, 1998), Barbados (Chase and Alon, 2002), Costa Rica (Brida and Zapata, 2010), Italy (Paoli *et al.*, 2017), Madeira, Portugal (Gouveia and Eusébio, 2018). However, there is a noticeable gap in academic research regarding the impact of cruise tourism destination branding on economic development, particularly in regions like Penang. Previous studies have predominantly focused on either the supplier's or the consumer's perspective, often paying attention to the broader economic implications. Additionally, there is limited research on how cruise tourism destination branding influences tourists' intentions to visit specific destinations like Penang. Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, widely used in various marketing contexts (Algharabat *et al.*, 2020), has not yet been extensively applied to cruise tourism destination branding. This gap presents a significant opportunity for research that could provide valuable insights for industry.

This research note aims to bridge these gaps by exploring the theoretical underpinnings of cruise tourism destination branding and its potential impact on the economic growth of Penang, Malaysia. Specifically, the study will apply the principles of the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) pyramid to the context of cruise tourism, aligning it with the Tourism-Led Growth Hypothesis (TLGH). Through this theoretical exploration, the study seeks to provide a foundation for future empirical research and practical strategies to enhance Penang's economic growth in the cruise tourism sector.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

THE CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY (CBBE) PYRAMID

Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model is a seminal framework in brand management that emphasizes the consumer's role in building strong brand equity (Keller, 1993). The CBBE model is structured as a pyramid with four levels, each representing a different stage in the development of brand equity (Keller, 2001) (see Figure 1). At the base is Brand Identity, which focuses on brand salience, ensuring that consumers can recall and recognize the brand under various conditions. This level is crucial for establishing a strong brand presence in the market. The second level, Brand Meaning, is divided into performance and imagery. Performance refers to the functional aspects of the brand, such as quality and reliability, while imagery encompasses the symbolic aspects, such as brand associations and user profiles. The third level, Brand Response, includes judgments and feelings. Judgments are consumers' evaluations based on quality, credibility, and superiority, while feelings pertain to the emotional responses the brand evokes. The final level, Brand Resonance, represents the pinnacle of brand equity, characterized by deep consumer loyalty, attachment, and a strong sense of community and engagement with the brand. The CBBE model is widely regarded as a comprehensive model for understanding how brands can build and sustain strong consumer relationships (Keller, 2016). However, its application has been predominantly in consumer goods and services, with limited exploration in the tourism sector, particularly cruise tourism. Given the experiential nature of cruise tourism, the CBBE model offers a valuable lens through which to examine how destination branding can influence tourists' perceptions behaviors.

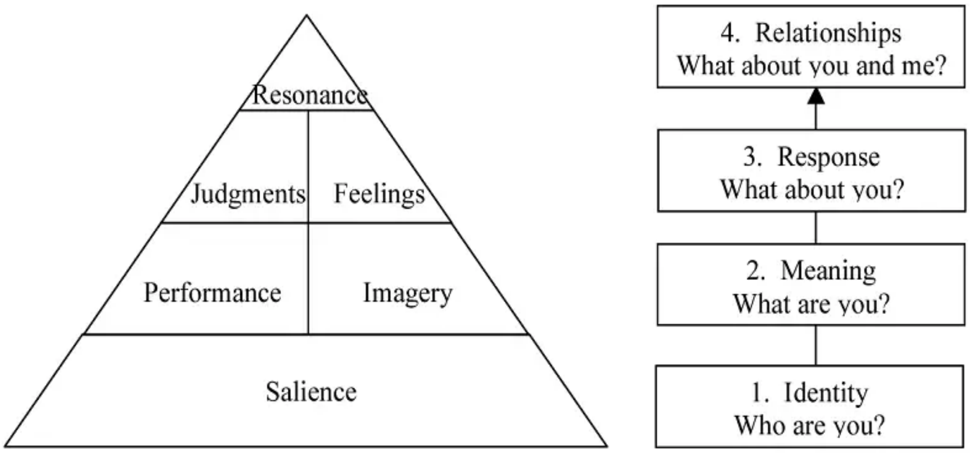

Figure 1: The Customer-Based Brand-Equity Pyramid (CBBE) model

CRUISE TOURISM-BASED DESTINATION BRAND EQUITY PYRAMID (CTBDBEP)

The Cruise Tourism-Based Destination Brand Equity Pyramid (CTBDBEP) adapts the principles of the CBBE model to the specific context of cruise tourism (see Figure 2). Similar to the CBBE model, the CTBDBEP is structured as a pyramid with four levels: Cruise Destination Identity, Cruise Destination Meaning, Cruise Destination Response, and Cruise Destination Resonance.

At the base of the CTBDBEP is Cruise Destination Identity, which focuses on creating strong awareness and salience of the destination among potential cruise tourists. This involves ensuring that the destination is easily recognizable and top-of-mind for tourists when considering cruise options (Yousaf *et al.*, 2020). The second level, Cruise Destination Meaning, comprises two components: destination performance and destination imagery. Performance refers to the functional attributes of the destination, such as the quality of facilities, services, and attractions, while imagery relates to the symbolic associations that tourists have with the destination, such as its cultural heritage, natural beauty, and reputation (Gnanapala, 2015; Qu *et al.*, 2011).

The third level, Cruise Destination Response, includes judgments and feelings. Judgments involve tourists' evaluations of the destination based on criteria such as perceived quality, satisfaction, and value for money (Weiermair and Fuchs, 1999). Feelings, on the other hand, pertain to the emotional responses that the destination evokes, such as excitement, adventure, relaxation, and a sense of escape (Hosany and Gilbert, 2009). These responses are critical in shaping tourists' overall perceptions of the destination and their likelihood of revisiting or recommending it to others.

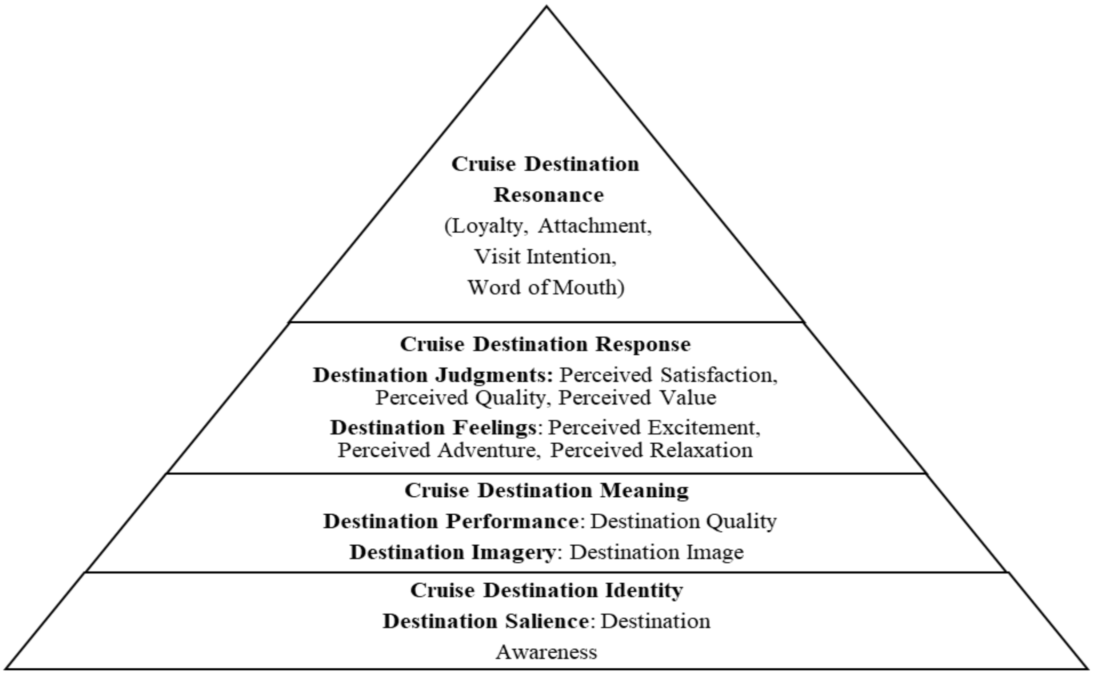

Figure 2: Cruise Tourist-Based Destination Brand-Equity Pyramid (CTBDBEP)

At the apex of the CTBDBEP is Cruise Destination Resonance, which represents the highest level of brand equity. Destination resonance is characterized by a deep psychological connection between tourists and the destination, leading to strong loyalty, attachment, positive word-of-mouth, and a high likelihood of visits or revisits (Yousaf *et al.*, 2020). This level is crucial for sustaining long-term economic benefits, as it ensures that the destination remains a preferred choice among cruise tourists, thereby driving repeat visitation and increasing tourist spending.

ALIGNING CBBE AND CTBDBEP WITH THE TOURISM-LED GROWTH HYPOTHESIS (TLGH)

The Tourism-Led Growth Hypothesis (TLGH) posits that tourism development can be a significant driver of economic growth, particularly in regions with substantial tourism potential (Odeleye *et al.*, 2022). The hypothesis is grounded in the idea that tourism generates both direct and indirect economic benefits, such as increased income, employment, and investment, which in turn stimulate overall economic growth (Balaguer and Cantavella-Jordá, 2002; Raifu and Afolabi, 2024)). This theory is particularly relevant in the context of Penang, where cruise tourism is seen as a key driver of economic development.

The TLGH aligns closely with both the CBBE and CTBDBEP models, as both frameworks emphasize the importance of building strong brand equity to attract and retain tourists (see Figure 3). A strong destination brand can lead to increased tourist arrivals, higher spending, and greater economic benefits (Dwyer *et al.*, 2014). In this context, the CTBDBEP provides a useful framework for understanding how cruise tourism destination branding can contribute to the economic growth of Penang by enhancing the destination's appeal and driving repeat visitation.

Destination Brand Resonance is the pinnacle of the CTBDBEP and is crucial for achieving long-term economic benefits. When a destination achieves high brand resonance, tourists exhibit deep loyalty, strong emotional attachment, positive word-of-mouth, and an increased likelihood of return visits (Chekalina *et al.*, 2016). These outcomes create a virtuous cycle that drives sustained economic growth through three primary mechanisms: direct impact, indirect impact, and induced impact.

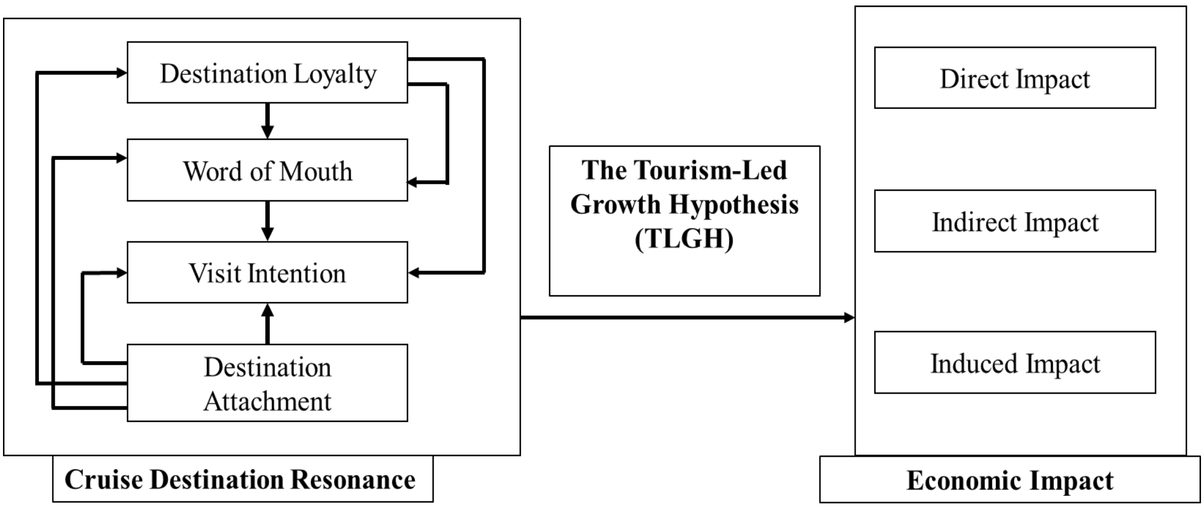

Figure 3: Alignment of CBBE and CTBDBEP with the Tourism-Led Growth Hypothesis (TLGH)

The direct economic impact of destination brand resonance is reflected in the revenue generated from cruise tourism activities. Tourists with high brand resonance are more likely to spend more on accommodation, dining, attractions, and other services, leading to increased income for local businesses (Alegre and Juaneda, 2006; Folgado-Fernández et al., 2016; Kozak and Martin, 2012). For instance, in Penang, cruise tourists contribute significantly to the local economy through spending on local products, guided tours, and cultural experiences. This direct spending supports local employment, increases business revenues, and enhances the overall economic vitality of the region. Additionally, high destination resonance often translates to higher occupancy rates for local hotels and longer stays, further boosting direct economic benefits.

The indirect economic impact arises from the supply chain activities associated with cruise tourism. As the demand for goods and services increases due to a high influx of tourists, local suppliers, vendors, and service providers experience a corresponding rise in business (Dwyer and Forsyth, 1997). For example, local agriculture, crafts, and food industries in Penang benefit from supplying products to businesses catering to cruise tourists. This creates a multiplier effect, where the income generated by primary tourism businesses circulates through the local economy, leading to increased production, investment, and job creation in other sectors.

The induced economic impact refers to the broader economic effects generated by the spending of income earned directly or indirectly from cruise tourism. As employees of tourism-related businesses and their suppliers spend their earnings on housing, education, healthcare, and other goods and services, the overall demand in the economy increases. This induced demand further stimulates economic growth, as it leads to additional job creation and investment in both the tourism sector and other industries (Seetanah, 2011). In Penang, the income generated through cruise tourism reverberates throughout the local economy, contributing to enhanced quality of life and socio-economic development.

The alignment between Destination Brand Resonance and the economic impact mechanisms highlights the crucial role that branding plays in driving economic growth in Penang. By fostering strong loyalty, attachment, word-of-mouth, and visit intention among cruise tourists, Penang can enhance its brand resonance, thereby maximizing the direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts of cruise tourism.

Moreover, the economic benefits derived from high brand resonance extend beyond the tourism sector (Duman *et al.*, 2018). For example, the increased revenue from cruise tourism can be reinvested into infrastructure development, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability initiatives, further enhancing Penang's attractiveness as a cruise destination. Additionally, the economic growth driven by cruise tourism can create spillover effects in other sectors, such as retail, healthcare, and education, contributing to broader socio-economic development in the region.

The integration of the CBBE and CTBDBEP frameworks with the TLGH theory provides a comprehensive understanding of how cruise tourism destination branding can influence economic growth in Penang. By achieving high brand resonance, Penang can not only attract more cruise tourists but also ensure that these tourists contribute meaningfully to the region's economic development through direct, indirect, and induced impacts.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The research note highlights the potential of cruise tourism destination branding as a catalyst for economic growth in Penang, Malaysia. By applying the principles of the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) pyramid to the context of cruise tourism and aligning them with the Tourism-Led Growth Hypothesis (TLGH), the study provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between destination branding and economic outcomes. The Cruise Tourism-Based Destination Brand Equity Pyramid (CTBDBEP) offers a tailored framework that captures the unique dynamics of cruise tourism and its potential to drive sustained economic growth.

The study emphasizes the importance of achieving high destination brand resonance through the strategic integration of loyalty, attachment, word-of-mouth, and visit intention. These elements are critical for fostering strong emotional connections with tourists, encouraging repeat visits, and generating positive word-of-mouth, all of which contribute to the direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts of cruise tourism. For Penang, leveraging these elements to enhance brand resonance can lead to significant economic benefits, including increased tourist spending, higher employment rates, and improved local infrastructure.

However, the study also underscores the need for a holistic approach to destination branding that considers the broader economic context. While cruise tourism presents a valuable opportunity for economic growth, it must be managed sustainably to ensure that the benefits are equitably distributed and that the region's cultural and environmental assets are preserved. This requires collaboration among key stakeholders, including government agencies, local businesses, and the community, to develop and implement strategies that align with Penang's long-term development goals.

The study has important implications for both academic research and industry practice. Academically, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on tourism destination branding by providing a nuanced understanding of how the CBBE model can be adapted to the cruise tourism context. It also highlights the need for further empirical research to validate the proposed theoretical frameworks and explore their applicability in different regional and cultural contexts. For practitioners, the study offers valuable insights into the strategic management of cruise tourism destination brands, particularly in emerging markets like Penang. By adopting a brand equity-focused approach, destination managers can enhance their competitive positioning, attract higher-value tourists, and drive long-term economic growth.

This research note sets the stage for future studies that can empirically test the proposed theoretical frameworks and provide actionable recommendations for stakeholders in the cruise tourism industry. By continuing to explore the intersection of destination branding and economic growth, researchers and practitioners can unlock new opportunities to maximize the economic potential of cruise tourism in Penang and beyond.

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PERFORMANCE INDICATORS IN LODGING: OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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ABSTRACT: *This research aimed to investigate the performance measurement indicators used by resorts in the city of Natal, State of Rio Grande do Norte and their applicability as management tools considering the Balanced Scorecard indicator theory in improving hotel performance. An exploratory-descriptive research was carried out, with a qualitative approach. The survey population was composed of managers of ten resorts in the city of Natal and the sample was by accessibility, being carried out with three managers of the resorts who were willing to answer the data collection instrument. The results obtained in the survey showed that the three respondents agree that performance measurement allows to compare the results obtained with the planned results, showing what needs to be improved or which procedures need to be reviewed. The use of the Balanced Scorecard methodology was pointed by managers as necessary in identifying performance gaps and opportunities for improvement and list operational and budgetary management as the main purposes for using measurement indicators. In the end, it is concluded that despite the limitation of the sample, the research showed that the use of Performance Measurement Systems is revealed as an essential tool in the monitoring and management of organizational as a source of data and information that substantiate strategic decisions, allowing the projection of scenarios for more effective management, sustainable and with possibilities to offer excellent services.*

KEYWORDS: *Performance Indicators. Balanced Scorecard. Manager. Hotel Resorts. City of Natal.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism activity, especially in the coastal regions of the country, has shown positive post-pandemic recovery rates. Indeed, the analysis of the results of the performance of enterprises in the hotel sector, supported using performance indicators, has attracted the attention of researchers, tourism trade and other professionals working in the area.

As pointed out by Haktanir and Harris (2005), with the emergence of new companies in the hotel sector and the maintenance of existing ones, it is imperative that managers develop and implement strategies to ensure the continuity of these ventures.

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In this scenario, factors such as competition, economic changes and consumer behavior, examples of variables that influence organizational strategies, require that hotel companies seek competitive advantages to remain active in a dynamic and competitive environment, characterized by seasonality.

This said, the establishment of metrics or performance indicators that have as purpose to verify the behavior of companies and generate data and information that underpin decision-making, especially strategic, becomes indispensable. Such indicators are central tools that enable the monitoring of operational and financial results, underpinning the planning of actions aimed at improving the overall performance of the organization (Rodrigues; Schuch; Pantaleão, 2003).

However, the use of financial indicators is not sufficient to guide and verify the trajectory of the company in a dynamic and competitive environment, because these indicators tell only part of the history of past actions and do not provide adequate information for present and future actions.

In this regard, Quesado and Rodrigues (2009) emphasize the importance of the methodology of the Balanced Scorecard, emerged as a tool of Management Accounting and Strategic Management, able to highlight the critical success factors and the set of financial and non-financial measures necessary to achieve strategic objectives, structured in four basic perspectives, which Kaplan and Norton (1997) classify as: financial resources; customers; internal processes; learning and growth, and these perspectives should be carefully measured.

In practice, the relationship between these four perspectives aims to define organizational goals and objectives, as well as the assignments of functions to employees and the establishment of action plans. This integration between the perspectives allows to logically structure organizational strategies and operationalize actions that effectively generate results (Mereo, 2020).

In a simplified way, the dynamics of BSC promotes communication between perspectives, allowing them to 'talk to each other', so that improvement in one specific area of the company leads to improvements in the others, resulting in a more sustainable overall performance and, therefore more satisfactory (Nonnatus, 2024). In addition, the BSC presents similarities with the SWOT Matrix and can be translated into a strategic map, presented in a visual summary table of the *BSC concept* that will be implemented in the company (RD Station, 2024).

Effectively, Camargo (2018) defines the BSC as a set of objectives that allows employees to have a quick and comprehensive view of the organization's strategy, configuring itself as an organizational performance evaluation model that enables to measure performance, as well, establish goals (individual and team), remuneration, resource allocation, planning, budget, feedback and strategic learning. In addition, the BSC can be used as a risk management tool, enabling the manager to identify and adequately treat threats, maximizing the chances of achieving successful strategic objectives.

Moreover, when the organization uses metrics to quantify the efficiency and effectiveness of its actions, it has a performance measurement system. In practice, the use of such systems makes the measurement and evaluation process more concise since it standardizes procedures and establishes criteria useful to the decision-making process.

Thus, considering the importance of performance indicators, especially in hotel companies installed in regions where tourism has shown significant growth, as is the case of Northeast Brazil, the central question of this research arises: What performance indicators are used by the resorts of the city of Natal, capital of the state of Rio Grande do Norte, and how is it applicable as a contributing tool for strategic management considering the Balanced Scorecard methodology?

The city of Natal is one of the main tourist destinations in Brazil, attracting national and international visitors with its beautiful beaches, rich culture and pleasant climate. Currently, according to information extracted from the MTur Tourism Service Provider Registry (CADASTUR, 2023), the city registers ten registered resorts.

It is worth mentioning that the city's accommodation facilities face constant challenges to maintain the quality of services and, at the same time, improve performance, optimizing overall results, particularly in a seasonality scenario of tourism activity, in which guest expectations and competition are continuously increasing.

According to the Potiguar Tourism Promotion Company (EMPROTUR, 2024), Natal has been highlighted as a safe and attractive option for tourists in the post-pandemic period. Among the Top 10, seven cities are in the Northeast Region of Brazil, and Natal, in Rio Grande do Norte, is in the second place of the Northeast, replacing traditionally sought after destinations such as: Porto de Galinhas, in Pernambuco, Salvador, in Bahia and Fortaleza, in Ceará. It is estimated that in 2023, the sector grew even more, registering an increase of 85% compared to 2020 figures, which represents a considerable recovery.

In addition, investments in new tourist attractions, promotion of the destination and strict sanitary measures contributed to make Natal a safe and reliable destination for tourists, occurring the expansion of the hotel network of the city, as well as the modernization of facilities and accommodation, increasing the attractiveness of the public that seeks comfort and quality in their travel experiences.

Indeed, financial and non-financial indicators measure different aspects of operations, such as efficiency in the use of resources, quality of services provided, customer satisfaction, innovation in internal processes and human capital development. Thus, managers must be attentive to issues that involve the performance and permanence of organizations in the market and, therefore, need useful and quality information that contribute to the decision-making process, especially in economic scenarios change and fierce competitiveness, as is the case of the resorts selected as objects of this study.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological procedures used to achieve the objective proposed for this study included bibliographic, hemerographic field and documentary research, being exploratory-descriptive research, with a qualitative approach.

The sample of the survey was defined by accessibility criteria. Initially, the survey instrument was sent to the managers of ten resorts, previously contacted. However, only three managers of three hotel enterprises, specifically resorts, located in the city of Natal/ RN – Brazil, were willing to answer the questionnaire through the Google Forms platform.

The data were compiled and organized using the Excel spreadsheet and converted into a file compatible with the statistical package Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) that produces information in tables, graphs and descriptive measures (absolute frequency, percentage frequency, averages and medians).

In addition, the four perspectives of Kaplan and Norton (1997) were used for the theoretical analysis of performance indicators collected in the surveyed hotel companies: financial, customers, internal processes and learning and growth, to analyze the correlation to determine the relationship between the performance indicators used by the hotels surveyed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As established in the methodological procedures, to achieve the proposed objective was carried out a field research with the application of a questionnaire with the responsible for three resorts located in the city of Natal. The data obtained are presented here.

Initially, the research sought to identify if the three respondents (managers of resorts) use Performance Measurement Systems (PMS) to subsidize the decision-making process: only two answered that they do. It was also asked who would be responsible for collecting data that feed the PMS. The three answers to this question were the parent company, the accountant and a trained employee. About the specific software used for this purpose, all respondents pointed to the use of the Excel spreadsheet.

The use of PMS provides managers with data and information that allows them to identify strategic issues proactively, directing new paths that underpin the process of strategic decision making; contributing to organizational learning; recognizing talents, improving communication and pointing out the priorities of senior management and managers (National Foundation for Quality, 2012).

For this, it is necessary to carry out surveys, defining their periodicity so that data and information are always updated. Thus, this study sought to identify with managers the periodicity of surveys, especially in relation to employee satisfaction, that is, the frequency with which they are carried out, being 'monthly' the response obtained from the three respondents.

As for the means chosen by the managers to identify the degree of satisfaction of the guests, such information is collected by Booking.com (Table 1). According to Vieira (2016), travel websites have power of influence on the choices of tourists and reflect the opinion of consumers. Monitoring the evaluations and comments on these sites offers managers an opportunity to reassess their services, which can lead to positive returns in their activities.

Table 1 – Main sources of information on customer satisfaction

Variable	Category	N	%
Attributes chosen by the manager to identify the level of guest satisfaction	Websites (Booking)	2	33.3
	Image search	1	16.7
	Research on service quality	3	50
	TOTAL	6	100

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Regarding the use of performance measurement systems to obtain information that supports the decision-making process, the three respondents stated that they hold monthly meetings, showing the commitment of managers to continuous evaluation.

For Fama and Cardoso (2001), the performance measurement system works as an information panel on organizational performance, indicating the route to be followed, allowing to measure progress in the pursuit of excellence.

The results obtained in the survey showed that the three respondents agree that performance measurement allows to compare the results obtained with the planned results, showing what needs to be improved or which procedures need to be reviewed.

Regarding the strategic objectives (Table 2), operational efficiency, quality of services, improved guest experience, effective management of resources and sustainable financial return were identified by the three respondents as main pillars of good management, which requires qualified information, obtained through performance measurement systems, to underpin strategic decisions, followed by higher profitability, brand strengthening and cost reduction. As Trindade et al., (2013, p. 13), states, "planning the future is a matter of survival in a dynamic market. An appropriate approach to business planning is one that considers as a form of control of the foreseeable outcome to the next one".

Table 2 – Main strategic objectives to be achieved through performance measurement

Variable	N	%
Operational Efficiency	3	14.3
Quality of Services	3	14.3
Enhanced guest experience	3	14.3
Effective Resource Management	3	14.3
Sustainable Financial Return	3	14.3
Greater Profitability	2	9.5
Brand Strengthening	2	9.5
Cost Reduction	2	9.5
TOTAL	21	100

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Among the performance indicators pointed out by the three respondents (Table 3), the occupancy rate/index, guest satisfaction and operating profit margin stand out, since such information is considered strategic for long-term investment decisions.

Table 3 – Main performance indicators of a Resort

Variable	N	%
Occupancy rate/index	3	21.4
Guest satisfaction	3	21.4
Operating profit margin	3	21.4
Average response time to requests.	2	14.3
Guest return rate	2	14.3
Customer reviews	1	7.2
TOTAL	14	100

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Undoubtedly, the performance measurement systems are configured as management control tools, reflecting the philosophy, organizational culture and quality of work performed, based on indicators on a given objective, as cost, time, quality and profitability (Feliciano et al., 2018).

The use of the Balanced Scorecard methodology was pointed out by the three respondents as necessary in identifying performance gaps and opportunities for improvement (Table 4). In addition, the BSC can provide clear metrics on service performance, measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of strategic objectives, providing greater clarity in data interpretation and generation of qualified information, directly influencing investment decisions and resource allocation, since the use of these metrics allows a strategic approach based on information provided by the tool, enabling investments to be directed to areas that maximize their return.

Table 4 – Influence of the Balanced Scorecard on investment and resource allocation decisions

Variable	N	%
Identification of performance gaps and opportunities for improvement.	3	60
Providing clear metrics on service performance.	2	40
TOTAL	5	100

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

The research also sought to identify managers' perception of the use of performance indicators in aligning the resort's daily operations with its long-term strategic objectives (Table 5). According to the three respondents, this interaction and alignment between performance indicators and strategic objectives strengthens the organizational culture; improves communication and coordination among sectors, as well as providing metrics for monitoring activities.

Table 5 – Adaptation of Balanced Scorecard indicators to meet the specific and dynamic needs of the Resort

Variable	N	%
Need to align indicators with resort differentiation strategies.	3	23
Customization of indicators to reflect the resort's demands.	2	15.4
Continuous adjustment of indicators in light of trends or demands of the tourism market.	2	15.4
Focus on the relevance of indicators according to customer expectations.	2	15.4
Consideration of guest feedback to update indicators.	2	15.4
Implementation of more dynamic indicators capable of monitoring changes in the tourist environment.	2	15.4
TOTAL	13	100

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

The data in Table 5 shows that performance indicators can be adapted to the specific needs of the resort in a dynamic environment such as the tourism industry. According to the three respondents, it is possible to customize the indicators to reflect the demands of the resort, as well as adjust them in the face of trends or demands of the tourist market, focus on the relevance of the indicators according to the expectations of customers, consider the feedback of guests to update the indicators and implement more dynamic indicators capable of tracking changes in the tourist environment. In addition, the three respondents pointed to the need for alignment of indicators to differentiation strategies.

Furthermore, the use of these practices allows resorts to remain competitive and responsive to market changes, reflecting the importance of a flexible performance measurement system, adaptable to new demands and trends.

When we sought to identify the financial indicators used by resorts and the motivation for choosing these indicators - profit margin and turnover-value - appeared as the most important metrics for the three respondents. In fact, these indicators are fundamental to assess the financial health of a business, focusing on profitability and cost control.

Regarding the non-financial performance indicators (customer perspective), the variables loyalty and satisfaction of customers were identified by the three respondents as the most important. Indeed, Marquezan, Diehl and Alberton (2013, p. 49) highlight that "non-financial indicators show, for the most part, the ability to transmit information more easily to the various levels of an organization".

The survey also sought to identify how respondents deal with customer complaints: the three pointed out that the variable time to resolve complaints is the most used indicator, especially for concern about the time of return and resolution of complaints received, being the efficient management of time and maintenance in periods of high occupancy, fundamental to ensure effective supervision in processes that raise the satisfaction of guests. The other indicator pointed out by two respondents refers to the occupancy rate and time, linked to the time of order fulfillment and customer complaints.

Another question raised in the research refers to the perspective of learning and growth, also contemplated in the Balanced Scorecard. The results showed the willingness of the three respondents to reinforce the importance of this perspective. For the three respondents, investments in training, employee satisfaction and quality of services are essential to achieve strategic objectives.

It is worth highlighting the interaction between these variables: well-trained employees perform their activities with the satisfaction of providing quality services, contributing to positive assessments of the enterprise. Investing in continuous employee training and development is the most effective way to provide guests with a more accurate perception of the quality of services offered.

In fact, the range of indicators in a performance evaluation system can cover both financial goals and non-financial indicators (Marquezan; Diehl; Alberton, 2013).

Finally, the results of the research allowed to identify the purpose of the use of performance indicators by managers. The three respondents pointed out the contributions to operational and budgetary management as the main purposes for the use of indicators.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study showed the importance of using structured performance measurement systems, based on pre-established metrics from the strategic objectives of the project.

Despite the limited sample size of this study, since only three of the ten managers contacted by the research team were willing to participate, the results of the research showed that the use of Performance Measurement Systems is revealed as an essential tool in the monitoring and management of organizational performance, especially as a source of data and information that substantiate strategic decisions.

The main indicators used in the survey covered the perspectives used in the Balanced Scorecard, both from financial and non-financial aspects, showing that although managers/respondents do not use specific performance assessment software, the reports produced through the Excel spreadsheet have met the needs of these managers, allowing to obtain a balanced balance on management in their hotel enterprises. The occupancy rate, guest satisfaction and operating profit margin appear as the most relevant indicators, highlighting the need for a management focused on operational efficiency and quality of services provided. In addition, the use of customer feedback through platforms such as Booking and internal questionnaires, show the continuous effort of employees to offer quality services, improving the guest experience.

Finally, the results obtained showed that although the challenges in hotel management are constant, especially by the peculiarities of this activity in the tourism industry, the use of Performance Indicator Systems, with emphasis on the Balanced Scorecard, is proven to be an essential tool for the achievement of strategic objectives, by enabling the projection of scenarios that contribute to a more effective management, sustainable and with possibilities to offer services of excellence.

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT (PRE-CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT PERIOD) IN ABKHAZIA (REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA)

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of the research: to conduct a comparative analysis of changes in the tourism spherer in Abkhazia over the past decades, to show the critical role of tourism in the economy of Abkhazia and the prospects for its development., To compare the state of the industry, Based on various sources and our own research, in the separatist region of Georgia before the conflict and after the declaration of independence. To Assess and analyse the state of the resort, recreational and tourism industry against the backdrop of a severe economic collapse caused by military action and ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population. To Asses the problems in the state of natural conditions of the region, cultural and historical heritage, the current state of protected areas and natural monuments caused by the artificially created ethnic background formed as a result of the war; Indications of illegal actions taken in the direction of the use of natural resources and nature conservation; Assessment of the impact of the current status of Abkhazia and external factors on the development of tourism.*

KEYWORDS: *Tourism, Republic of Georgia, Abkhazia, Environmental protection.*

INTRODUCTION

Abkhazia is a separatist region of Georgia, which was once an autonomous republic within Georgia during the Soviet era. After the dissolution of the USSR, Abkhazia remained an autonomous republic within independent Georgia. Following the 1992-1993 conflict, Abkhazia declared independence, which has been recognized by Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru, and Syria

During the Soviet period, due to specific climatic conditions, Abkhazia became a major recreation area of the national importance. The region was famous for its seaside resorts, where excellent natural conditions for recreation: a mild subtropical climate, healthy air, a long resort season, where the sun shines 220 days a year, and the wonderful landscapes of the sea coast create a unique atmosphere for a seaside holiday.

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That is why most of the sanatoriums, pensons, rest homes and tourist bases are concentrated here. Already in the 80s of the 20th century, the resort and recreational and tourist industry of Abkhazia was an important factor in the employment of the population of Abkhazia [Кития Л. Зухбая В. 2020].

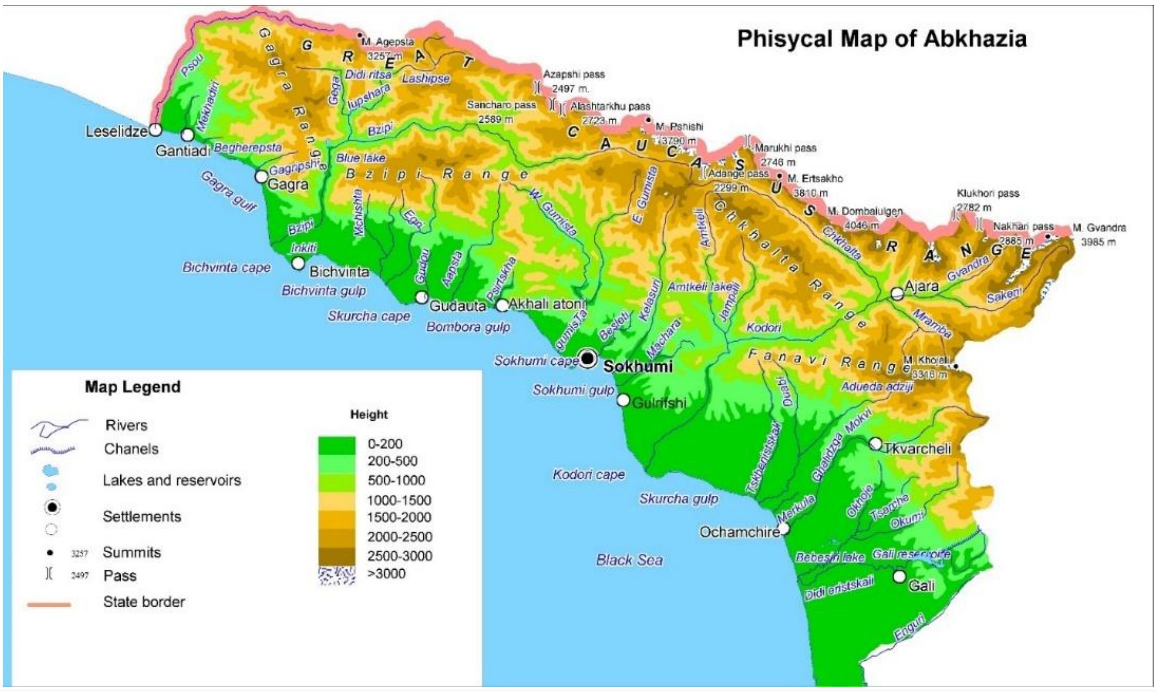

Fig. 1. Physical map of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia
(https://www.guideoftheworld.com › Abkhazia Map)

The main attractive factor of Abkhazia is its nature. An important place in the development of tourism in Abkhazia is occupied by natural conditions and attractions. caves, lakes, fast mountain rivers, waterfalls and lakes, healing mineral and thermal waters, the main Caucasian Range itself with relict picturesque forests, caves and deep ravines, clean pebble beaches and nature reserves. as well as historical and cultural (New athos monastery, ruins of fortresses on Mount Iverskaya and Kodorsky Gorge, the medieval Bagrat fortress in Sokhumi, the churches of Bedia, Likhni and Ilori, etc.) and archaeological monuments (Tolordava, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Historical, geographical, cartographic and statistical sources of various scientific nature were used in the research process; Materials of the project "Complex-geographic atlas and geoinformation system of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia" under our leadership at the National Scientific Fund named after Shota Rustaveli and research conducted by us on the territory of Abkhazia at different times, in the processing of which we used graph-analytical, mathematical, cartometric, comparative analysis and Other methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To protect virgin forests, flora and fauna in Abkhazia, was created four reserves: Bichvinta-Museri, Pskhu-Gumistinsky, Ritsa and Skurchi, of which the Bichvinti and Ritsia reserves deserve special attention. Betveen the natural monuments, the most popular among visitors are the caves of New Athos and Abskrill (Kitia & Zukhbaia, 2020).

All this beauty and grandeur of Abkhazia was easily accessible for visiting by Soviet citizens, although the reception of tourists from other countries was limited. Situational changes in this area began in the second half of the 80s of the last century, which from the beginning on the 90s, acquired a mass character, and tourists began to arrive from outside the post-Soviet space.

An important role in the economy of Abkhazia played the resort, recreational and tourism industry. The seaside resort was founded in the second half of the 19th century, which marked the beginning of the arrival of vacationers. By the end of the 19th - beginning of the 20th century, began the construction of sanatoriums and holiday homes (Gulrifsh sanatorium and Sokhumi arboretum in 1898, sanatorium building on the territory of the "Gagra climatic resort", beginning of the 20th century). This process contributed to the formation of resort infrastructure and cities (Gagra, Gudauta, Ochamchira) and the growth and development of Sokhumi. Recreational functions were assigned to villages: New Athos, Bichvinta, Leselidze, Gantiad, etc. (Kitiya & Zukhbaya, 2020).

Before the conflict, resort facilities (23 sanatoriums, 21 boarding houses, 46 holiday homes) operating in the coastal zone of Abkhazia[1] (table 1) were visited by 202,000 tourists, which amounted to 40% of the tourist market of the Georgia SSR (Shengelia et al., 2020).

The 1992-93 conflict caused irreparable damage to the tourism and recreational industry of Abkhazia, as well as the economy as a whole. True, military actions did not cause significant damage to recreational facilities, but the uncontrolled post-war situation led to their looting and infrastructure disruption of about ¾ of the region's population was forced to leave the autonomous republic, which also caused a shortage of qualified specialists. At the same time, the CIS countries introduced sanctions against the self-recognized republic (1996, 01.), which played a negative role in the economic situation of Abkhazia (Shengelia et al., 2020).

It should be said that the lifting of these sanctions by Russia (2008) had a positively effect economic growth, including the tourism, sector although this act opened up the opportunity for the northern neighbor manage the region's natural resources, wich has a

[1] *The length of the coast line of Abkhazia is 210 km. From here, 140 km was suitable for beach-recreational space.*

negative impact on the state of the natural-territorial complex of the region's. for example, It is planned to begin geological exploration of hydrocarbon raw materials in the Gudauta region of the Black Sea. The Cabinet of Ministers of Abkhazia has already extended the previously issued (2014) license for geological exploration and production work to the Russian company Rosneft, although part of the Abkhazian society believes that these works can cause great damage to the coastal recreation area, which will negatively affect the number of tourists (https://www.rosneft.ru/, 2015).

To build the infrastructure for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, large quantities of inert materials were extracted and removed from the delta of the river of the Abkhaz region, which could cause serious and irreparable damage to the unique and pristine nature of the Black Sea coast in the future. Due to the fact that logging is one of the main sources of income for Abkhazia, the forest fund is shrinking. For example, the total volume of timber reserves over the past 5 years has decreased from 103 to 83.1 million m^3, and timber production in 2019-2022. From 19 787 to 5653 m^3, which is caused by the reduction of forest area from 528 thousand to 494 thousand hectares over the same period. [Шенгелия Т., 2020]. This situation forced the government of Abkhazia to pass a law in the Parliament of Abkhazia of the sezure of forests from the high-mountain reserve named Pshu, while industrial logging had been prohibited in Abkhazia since 1978, which was especially important for Abkhazia as a recreational region. The adoption of this law will cause irreparable damage to the nature of the republic (Shengelia et al., 2020).

Despite the risks, Abkhazia is visited annually by about 300 thousand tourists, mainly from the Russian Federation. Unlike other cities on the Black Sea coast, such as Sochi, Abkhazia attracts tourists with relatively low prices, a unique climate and nature, and high-quality cuisine (Shengelia et al., 2020).

There is a certain imbalance in the tourism sector of Abkhazia, - the most popular tourist area is the western part of Abkhazia, where the resort centers of Gagra, Bichvinta, Gudauta, New Athos and Sokhumi, as well as the main tourist sites, are located. At the same time, Eastern Abkhazia also has great prospects in this regard, for which it is necessary to create favorable conditions for the development of tourism in this part of the republic (Akaba, 2024).

The revitalization of tourism in Abkhazia will facilitate the restoration of the Sokhum International Airport, the opening of which is scheduled for 2025. It is expected that after completion of all stages of reconstruction, the airport's capacity will be about 1.2 million passengers per year (Akaba, 2024).

In addition to collective accommodation facilities, there are 276 mini-hotels with 7618 beds in the region. As can be seen from the table, the total number of tourists has significantly decreased compared to the Soviet period, although there is a tendency for growth. The number amount of collective accommodation facilities has already exceeded the pre-conflict period, and the number of vacationers in this sector has increased accordingly. The exception is 2020, when the number of tourists halved compared to 2019 due to the Covid pandemic.

Table 1. Dynamics of the number of tourists in Abkhazia
(STATE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ABKHAZIA, 2024)

years	Number of tourists			Collective accommodation facilities		
	Total	multi-day	one day	quantity	places	Number of tourists
1989	1202000	202 000	1000000	90	19017	800 000
2016	700 000	350 000	600000	76	13919	151900
2017	800 000	450000	350000	76	14749	113747
2018				79	15771	131085
2019				83	15578	142522
2020				79	17198	78612
2021				97	20500	309185
2022				107	22618	309702

CONCLUSION

Thus, the territory of the occupied autonomous region of Georgia has all possible natural conditions for the development of tourism. However, the political situation and socio-economic difficulties hinder progress in this area. The results of the study revealed the main obstacles to the development of tourism in Abkhazia: damage caused by the conflict, post-conflict economic collapse and devastation, due to which ¾ of the population left the region, he status of an occupied territory, prohibiting entry into the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia for foreign citizens and stateless persons; economic sanctions from the CIS countries, which were in effect until 2008; Systematic exploitation of natural resources, damaging the unique nature of the region; disorganized transport system, etc. The revival of the tourism sector in Abkhazia is possible only after these issues are resolved. First of all, it is necessary to regulate relations with Georgia, create conditions for the return of the population displaced from the region during ethnic cleansing and conflicts.

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Physical map of Abkhazia https://www.guideoftheworld.com › Abkhazia Map

ACCESSIBILITY CONDITIONS FOR THE SENIORS IN LODGING FACILITIES: A STUDY ON THE BEACHES IN CONDE-PB

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ABSTRACT: *Brazil, like many other countries, has an aging population and increased life expectancy. Architectural obstacles must be removed in public and private settings to ensure senior citizens have safe and dignified access to all situations. To achieve the proposed objective, a review of the existing literature was carried out, which included academic studies and government data. In the second stage, field visits were carried out, with the application of a checklist developed by the Institutional Program for Scientific Initiation Scholarships at the Federal University of Paraíba (PIBIC-PIVIC-UFPB), based on NBR 9050/2020. The study was characterized by descriptive exploratory research with quantitative and qualitative analysis and the findings indicate that there is an urgent need to improve the conditions for welcoming senior travellers in safety and comfort, since, in general, it was found that 100% of the establishments studied do not have full accessibility conditions for senior citizens. Public policies and society must mobilize to ensure senior citizens are treated with dignity, respect, and equality, allowing them to live fully and healthily in their communities, so that tourism can develop responsibly.*

KEYWORDS: *Senior citizens, tourism, accessibility, lodging facilities*

INTRODUCTION

Accessibility for the seniors in public and private areas is critical to promoting their inclusion and quality of life. The seniors come across numerous barriers to accessing areas such as public transport, and commercial and residential buildings. The lack of ramps, appropriate elevators, visual and audible signage, among other factors, make it difficult for these people to move around and access.

Increased life expectancy and an aging population are a reality in Brazil, as in many other countries. It is worth mentioning that these demographic changes influence various sectors of society. As defined in Article 1 of the Statute of the Senior, a senior person is an individual who has reached the age of 60 or older (Brasil, 2003). In Brazil, according to the

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Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2022), the sênior population represents around 32.9 million people aged 60 or over, 15.6% of the total.

Architectural barriers are one of the main obstacles to mobility and access for the sênior in urban environments. Narrow sidewalks, steep stairs, lack of handrails, and slippery floors are just a few examples of the difficulties faced by this population. Existing legislation on accessibility for the elderly is essential to guarantee their rights and promote equal opportunities (Brasil, 2003).

With this in mind, the general objective of this study was to analyze the accessibility conditions of lodging facilities located at the beaches in Conde County, concerning the elderly.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBILITY FOR SENIORS

The growth of the senior population and the increase in life expectancy have sparked debate in the tourism sector, which has expressed an interest in offering improvements to serve the segment of people over 60 years old (Brambilla, 2024). In conceptual terms, accessibility is based on everyday occurrences and, in this way, accessibility conditions can be designed to provide individuals access to certain places and situations.

The Brazilian National Standards Organization (ABNT, 2020), through NBR 9050, defines accessibility as the possibility and condition of reaching, perceiving, and understanding the safe and autonomous use of buildings, spaces, furniture, urban equipment, and elements. The same legal provision defines the term accessible as space, building, furniture, urban equipment, or element that can be reached, operated, used, and experienced by anyone, including those with reduced mobility.

Article 20 of the Statute of the Senior Citizens (Law 10.741/2003) states that: "the senior person has the right to education, culture, sport, leisure, entertainment, shows, products, and services that respect their peculiar condition of age". To ensure accessibility, the architectural design of lodging facilities must be adapted to the legal requirements for people with reduced mobility or disabilities, allowing them to fully enjoy the services available while maintaining autonomy and quality. Accessibility is the implementation of the right to equality guaranteed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution (Ribeiro, 2014).

Thus, adapting hotel premises to meet the specific needs of the seniors is critical to ensuring a comfortable and safe stay. Access ramps make it easier for wheelchair users and older individuals with mobility issues to get around, whereas handrails in common areas and adapted bathrooms provide greater autonomy and independence.

METHODOLOGY

The study was characterized by descriptive exploratory research with quantitative and qualitative analysis. Bibliographic, documentary and field research were consequently considered. Initially, the bibliographical research was carried out on scientific articles, books, websites, and documents focusing on the subjects of tourism, the senior age, and the conditions and needs for public accessibility in lodging facilities.

To achieve the proposed objective, bibliographic research was carried out on the subject, including academic studies and government data, on scientific publications and documents based on texts on the senior age, hospitality, tourism, accessibility, NBR 9050 of the Brazilian Association of Technical Standards (ABNT, 2020), the Statute of the Senior (Law no. 10. 741/2003), the legislation on priority service for the seniors (Law 10.048/2000), the promotion of accessibility for people with disabilities or reduced mobility (Law 10.098/2000) and the National Policy for the Senior (Law 8.842/1994). According to Gil (2002, p. 45), the primary benefit of bibliographical research is that it allows "[...] the investigator to cover a much wider range of phenomena than could be researched directly".

In the second stage, field visits were conducted to collect information and data on the research topic that would be required for the progress of the study. The search for data resulted from the application of a checklist, based on NBR 9050/2020, considering the legal standards of accessibility and the requirements demanded so that the senior public can safely and autonomously enjoy the lodging facilities that are the object of the study and verify the conditions, in the Housing Units (UH), restaurants/bar, common areas, swimming pools and parking, in the means of lodging on the coast of Conde/PB, registered with the Ministry of Tourism's CADASTUR and in operation, in a total of 15 enterprises, as well as a brief history of them and location.

In the end, the results, analyses, and photographs will be presented, indicating the general accessibility conditions of the area under study.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The data analyzed was collected through a visit and the application of a checklist by the researcher to the 15 lodging facilities at the Conde/PB Coast in operation and registered with the Ministry of Tourism's CADASTUR, 6 of which are located at Jacumã beach, 7 at Carapibus beach and 2 at Tabatinga beach. To protect the identity of the lodging facilities surveyed, their names have been replaced by the codes H01 to H15.

The article "Accessibility conditions for the seniors in lodging facilities: a study on the beaches in Conde/PB" was prepared for presentation at the Tourism Conference, Bulgaria 2024, organized by the Department of Tourism at St. Cyril and St. Methodius University and the National Institut of Geophysics, Geodesy, and Geography at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, using the data collected during the visits. The article will also be published in the conference book. In addition, the partial findings of this work are being used to finalize TCC 2 (Course Conclusion Work), which will be presented to the Hotel Management course at the University. The results are provided in tables 1 to 6, which show whether or not accessibility elements are complied with in five areas of the lodging facilities: guest rooms, restaurant/bar, common area, swimming pool, and parking lot. In the tables, the digit "1" corresponds to compliance with the accessibility guideline, the digit "0" to non-compliance, and n/a to non-application. The sums of the items met, per item and lodging establishment, are also displayed, along with the appropriate percentages. Table 7 shows the consolidated results for each lodging establishment and the group as a whole

TABLE 1 - Percentage of items met for the senior accessibility of the Housing Unit

	Door ways 80 cm	Free Swivel 360º	Bathroom Doorway 80 cm	Support bars	Accessible routes	Non-slip flooring/ No steps	Unbreakable shower enclosures	Total	~~%~~
H01	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	100,0 %
H02	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H03	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6	85,7%
H04	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	4	57,1%
H05	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6	85,7%
H06	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H07	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H08	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	14,3%
H09	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	42,9%
H10	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	4	57,1%
H11	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6	85,7%
H12	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	85,7%
H13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H14	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	4	57,1%
H15	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6	85,7%
Total	10	9	10	8	6	6	4	53	
%	66,7%	60,0%	66,7%	53,3%	40,0%	40,0%	26,7%		50,5%

Source: Field research.

Table 1 shows the results of 7 accessibility items for the seniors, 80 cm doorways, 360º free swivel for wheelchairs, support bars in the bathroom, accessible routes, no steps, non-slip flooring, and unbreakable shower enclosures, in the guest rooms of each of the 15 lodging facilities visited. It was found that only 1 fully complies with the 7 accessibility items checked, while 4 do not comply with any item and hence are not equipped with accessible guest rooms, even partially. The overall average, considering all the UH and accessibility items checked, is 50.5%.

Table 2 shows the results of 3 accessibility items for the seniors, accessible restrooms, accessible routes, and menus with enlarged characters, checked in the restaurant/bar of the 15 lodging facilities visited. It was found that 5 fully complied with the 3 accessibility items checked and 4 did not comply with any item. The overall average, considering all the restaurants/bars and accessibility items checked, is 55.6%, which is very close to the average of the items considering all 15 lodging facilities.

TABLE **2 -** Percentage of items met for the senior accessibility in restaurants/bars

	Accessible restrooms	Accessible routes	Menus w/ enlarged characters	Total	~~%~~
H01	1	1	1	3	100,0%
H02	0	1	1	2	66,7%
H03	0	1	1	2	66,7%
H04	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0,0%
H05	1	1	0	2	66,7%
H06	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H07	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H08	0	0	1	1	33,3%
H09	1	1	1	3	100,0%
H10	1	1	1	3	100,0%
H11	1	1	0	2	66,7%
H12	1	1	1	3	100,0%
H13	0	0	1	1	33,3%
H14	1	1	1	3	100,0%
H15	0	0	0	0	0,0%
Total	7	9	9	25	
%	46,7%	60,0%	60,0%		55,6%

Source: Field research.

Table 3 shows the results of 3 accessibility items for the seniors, tactile flooring, non-slip flooring, and built-in carpets and mats, in common areas. It was found that none fully complied with the accessibility items checked and 3 did not comply with any item. Individually, the non-slip flooring item reached a percentage of 80%, considering all the establishments and the other two items were 0%. The overall average, considering all the common areas and accessibility items checked, is 26.7%.

TABLE 3 - Percentage of items met for senior accessibility in common areas

	Tactile flooring	Non-slip flooring	Built-in carpets and mats	Total	%
H01	0	1	n/a	1	33,3%
H02	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H03	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H04	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H05	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H06	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H07	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H08	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H09	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H10	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H11	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H12	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H13	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H14	0	0	n/a	0	0,0%
H15	0	1	0	1	33,3%
Total	0	12	0	12	
%	0,0%	80,0%	0,0%		26,7%

Source: Field research.

Table 4 shows the results of the 4 accessibility items for the seniors in the swimming pool areas, submerged staircase, non-slip flooring, internal support bars, and wheelchair-accessible shower, of the 15 lodging facilities visited. Only 1 fully complies with the 4 accessibility items checked and 2 do not comply with any item. The best rate achieved was 73.3% for non-slip flooring. The overall average, considering all areas and pools and all accessibility items checked, is 53.3%.

TABLE 4 - Percentage of items met for the senior accessibility in the swimming pool

	Submerged staircase	Non-slip flooring	Internal support bars	Wheelchair-accessible shower	Total	%
H01	1	1	0	1	3	75,0%
H02	1	0	0	0	1	25,0%
H03	1	0	0	0	1	25,0%
H04	1	1	0	1	3	75,0%
H05	1	1	1	1	4	100,0%
H06	0	1	0	0	1	25,0%
H07	0	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H08	0	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H09	1	1	1	0	3	75,0%
H10	1	1	0	1	3	75,0%
H11	1	1	0	1	3	75,0%
H12	1	1	0	1	3	75,0%
H13	0	1	0	1	2	50,0%
H14	0	1	1	1	3	75,0%
H15	0	1	0	1	2	50,0%
Total	9	11	3	9	32	
%	60,0%	73,3%	20,0%	60,0%		53,3%

Source: Field research.

Table 5 shows the results for the 3 items of accessibility for the seniors reserved and signposted parking spaces and accessible routes in the parking lots of the 15 lodging facilities visited. It was found that none of them fully complied with the 3 accessibility items checked and 9 did not comply with any item. Accessible routes were the only item met by 6 properties, representing 40% of the total. The overall average, considering all the parking lots and accessibility items checked, is a low 13.3%.

TABLE 5 - Percentage of items met for the senior accessibility in parking lots

	Signposted parking spaces	Accessible routes	Circulation among nonexistent vehicles.	Total	~~%~~
H01	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H02	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H03	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H04	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H05	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H06	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H07	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H08	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H09	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H10	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H11	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H12	0	1	0	1	33,3%
H13	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H14	0	0	0	0	0,0%
H15	0	0	0	0	0,0%
Total	0	6	0	6	
%	0,0%	40,0%	0,0%		13,3%

Source: Field research.

Table 6 shows the percentage of compliance with the 20 accessibility items checked in each of the lodging facilities visited. The best rate achieved was 75,0% at H01 and the worst was 5,0% at H07. The table also shows the overall percentage, considering all 15 lodging facilities visited and the 20 items checked, totaling 300 accessibility items, with 128 items being met, representing 42,7%.

TABLE 6 - Percentual geral | Por hospedagem e global X Itens de acessibilidade

	Total T1	Total T2	Total T3	Total T4	Total T5	Total	~~%~~
H01	7	3	1	3	1	15	75,0%
H02	0	2	0	1	0	3	15,0%
H03	6	2	1	1	1	11	55,0%
H04	4	0	1	3	1	9	45,0%
H05	6	2	1	4	0	13	65,0%
H06	0	0	1	1	0	2	10,0%
H07	0	0	1	0	0	1	5,0%
H08	1	1	0	0	0	2	10,0%
H09	3	3	1	3	1	11	55,0%
H10	4	3	1	3	0	11	55,0%
H11	6	2	1	3	1	13	65,0%
H12	6	3	1	3	1	14	70,0%
H13	0	1	1	2	0	4	20,0%
H14	4	3	0	3	0	10	50,0%
H15	6	0	1	2	0	9	45,0%
Total	53	25	12	32	6	128	
%	50,50%	55,60%	26,70%	53,30%	13,30%		42,7%

Source: Field research.

CONCLUSIONS

The lodging facilities on the Conde Coast are not fancy and are often small, yet they are pleasant and provide courteous service. However, given their tourist potential and the importance of accessibility, including legal requirements, they need better conditions to welcome the seniors safely and comfortably, thereby boosting their self-esteem and well-being, as well as the region's economic development.

The evaluations in the tables take into account the provisions of Brazilian legislation, specifically NBR 9050/200. Analysis of the results shows that, although some of the lodging facilities visited and the subject of the research are relatively well adapted, many still need significant improvements in terms of accessibility for the seniors, especially in criteria such as safety shower enclosure with unbreakable material, curtains, accessible routes, rugs and mats embedded at floor level, internal support bars in swimming pools, reserved and signposted parking spaces, which are essential for the safety and comfort of people with reduced mobility.

If we consider each of the 5 areas checked, the guesthouse, restaurant/bar, common areas, swimming pools, service desk, and parking lot, the best overall average, considering the sum of the lodging facilities, was in the restaurant/bar area, at 55.6%, even though only 3 accessibility items were checked in this area. In the area of the UH, with 7 items checked, the average was 50.5%, which proportionally can be considered a better result.

When comparing the lodging facilities visited (H01 to H15), H01 had the highest compliance rate for the total number of items checked, with a percentage of 75.0%. The poorest, H07, scored only 5.0%. An overall analysis of the results, considering all of the lodging facilities and accessibility items assessed, yielded a percentage of 42.7%, highlighting the need to enhance accessibility conditions for the seniors

Lack of accessibility can compromise the image of a tourist destination, with significant economic consequences for both senior travellers and businesses.

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THE PERSUASIVE POWER OF LANGUAGE IN TOURISM ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT: *Throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, travel advertisements and/or services related to the tourism industry have used the persuasive power of words to attract potential consumers. Currently, travel agencies and social networks are playing this role, increasingly using persuasive strategies to present their services and itineraries. Language, in its various forms, serves as the basis for these advertisements. The persuasive power of these visual communication "tools" has put textual multimodality in the spotlight over the years. This research examines this evolution through an analysis of advertisements encompassing a research period from the 19th century to the 21st century. The objectives of this study were to present these texts constructed with different types of language and to identify the linguistic elements that favor or not the itineraries presented in these advertisements that use persuasion and argumentative techniques to convince and attract the interlocutors to consume their tourism products and services. The results found through the descriptive analysis of the corpus confirm that all the material studied presents linguistic and extralinguistic elements that influence consumers to choose their products/services through persuasive language, sometimes subtle and, in other situations, with clear intentions of convincing.*

KEYWORDS: *Language. Advertisements. Images. Persuasion. Tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Before beginning the subsequent studies, it is necessary to explain some concepts in the light of authors who have made major contributions to linguistic studies regarding the meaning and importance of language for human life. According to Chomsky (2005), "language is the very way in which we, human beings speak and understand one another" and, to Saussure (1969), "language is a human faculty, a capacity that men have to produce, develop and understand language and other symbolic manifestations similar to language". While Chomsky considers language "a system of principles rooted in the human mind", Saussure considers it "a fundamentally social object".

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The intention of presenting the two concepts was not to delve into these linguistic matters, but to situate which of them are considered for the analyses presented below. The concepts to be followed those of Saussure, as he understands that they encompass language as a capacity for communication that goes beyond written or spoken text; it encompasses other types of communication such as visual, symbolic, artistic, and others that also fulfill the role of expressing and sharing an idea with the interlocutor. It is necessary to differentiate between the types of language.

This study considers the following four types: verbal language, which uses written or spoken text to establish communication between the interlocutors; non-verbal language, which does not use writing or words for interlocution. This type of language covers a range of signs such as gestures, works of art, body language, facial expressions, and others that can convey the message just as effectively as written or spoken words; hybrid or mixed language that combines the use of words and other communication signs, i.e. verbal and non-verbal language; and, finally, digital language (Brasil Escola, n.d), which was introduced in 1992, with the emergence of communication networks, initially for academic use before expanding to commercial purposes only three years later. (RNP - National Education and Research Network of the Federal Government). This type of language uses specific digital devices to establish communication such as computers, smartphones, tablets, and, above all, the internet; it transmits information through texts, images, videos, and audio, using specific codes and resources such as emojis, hashtags, emoticons, Gifs and others.

The analysis of tourism advertisements reveals linguistic aspects that encourage the use of persuasion through the creation of these materials to convince potential customers. What does persuasion mean? "Persuasion is a communication strategy that uses logical, rational or symbolic resources to induce someone to accept an idea, an attitude or act." The use of persuasive language is done through sensitization to attract the interlocutor; presenting figures of speech, argumentative techniques, and reasoning to attract the target audience and influence them to think or take action using strategic arguments; it is a language focused on the idea presented using reciprocity between it and the audience and conveys credibility generating convincing strategies associated with ideological, subjective and timeless discourse.

METHODOLOGY

In order to fulfill the objectives of this research, which are to present tourism advertisement texts created with several types of language and identify linguistic elements that favor or not the itineraries presented in these advertisements, descriptive research with a qualitative approach was developed with the perspective of analyzing and identifying which linguistic elements are being used in the creation of these advertisements, throughout the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries with the collection of material from these periods in distinct sources such as old periodicals, promotional materials from tourism companies and services related to the same purpose (travel agencies, airlines, old magazines and cards from tourism agencies to more current advertisements that use social networks as a means of promotion).

All of this material was divided into categories with the following research intervals: 1- prior to the 20th century with an analysis of one advertisement from the 19th century (1808); 2- eight advertisements from the 20th century, ranging from 1909 to 1988); 3- two advertisements from the 21st century (2010 and 2012); 4- A window titled "Current Events" that included a mosaic of six currents (2022) advertisements.

RESULTS

The analysis begins with a 19th-century advertisement from 1808, sourced from a historical advertising website that collects old images and advertisements for research purposes. The figure and its persuasive characteristics are shown below.

Figure 1- 1808 Rio Grande Transportation Company Ad


VIAÇÃO DO RIO GRANDE.

As diligencias partem desta Capital para Santos, nos dias 14, 19, 24 e 29 de cada mez.

As bagagens recebem-se na vespera da partida até ás 9 horas da noite, visto que acompanhão «em carro» as Diligencias. Tambem se faz sahir Diligencia em dias não determinados, mediante aviso, e ajuste rasoavel para familias. Para tratar, rua do Principe n. 14, antiga rua da Cruz Preta. 3

Source: Reis Jr, 2015

The advertisement, despite being from the 19th century, already contains traces of discursive multimodality, through the use of hybrid language that used written text and images with a play of light and shadow suggesting the idea of movement; the use of a different font in an upper case highlighting the company's name, also reflects the diversification of signs to draw the interlocutor's attention to its "importance". The text was created with information designed to inform the target audience about the amenities they will have access to if they choose to use the transportation services. The discourse exhibits flexibility to accommodate the customer's specific needs.

The advertisement below, published in 1909 (20th century), promotes a hotel of considerable proportions for the time. The text presents various elements of persuasive language, namely: it maintained the use of hybrid language (written text and image); the three-dimensional image itself reinforces the idea of the establishment's grandeur; The use of the expressions "largest in Brazil / 220 rooms / first-rate kitchen / electric elevators", reinforces the image of excellence in physical structure and services offered, as well as highlighting its location through information about ease of internal and external locomotion.

Figure 2- 1909 Hotel Avenida Ad

Source: Reis Jr, 2020

The following advertisement features culture language and traces of 18th-century Portuguese writing (assucar/omnibus); it maintains the presence of hybrid language (image and descriptive text praising the tourist attraction to induce Brazilians to visit the place); throughout the written text that overlaps the image as a reinforcement to convince the target audience, the use of bold font and upper case to highlight the name and characteristics of the attraction. The facilities for visiting the site indicated in the advertisement act as factors of persuasion for the consumer.

Figure 3- 1923 Copacabana Palace Hotel Ad- with partial transcription of the text by the author

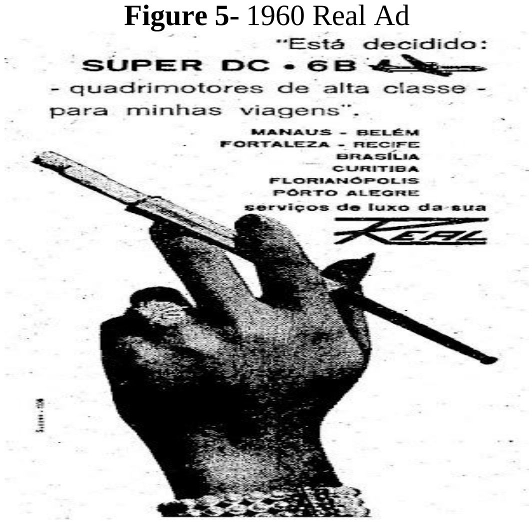
"**Copacabana" is the** ideal place for a beach holiday.
"Copacabana" offers sea baths, sun, and outdoor life.
"Copacabana" has taken special care of children's comfort, with special rooms.
"Copacabana" is set up with utmost luxury, its excellent cuisine and impeccable service make for a delightfully pleasant life.
Music and dance from 9 to 11.30
Tea dances on Sundays.

Source: Reis Jr, 2015

Figure 4- 1940 Pão de Açúcar promotional campaign

Source: Reis Jr, 2018

Figure 5- 1960 Real Ad



Source: Reis Jr, 2018

Figure 5 shows various persuasive language features such as the imperative "it's decided" initiating the interaction; technical language with arguments to convince the public; the use of the possessive pronoun "my" reaffirming the ideas of order; multimodality in line with the concepts of luxury and refinement of the time (image of a woman wearing jewelry and a cigarette holder).

Figure 6- 1960 VASP Ad

Source: Reis Jr, 2018

The advertisement presents an informal dialog suggesting prompt service to any customer demand; it uses verbal language with the use of anaphora as an advertising attraction; personification of the symbol of efficiency in customer service (photo of the stewardess); brief narrative, below the photo, confirming the whole tenor of the advertisement: the excellence of the service.

Figure 7- 1973 VARIG Ad

Source: Reis Jr, 2018

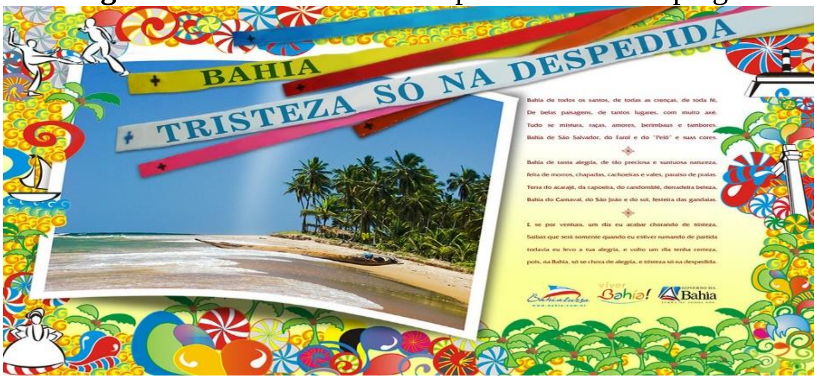
The advertisement presents Hybrid Language (Multimodal Text); and discursive ambiguity with the word nhoc! And the image of the "apple" dates back to the early days, symbolizing "desire", "The world is getting tastier and tastier. That's why it's good to start awakening your immense appetite to get to know it"; while also referring to the idea of the planet with lines representing the company's connections and scope of operation; use of persuasive phrases in the imperative: 'go, awaken, talk, choose'; Inducement to hedonism: "...don't worry about the bill.... The important thing is that you feel satisfied..." / ..." the world is on the table... Choose your piece. What matters is that you taste the world**".**

Figure 8- 1980 VASP Ad **Figure 9-** 1988 Embratur Publicity material

Source: (Reis Jr, 2018) Source: Matovani, 2014

Figures 8 and 9 were deliberately placed side by side for comparative analysis: both use the female image and present ambiguous language. However, the first establishes the use of the image in an elegant context; the highlighted female attributes refer to the efficiency of the service provided. In the second figure, there is a clear subliminal message of commodification and objectification of women as a tourist attraction and the use of nudity and the English language in the construction of the advertisement establishes a connection to the inducement of sex tourism (a very common practice in the advertisements of the 70s and 80s);

Figure 10: 2010 Bahia Tursa promotional campaign



Source: Franco, 2010

The material above presents explicit elements of persuasion: the dominance of vibrant colors reinforcing the "stereotype" of the eternal joy of the people of Bahia; the use of various symbols that refer to the culture and natural wealth of the state; images of various tourist spots "implicit" in the advertisement; verbal language as a resource of lesser proportion; Campaign that introduced the concept of tourism of diversity and welcome; seduction of the target audience through the exaltation of the location.

Figure 11: 2012 "SP a state, Many Destinations"

Source: Free access ads organized by the author

São Paulo Turismo (São Paulo Tourism Bureau) and Companhia Paulista de Eventos e Turismo (São Paulo Events and Tourism Corporation) - (TUR.SP) collaborated on this campaign and created these advertisements (six cards) with elements of persuasion from the digital age, including constant recordings and the use of anaphora to affirm and convince viewers this is the destination being promoted: "Yes, it's São Paulo. Yes, it's São Paulo. Yes, it's São Paulo. Practice this phrase well: you'll need it when you show the photos you've taken here."; Use of the cell phone as a confirmation element for the campaign slogan; tourism ads presenting a São Paulo city unknown to many; Dispelling the myth of a capital city being exclusively a place of work.

Figure 12- 2022 Northeast photo mosaic

Source: Free access ads organized by the author

Figure 12 presents a mosaic of nine advertisements in which Linguistic Multimodality is predominant, above all due to the consideration of sensory factors in the creation of the advertisements; the use of the same color palette awakens in the target audience the desire to visit these destinations, which were intentionally limited to the coastline to attract the consumer; there was also the use of language-thought matrices (Santaela, 2005): Sound, visual and verbal.

CONCLUSION

The studies were carried out with the objectives of presenting texts of tourism advertisements created with different types of languages and identifying linguistic and extralinguistic elements that favor or not the scripts presented in these advertisements that use persuasive language as a strategy to convince the public to whom these advertising materials are directed, it can be seen that there is a very clear relation between the resources used in the construction of these materials, even before the emergence of discursive multimodality.

What used to be proposed as persuasive resources (the diversity and size of fonts, the use of upper case and bold, the positive description of environments and places), has gained, over the years, more non-verbal elements such as images, colors, and the variety of digital language resources that have contributed to the construction of campaigns increasingly aimed at convincing an audience that is no longer satisfied with the use of a single language and that has expectations of interaction, often in real-time, with the possible chosen itineraries. This study does not exhaust all discussions on persuasive language in tourism advertisements and suggests future studies involving additional biases, bringing new discoveries on the subject.

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ESG METRICS APPLIED TO SUSTAINABLE HOSPITALITY

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ABSTRACT: *The ESG appliance is being used by organizations, including hosting enterprises, that look forward to improve their strategic management founded in precepts of good sustainability practices of environmental, social and governance, these are the pillars that guide the creation of disseminated value among stakeholders and shareholders. This study has the objective to present a brief discussion about the ESG appliance, focusing on sustainable hospitality. This is a descriptive study, in the form of an essay theoretical, based in bibliography, hemerographic and documentary search. The results showed that the adoption of ESG, especially by the hosting enterprises, contributes to the improvement of processes regarding the environmental sustainability practices and guest perception concerning the organization's image. Answering the guide question of this study, the hosting enterprises that implement good sustainable management practices aside the use of the ESG appliance, they have to align the ESG criteria with the Sustainable Development Goals.*

KEYWORDS*: ESG. Environment, Sustainability and Governance. Sustainable Hotels.*

INTRODUCTION

The discussions about sustainability, based on the triple relation among economic, social and environmental, have grown during the last years, especially in academic, political and business spaces. In the business perspective, the hotel sector has targeted management models for sustainable practices as strategy differentiation. As these discussions advance, new tools emerge because of necessary demands to supply the planners and managers' expectations involved in bringing solutions for good governance, linked to social responsibility and environmental sustainability.

In the business context, sustainability has traditionally been viewed as a cost or obligation rather than a key driver of results. With the rise of stakeholder capitalism, which emphasizes mutually beneficial relationships between companies, employees, suppliers, and consumers, profitability remains crucial but increasingly relies on strong environmental and social sustainability, along with effective governance.

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The term ESG was first introduced by UN Secretary Kofi Annan in 2004, urging companies to integrate these principles to enhance their performance (Pereira, 2020). The term ESG encompasses environmental, social, and governance aspects, which are inserted to the management model adopted by corporations (Mazon; Issa, 2022). To address environmental sustainability, managers incorporate ESG principles into their planning, using them to establish metrics across these three areas. Since the adoption of ESG metrics, organizations have increasingly focused on aligning their practices with these indicators to create value and gain a competitive edge. This trend is also evident in the hotel sector, where ESG considerations are becoming more prevalent. Guests and investors increasingly prioritize sustainability principles in their decisions, making effective management of environmental, social, and governance issues essential in the hospitality industry (Croce, 2023).

Combining analytics in these three perspectives, the concept represents a conscious way of acting in the market that will go beyond the organization's profitability, since the ESG appliance allows measure management practices adopted by companies, including the way they respond to the climate changes, such as the natural resources' administration and their relation with employees, customers and suppliers. In fact, these variables' analysis has become more common for investors to decide where to apply their resources: companies committed to good sustainability practices have reduced the environmental impacts because their activities and ESG metrics are being used in risk financial analysis by several businesses.

According to projections released by Bloomberg, the global ESG assets are on track to surpass the 53 billion dollars until 2025, representing more than a third of the 140.5 billion dollars in investments (Bloomberg, 2021), which could be an incentive to adopt ESG to attract investments, including the hotel sector. Another ESG indicator, the social, deals with business relationships and how it is widespread within the aspects of environment and governance. It's important to highlight that ESG brings one important contribution for the dissemination of the governance mechanism, helping it to expand beyond the business agents.

The study aims to explore how ESG practices contribute to effective governance in sustainable hospitality. It provides a theoretical discussion on ESG in the context of sustainable hospitality, using bibliographic, hemerographic, and documentary sources. The Verdegreen Hotel in João Pessoa, Paraíba, is highlighted as a case study. This hotel was the first in Brazil to adopt eco-design principles and receive a sustainability green seal, serving as an example of ESG implementation in the hospitality sector.

METHODOLOGY

To understand the importance of the ESG appliance, we must define its meaning, as well as the necessary actions for its implementation. The ESG tool represents three investment pillars that are fundamentals responsible and sustainable: Environmental, Social and Governance. These three indicators are used to evaluate the companies' performance and their perspective in relation to the environment, social questions and corporate governance.

The letter "E" refers to the impact of the company 's activities on *the environment*. Which includes questions as waste management, greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy use, efficiency energy, natural resource conservation and concerns about climate change.

In relation to the letter "S", concerns about the *social*, to the company's relationship with people and society in general. That involves considerations on diversity and inclusion, fair work relations, employee safety, respect to the human rights resources, community involvement and positive social impact generated by activities business.

The letter "G" refers to the governance practices, corporate issues adopted by the company. That includes the governance structure, transparency in the operations, the board of directors' independence, risk management, executive remuneration, ethics in business and respect to the shareholder rights.

Roughly speaking, the ESG criterias represents the company's decision about how to relate to its stakeholders – internal and external – and how the actions' direction implemented by the managers will impact environmental, social and governance sustainability, which could be decisive in the choices of these stakeholders. It is, undoubtedly, a strategic tool. Pereira (2023) corroborates this affirmative when suggests that the ESG appliance is a lever for results. It's a holistic approach that recognizes the importance of sustainability and social impact and good governance in value creation in a far away term.

Therefore, the adoption of ESG practices can bring several benefits for companies, such as strengthening reputation and brand, reducing financial risks and operational aspects, attracting investors and talent, in addition to aligning with society's expectations. Lots of companies are incorporating these criteria in their business strategies and disseminating their practices through reporting disclosed publicly.

For Rosa (2022), communicating these results through management reports, allows in a far longer term, generate value for the company, as progressively its consumers and investors look for companies that present solutions aligned with facing the social and environmental challenges. In addition, these companies maintain in their operating environment, teams and collaborators who feel more engaged to the work because the organization stimulates the growth with purpose, starting to use available resources in efficient and productive ways.

The application of ESG criteria in hotel ventures requires changes, especially in mindset, that allows the redesign of processes, the redefinition of organizational culture and decision - making process. For a small entrepreneur it can until be easier to evaluate its performance applying the ESG tool, but for larger companies are necessary periodic and calculated changes, that demands more time to be implemented, since the need for the company to listen and interact with stakeholders and shareholders.

Currently, informed society, there is a growing concern about environmental and social issues, leading companies to face increased scrutiny and stringent regulations, especially concerning labor rights. Adopting good management practices and sustainability has become essential for business development and is demanded by investors and consumers (Issa; Mazon, 2022). For hotels using ESG principles, maintaining transparency and consistency in their actions and communications is crucial for remaining respected and valued, which is vital for business survival.

Hotel ventures must adhere to eco-friendly standards and environmental responsibility. Key institutions have developed sustainability indices, such as the Sustainability Index (ISE) from B3, the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI), and the Equator Principles for financial institutions (Issa; Mazon, 2022). Despite the existence of these frameworks, some companies claiming environmental friendliness may still fail to follow sustainability principles in practice. This issue is compounded by the mandatory requirements set by Law No. 13,303/2016, which obligates companies to publish sustainability reports, aiming to ensure transparency and accountability.

According to Sebrae (2023), several ESG methods and reports on sustainability are available to companies, and a criticism about these methods is the principle of self-declaration: companies can choose the ESG indicators that will be disclosed, and it may lead to inconsistency and lack of objectivity. Although from an ethical point of view this is a no recommended practice. Greenwashing continues to be used by some hotel companies that despite declaring themselves eco friendly, they disseminate misleading advertising on sustainable practices, although no meeting criteria minimally tolerable, expressing a responsible image for the environment, with the aim of boosting your profitability.

Social issues in the workplace involve concerns about employee treatment and staff diversity. A company cannot truly be inclusive if it lacks diversity, efficient working conditions, and gender equality. Data reveals that 7.4 million black workers ceased job searching by late 2020 due to poor hiring prospects. In 2019, women comprised 54.5% of Brazil's workforce compared to 73.7% of men, with women earning 20.5% less on average. In today's diverse and conscious world, it is essential for hotels to address discrimination and improve workforce diversity, as these factors significantly affect consumer perception and company reputation.

According to the consultancy and research house *Accenture*, ESG companies can deliver a profit of 20% more in relation to those who still do not adopt new practices. Furthermore, sustainable management brings more investors' attention: "according to the Global Sustainable Investment Alliance report, there are around US$ 30 trillion under the management of investment funds that define sustainability as a factor to invest your capital" (Sebrae, 2023). It's a way to stay updated with social issues and establish safe and durable alliances internally and externally.

There are lots of remarks on companies that call themselves ESG. This reality, when applied to hotel enterprises, becomes more evident to present results yet incipients, since the adoption of ESG requires a long process to reinvent the old ways to manage a business. Furthermore, it is commendable that companies be more attentive to the new forms of management, which do not just add value to the organization, such as also for society. In this way, management based on ESG criteria allows a far away deadline for continuous good changes that refer to the organizational success.

RESULTS

When it comes to the use of the ESG tool, the actions adopted by hotel ventures in Brazil yet are incipient. On the other side of the world, the discussion about ESG has been going on for a long time, the harmony between companies and ESG are clearer. Although the term has arisen in 2004, in Brazil this "protocol" started late and the practical use of this appliance was not part of the Brazilians population and business people, especially in the hotel sector.

According to Otto (2018), hotels that combine personal satisfaction with social and environmental positive impact, elevate the guests' positive perception and experience. Actions considered correct ecologically practiced by "green hotels" conquer more supporters. Not surprisingly, data provided by TripAdvisor shows that 25% of Americans are willing to choose eco-friendly hotels, even though they can have higher prices.

In Brazil, 75% of consumers prioritize sustainability when choosing holiday destinations or hotels, according to Booking.com's Sustainable Travel Report 2019 (Journal, 2021). To support the adoption of ESG tools in the hotel sector, it's important to consider both social pressure and the goal of maximizing results. Companies' principles and organizational culture influence their decision-making, impacting overall performance. As environmental, social, and governance issues increasingly drive corporate actions, hotels are being encouraged to implement sustainability practices to align with these growing demands.

Hotels are increasingly investing in sustainability to secure a place in the growing eco-friendly market, cut operating costs, boost brand reputation, and address environmental concerns (Otto, 2018). This shift is driven by the need to adapt to market demands and stay competitive (Sebrae, 2022). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer guidelines for actions that positively impact environmental, social, and economic sustainability, helping hotels integrate these principles into their strategic planning for environmental preservation.

According to Rodrigues (2021), there is a clear connection between ESG practices and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Effective ESG measures help companies and funds contribute to the SDGs, which were established in 2015 to guide both public and private sectors in environmental preservation. Key SDGs related to environmental goals include responsible consumption, climate action, and the protection of marine and terrestrial life. Companies can use the 2030 Agenda as a framework to implement sustainable practices and achieve these goals.

It is important to understand that ESG and the SDGs are not synonyms: while the ESG appliance refers to the environmental, social and governance conduct of an enterprise, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the UN (United Nations), go beyond the internal practices of a company, establishing the world commitments in favor of sustainable development (Rodrigues, 2021). Thus, the ESG tool and the SDGs are intrinsically connected with the aim of promoting the corporations direction, so that they contribute to the planet's sustainability.

DISCUSSION

In Brazil, there are several certifications that can be issued to companies that adopt good sustainability practices: ISO 14001, SA8000, GRI Standards, B Corp Certification, LEED, Eureciclo, SGS (2030 today), and other ones that allow perform diagnostics withdrawals about the enterprises' actions for improvements in their processes, besides the certifications in different areas that can be obtained.

According to Sebrae (2023), the GRI Standards from the Global Reporting Initiative are the most recognized method for sustainability reporting. Additionally, the ESG WEF-IBC indicators offer 21 basic and 34 expanded metrics across four pillars: Governance, People, Planet, and Prosperity. The SASB model provides sector-specific guidelines for identifying material environmental, social, and governance issues impacting financial performance. The Ethos Institute, in partnership with Sebrae, has also created a methodology for selecting sustainability indicators tailored to an organization's specific interests and objectives.

According to Ramos (2018), large hotel chains such as Accor, Hilton, IHG, Marriott, and others, already understood the market's message regarding the sustainable practices. In Paraíba, a good example of these practices is the "Verdegreen Hotel", located in the beachfront of the capital João Pessoa, which since its conception, is a reference when it comes to sustainable hotels. The architectural project is already "born green".

Verdegreen Hotel stands out for its sustainable actions, as detailed in its "Green Attitude" program. Environmentally, the hotel implements practices such as using natural ceramics, reforestation wood, supporting local crafts, maximizing natural lighting, LED lighting, presence sensors, low-impact air conditioning equipment, solar water heaters, smart elevators, smart TVs, dual flush systems, surrounding gardens, an organic vegetable garden, and flow restrictors in faucets.

In terms of social responsibility and governance, the hotel is committed to training its teams in environmental causes, conducting educational work with guests to promote sustainability, and prioritizing local suppliers. Additionally, it provides bicycles to reduce pollution, supports initiatives by entities such as WWF, uses biodegradable cleaning products, reuses rainwater for various purposes, and manages waste separation throughout the hotel, including in guest rooms.

Also, Verdegreen Hotel is ISO 14001 (Environmental Management System) certified, the only one with this certification in Paraíba (BR). In 2012, it received the title of Sustainable Hotel of the Year from Guia 4 Rodas. In 2013, TripAdvisor included Verdegreen Hotel in its top 25 list hotels in Brazil and, in 2015, the Ecolíderes Seal – level gold, awarded the hotels and inns committed to sustainable practices.

Undoubtedly, the ESG implementation, combined with the SDGs, is configured as an instrument guide for sustainability practices in hospitality. Being a sustainable hotel goes beyond the mere environmental concern: involves changing managers, employees and investors' mindset, willing to implement actions that guarantee environmental and social sustainability, based on good corporate governance.

CONCLUSIONS

The adoption of ESG practices in conjunction with the SDGs is essential for the hotel sector, promoting environmental responsibility, social initiatives, and sustainable corporate governance. With the increase in environmental and health crises in recent years and the growing interest from investors in companies that adhere to ESG criteria, the concept has gained global relevance. However, to achieve the desired outcomes, the implementation of ESG practices must be aligned with the company's strategies. Market demand, particularly in the hotel industry, is pressuring companies to adopt these practices to maintain their competitive edge.

Although the application of ESG indicators lacks rigid criteria and varies by sector, specialized consultancies can support the implementation and monitoring of these practices. For example, Verdegreen Hotel has been recognized for its sustainable actions due to its positive perception among stakeholders. Companies that ignore this trend risk losing their competitive advantages. Integrating ESG with the SDGs is crucial for sustainable hotel management and should be considered to achieve significant results and align with stakeholder expectations.

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"THIRD AGE TOURISM" AS A POST-COVID-19 TOURISM PRODUCT

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ABSTRACT: *The Covid-19 period and its aftermath have caused permanent changes and transformations in many areas of the tourism sector. The desire for diversification has increased in order for the sector to sustain its existence and increase its efficiency. This diversification has undoubtedly directed the tourism sector towards alternative tourism types compatible with a destination. One of the alternative tourism is related with health sector; which is called 'Third Age Tourism'. This tourism type has been developed especially for the middle and older age group (Third Age), which is the group most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, means many new services and products for the tourism sector. At the same time, this type of tourism, which spreads throughout the year, can be attractive for the tourism sector. This study examines the steps taken by Turkey towards 'Third Age Tourism' and especially the initiatives of the Çanakkale destination in this direction.*

Keywords*: Alternative Tourism, Third Age Tourism, Post-COVID-19, Turkey, Çanakkale*

Post-COVID-19 and Tourism

The coronavirus Pandemic, which was seen in the last weeks of December 2019, first emerged in the Wuhan Region of China and spread throughout the world in a short time (WHO, 2020). This virus spread over time and thus named Covid-19 as of February 12, 2020. As of March 11, 2020, Covid-19 was declared a pandemic (global epidemic) by the WHO. Measures such as travel restrictions, visa cancellations, border closures, curfews and social distancing rules affected directly tourism sector and these restrictions tightened to prevent the spread of the virus. The Covid-19 Pandemic has receded with the discovery of vaccines. Vaccines have helped prevent serious cases. However, there are some new mutations that could cause it to spread again. The Covid-19 Pandemic continues to exist today as a cause for concern in front of travel, which is essential for the tourism sector.

In terms of tourism in Turkey, the concentration on coastal tourism and the greater preference for mass holiday tourism have led to the inability to adequately evaluate other natural, cultural and historical values other than sea, sun and sand in terms of alternative tourism, and the impact of Covid-19 has been experienced more. According to the 2020 data of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the number of tourists visiting Turkey decreased by 77% compared to the previous year (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2020). Despite all the

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measures taken, almost the entire world and all sectors were negatively affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. Negatively affected sectors by the Covid-19 outbreak were supported to continue their activities by providing financial aid, tax deferral, loans and consultancy support. But unfortunately these aids were not enough to keep many tourisms related businesses alive. This stage has been a turning point for the tourism sector after the Covid-19 Pandemic. The sector has now realized how fragile it is to rely solely on one type of tourism, such as mass tourism, and has begun to turn to alternative types of tourism. Each destination has begun to focus on the type of tourism that would be stronger among alternative tourism types depending on its own situation.

The transfer of the intensity of tourism movements to other months of the year, thus increasing foreign exchange inflows or income from tourism, more efficient use of tourism investments and reflection of many positive results of tourism bring alternative tourism options to the agenda (Oktayer et al., 2007:129). Tourists, who are at the core of the tourism industry, are now looking for more meaningful and personal experiences beyond standard holidays. Alternative tourism emerged as a reaction to traditional tourism, as an alternative to it. The main purpose of alternative tourism is to meet the various motivations, social, cultural and psychological needs of individuals, as well as to protect and use natural resources in tourism, since the number of areas suitable for tourism cannot be increased in the world (Kahraman, 2010: 67). For these reasons, traditional tourism is described as "hard" and alternative tourism as "soft". This type of tourism is an indispensable part of today's tourism industry (Dennison and Buttler, 1990:163). Various forms of alternative tourism have seen a significant rise in recent years following the Covid-19 Pandemic. These forms can be introduced in terms of Turkish tourism as follows;

Cultural tourism: this is a type of tourism that offers tourists the opportunity to experience the traditions, history and lifestyle of the country they are visiting. These experiences can include historical and cultural places, museums and festivals where cultural assets can be seen. Tourists participating in cultural tourism can observe and understand the lifestyles and cultural values of the people living in the destination they visit.

Gastro tourism: This type of tourism has emerged based on people gaining new food and drink experiences. This statement may also include access to foods and beverages necessary for a healthy diet. According to Correia et al. (2008); gastronomy is not only a cultural attraction element but also a complementary instrument for different cultural products. The subject of the field of gastronomy, which is defined as advice and guidance on where, when, how, how much, in what form and with what to eat and drink food (Uner, 2014). Other alternative tourism types can be considered as river tourism, hunting tourism, mountaineering and winter tourism, photo-safari tourism and sports tourism etc. The alternative tourism type generally referred to as 'Medical tourism' or 'Health tourism' and its sub-branch 'third age tourism', which is discussed in this study and should be evaluated together with the health sector.

Health tourism: Tourists travel from their hometown to a destination to receive health services, in addition to visiting a destination. Health tourism allows tourism businesses as well as health institutions to grow and develop. The services that tourists can receive regarding health vary. These services are;

- Health-preventive services
- Therapeutic health services
- Health services received for rehabilitation purposes
- Health-enhancing services

Health tourism primarily aims to protect and improve health. In this respect, it has been preferred by tourists living in densely populated cities who want to reduce the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The type of health tourism aimed at receiving health services from health facilities is called 'Medical Tourism'. This type of tourism is also known as global health services. Medical tourism is the travel of individuals to a different country for medical care. It consists of treatment and surgery services. Many services can be received within the framework of medical tourism.

- Dentistry,
- Organ transplantation,
- Heart surgery,
- Cosmetic surgery,
- Orthopedic surgery,
- In vitro fertilization treatment.

These are the areas covered by medical tourism. In addition to tourists directly participating in medical tourism activities and receiving health services, there are also facilities that they can use for mental and physical relaxation. The most well-known and preferred of these facilities are thermal tourism facilities. Thermal tourism aims to rehabilitate. The services that can be received from these facilities consist of treatment types such as:

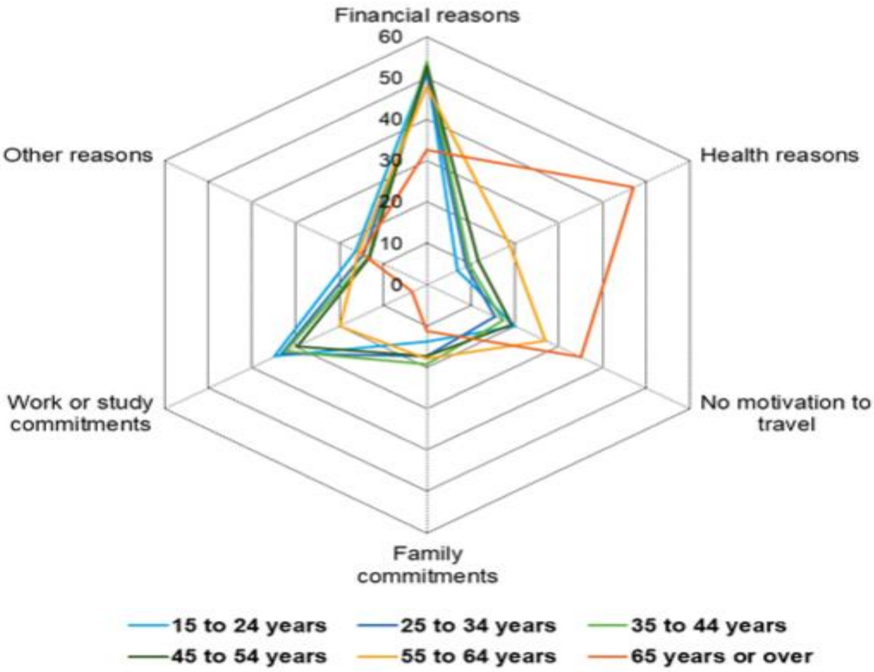
- Mud bath,
- Physical therapy,
- Thermo-mineral water bath,
- Diet,
- Psychotherapy,
- Exercise. These treatments are usually applied in combination with thermal waters (Dentevim, 2024).

Third age tourism: it is originated from the travels of people aged 50 and over outside their usual residences and temporary accommodations during their travels, usually by requesting goods and services produced by tourism sector. Service places are generally clinic hotels, holiday villages, nursing homes and entertainment areas. Since countries competing to attract foreign patients to their own countries will focus on issues such as technological infrastructure, physical infrastructure, and increasing the quality of health services in their own countries, their own citizens will also benefit from these developments. Apart from these tangible benefits, it can be said that health tourism can provide many tangible benefits such as social and sharing, developing cultural experiences between countries, and developing medical trade and providing a competitive advantage due to global marketing (Annette & Arellano, 2007).

Elderly and disabled care and special care services for the disabled can be added to this type of tourism. People, especially those in the age range considered as the third age, may not want to participate in tourism activities, citing their health factors. As can be seen from the figure below, Europeans aged 65 and over gave health as the main reason for not participating to tourism. Therefore, these people need to be informed and convinced about the existence of health facilities and infrastructure in the destination.

If the necessary infrastructure and facilities are provided, third-age tourism will bring about longer stays compared to other types of tourism. Treatment is aimed for elderly people along with social activities. Both care and sightseeing tours are organized for disabled people (Şengül & Bulut, 2019).

Figure 1: Main reasons for not participating to tourism by age groups.



Source: *Eurostat*

Turkey and Çanakkale as a destination of Third age tourism

Globally, it is estimated that there are over 500 million cross-border movements for health tourism (medical, thermal, elderly, disabled) purposes in the world. With the increasing elderly population in Turkey and especially in Europe, the popularity of third age tourism is gaining momentum in Turkey every day. Turkey is one of the countries with a fundamentally strong tourism sector and good potential in third age tourism. Turkey is a budget-friendly destination with its four-season nature, historical beauties and high quality services provided by its hotels and facilities. Turkey started working on third age tourism almost three decades ago. The first and most comprehensive study on third age tourism in Turkey was prepared in 1992 by the Ministry of Tourism, General Directorate of Investments, Research and Evaluation Department to determine the demand for third age tourism and the measures to be taken for its development. The study, which is of great importance in the context of diversifying tourism products in Turkey and extending the tourism season, included third-age tourists aged 50 and over who visited Turkey through various organizations, elderly clubs and associations abroad, managers of the facilities where third-age tourists stayed, managers of the travel agencies that carried out the organizations, provincial tourism directorates of Cappadocia and Antalya, and artisans in these regions. In the field research conducted with third-age tourists within the scope of the aforementioned study, the most important problem related to third-age tourism was the lack of health institutions for first intervention. (Duran, 2020).

Destinations in Turkey are investing more in hotels, thermal facilities, transportation and health facilities suitable for the third age group in order to increase the demand for third age tourism. It is seen that the destinations working in this direction are especially destinations with thermal resources which are given below.

Figure 2: Turkey thermal tourism destinations and thermal spa map

Source: *Kaplıca Otelleri, 2024*

The above map shows that there are thermal resources and facilities in almost all regions of the country. However, it is noteworthy that thermal resources and facilities are intensive especially in the western part of Turkey. Çanakkale destination, which is evaluated within the scope of the study, is one of the thermal resource destinations located in the westernmost part of Turkey.

Çanakkale province is quite rich with many thermal resources such as Hıdırlar, Külcüler, Kocabaşlar, Kum, Küçükçetmi, Pazarköy, Uyuz and Tuzla Geothermal resources, as well as the Ezine Kestanbol thermal facility located on the map above. There are also accommodation facilities with a capacity of 28441 beds close to thermal resources in Çanakkale destination (Eşitti & Yıldırım, 2024). However, it is observed that the quantity of health facilities required for third-age tourism is insufficient (12 health institutions and 1211 beds), with most of them located in the city centre and being public institutions.

Implementation of strategy research prepared in this field, encouragement of private sector investments especially in the field of health facilities, continuous availability of health personnel in case of long-term accommodation in accommodation establishments, sufficient and equipped employment, encouragement and promotion of developments in the field of care and technologies for third-age children (Ökem and Çelik, 2019) may provide advantages for the Çanakkale destination.

Result

Third age tourism is called elderly, mature, advanced age tourism and is a type of tourism that has emerged as a result of the increase in average life expectancy all over the world and the demographic changes that have occurred in the population structures of countries. According to the data of the United Nations and the World Organization on Aging, the number of individuals aged 65 and over, which is 600 million, is estimated to reach two billion by 2050. At this point, Covid-19 caused a deviation, and in 2021, global life expectancy at birth decreased from 72.8 in 2019 to 71 years, mainly due to the impact of the pandemic. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of population change, including fertility, mortality, and migration, the world population is still ageing (UN, 2024). For this reason, like many countries and destinations, Turkey has focused on this type of tourism in order to use its resources efficiently and has started promotional activities aimed at global elderly associations, organizing tour operators and health insurance companies to promote third-age tourism supply opportunities and facilities. However, as stated above, it is evaluated that there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of establishing facilities, improving transportation facilities and developing a common perspective with health institutions.

Accommodation establishments should employ healthcare professionals as well as tourism personnel specialized in this field in their facilities in order to get a share of the third-age tourism pie. This tourist group, which continues to form in the tourism sector, generally consists of people in the retired age group. Since this group is not in business life, they tend to stay in the destination for longer periods than other age groups. This is a sought-after situation in terms of bed occupancy and length of stay in destinations. The position of the elderly in the increasingly competitive environment and the changes they undergo and new travel possibilities for their health needs should also be brought to the agenda.

There is a similar situation in terms of the Çanakkale destination addressed in this study. For example, as stated in the study of Buluk and Yıldırım (2024), it has been observed that the majority of foreign patients who receive services and treatment from Çanakkale health institutions are tourists who are in Çanakkale for touristic purposes and who have to receive health services during their travels. The main purpose of the tourist group in question is not health tourism but visiting the region for various purposes. Apart from these and similar studies conducted without considering the difference between age groups, no data on third-age tourism in the Çanakkale destination has been reached within the scope of this study. What is meant here is that although the destination is suitable for third-age tourism, it can be said that this target group has not yet been fully reached. Also, various measures can be taken in the destination to encourage essential social interaction for third-age tourists. These include organizing special group tours for third-age tourists receiving health services, special events, and social gatherings.

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CONTENT CREATION FOR DIGITAL MEDIA IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: *Digital media, which has become an increasingly important area in marketing and promotion every day, has accelerated with the impact of Covid-19. In recent years, the traditional travel phenomenon and understanding of tourism have begun to change with mobile applications, social media, virtual reality, 360-degree videos through digital media, which has also started to reshape the tourism industry. While digitalization changes the expectations of tourists, it has become inevitable for the tourism industry to keep up with this change. Today, where tourists assume the role of advertising, the use of digital media has become one of the most important requirements of the age. In this context, it is aimed to examine how content is created for digital media at the point of promotion in the tourism industry and how digital media is used in promotion through studies in the literature. As a result of the study, it has been determined that tourism destinations and businesses mostly use social media channels as a digital media tool for promotion. In addition, it has been determined that social media offers many advantages for tourism destinations and businesses, saves time, is more effective in gaining potential and loyal customers, and increases brand awareness through promotions made through social media channels. In order for tourism businesses and destinations to gain an advantage in an intensely competitive environment, they should take place professionally in digital media Based on the necessity of this, some suggestions have been made for tourism enterprises and destinations.*

KEYWORDS: *Digital marketing, Digital media, Content creation, Covid-19, Tourism.*

INTRODUCTION

Digitalization has become an imperative way for businesses to step into the future and respond to modern consumer needs (Schildt, 2020). For businesses, digital content production is a result of using digital marketing strategies. The tourism industry is one of the industries that benefit the most from the opportunities offered by digitalization. Today, tourism businesses and destinations gain significant advantages in reaching their target audiences and increasing brand awareness by taking serious steps in digital content creation, which is indispensable for digital marketing (Minazzi, 2015).

Digital media refers to any information broadcast through screens (Dewdney and Ride, 2013). On the other hand, digital content, in its simplest definition, is a type of content that is in the form of digital data and consumed in digital media (Hayles, 2012). Digital content types include blog content, website content, video content, audio content, advertising content, e-commerce content and social media content (Confetto and Siano, 2018; Ma, 2023). Digital

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content creation can help tourism businesses and destinations interact with potential customers, inform them and motivate them. Especially considering the tendency of people who make holiday and travel plans to conduct research on social media, blogs and websites, and this trend has accelerated even more with the Covid-19 process, it is very important for tourism businesses and destinations to share regular and interesting content on these platforms (Camarinha et al., 2020). Original and impressive content can be effective in attracting the attention of potential customers, as well as creating brand loyalty and increasing the number of repeat visits. It is important to know trends when creating digital content in the tourism industry (Pencarelli, 2020). The world of tourism is constantly changing. Accordingly, digital marketing strategies need to be updated in order to keep up with the aforementioned change. In this context, the aim of this study is to examine how content for digital media is created in terms of promotion in the tourism industry and how digital media is used in promotion through studies in the literature.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to examine how content for digital media is created in terms of promotion in the tourism industry and how digital media is used in promotion with studies in the literature. Within the scope of the study, secondary data sources reached by scanning current sources in the "Google Academic" search engine used to search for comprehensive scientific literature were examined and through these sources, how content for digital media is created in terms of promotion in the tourism industry and how digital media is used in promotion were evaluated. Therefore, the study method based on qualitative data was taken as the basis in the study. It was foreseen that new fields of study could be created through the information to be obtained as a result of the study and that the results of the study could provide ideas for future studies in this direction.

RESULTS

Studies that are accessed through secondary data sources and examine how content for digital media is created in terms of promotion in the tourism industry and how digital media is used in promotion are seen in the following literature:

Bulgaria publishes travel guides and books for touristic places in Bulgaria with the digital application it calls "Travel Books". With this application, a free mobile application and software system has been developed to help tourists during their travels, to better promote and market historical and cultural places, and to make travels more enjoyable by adding interactions to the books prepared. Tourists traveling to Bulgaria can easily access short videos prepared by professional photographers and some websites. With this application, the photos and images in the books are animated and turned into a video show on the device. The "animated" images both provide tourists with original information about the places they will travel to and make travel planning and information gathering more enjoyable (Offir, 2018).

Within the framework of the project titled "Promotion of the Historic, Cultural and Touristic Treasures of Edirne and Nessebar" carried out jointly by Edirne Municipality of Turkey and Nessebar Municipality of Bulgaria, Edirne Municipality has placed 16 touch-screen kiosks at different points of Edirne and made them available for use by local and foreign tourists. In addition, applications for Android and iOS phones have been developed with the website www.edirnevisit.com and when the name "Edirne Visit" is searched in both, the applications start to serve in Turkish, English and Bulgarian languages with the icon in Edirne Red and the logo of the Edirne Municipality. Both kiosks and software applications are designed to promote Edirne. The information includes a digital city map, information about historical and touristic places, hotels, food and beverage places, a monthly calendar of events to be held in the city, minibus routes, locations and phone numbers of taxi stands. In one section, the Bulgaria-Nessebar Municipality is also given space for city promotion. In addition, news from the official website of the Edirne Municipality is shared here. When official institutions and private organizations that want to share events in the city send event information in a visual format (content, location, day and time) to edirnevisit@edirne.bel.tr, it is shared through kiosks and software applications. The Edirne Municipality Transportation Services Directorate's website www.edirnebelediyesiulasimhizmetleri.com can also be used to track minibus routes. The WhatsApp Request and Complaint Line, established by the Edirne Governorship and Edirne Municipality in 2017, evaluates the suggestions and complaints of local and foreign tourists visiting the city and actively implements the necessary solutions (Erkmen and Güler, 2020).

Greece is one of the countries that effectively uses social media as a digital content creation tool in the promotion and marketing of tourist destinations. The Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) has a presence on many platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, and creates digital content on these social media platforms. GNTO shares visuals of the country's natural beauties, historical and cultural centers on each platform. In order to further increase participation, GNTO shares the stories of local and foreign tourists who visit Greece. In this way, the potential for followers and users of the page to visit the country to experience Greece and its historical, cultural and natural places increases (Vazou, 2014).

Çeltek (2023) stated in her study that most corporate hotels in the world, such as Atlantis Dubai Hotel, Novotel Hotels, Holiday Inn Express Sydney, Relaxa Hotel Munich, upload Virtual Reality videos on YouTube or their websites that allow customers to visit their rooms. The study, which indicates that Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality, which integrate digital information into the real-world environment and contribute to the creation of digital content, can be powerful tools for any hotel promotion campaign, indicates that customer experience can be improved by using Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality in hotels, hotels can be promoted, and the information customers need can be provided and hotel employees can be trained.

Digital content creation also includes promotional activities made on social media networks for tourism businesses and destinations (Oliveira and Panyik, 2015). In this context, Eataly New York, one of New York's leading Italian restaurants, uses a social media marketing and promotion strategy that showcases the art of Italian cuisine. This campaign, in which videos and photos of its chefs preparing classic Italian dishes, recipes and cooking tips are shared on Facebook, has attracted great attention on social media, which has emerged as a result of digitalization, and has contributed to the restaurant's positioning as a pioneer in the region where it is located. On this occasion, the restaurant, which also promotes and sells its own brand products used in the business, periodically shares the relevant videos in a synchronized manner on all social media platforms (Bortolato, 2016).

Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is considered the center of digital technological transformation and accelerates digital content creation (Borges et al., 2021), can be used to create the best travel route suggestions for visitors through applications with its functions such as machine learning, deep learning and fuzzy learning. This offers significant advantages to tourism businesses in terms of marketing. Artificial intelligence-supported robots used for customer service can also be a marketing tool in the tourism and hospitality industry. The hotel called "Henn na Hotel Maihama Tokyo Bay" is sold for rooms on booking.com, one of the world's leading online hotel reservation sites. The feature of this hotel is that all its employees are artificial intelligence robots. Robots work in all departments from reception to housekeeping and room service and provide service to customers. In the comments about this hotel, it is noteworthy that customers find the robots interesting and the general evaluation score of the hotel is 8 out of 10 (very good). It is noteworthy that Booking.com uses robots in marketing by featuring reviews about robots on the first page of hotel promotions (Ercan, 2020).

Digital content creation can also be carried out within any digital marketing campaign, and can be effective in terms of other marketing channels used by tourism businesses and destinations or the advertising budget spent (Hays et al., 2013). Deutsche Bahn, a transportation company headquartered in Berlin, Germany, attracts customers with campaigns and discounts organized through its Instagram account. In an announcement published on April 1, 2024, the company organized a campaign valid between April 2 and 4 as both an apology and a thank for the patience of its customers due to the ongoing strikes in Germany. Within the scope of this campaign, which provides a 20% discount only on economy and super economy tickets, the travels must be made by October 1, 2024 at the latest (Dittrich, 2024). The company's Instagram account has 230,000 followers (Deutsche Bahn, 2024).

Recreation businesses can also expand their customer base, increase brand recognition, and strengthen customer relationships by creating digital content through social media. For example, Anatolian Civilizations Museum (Ankara, Turkey) encourages students in a certain geographic area to visit the museum by offering special discounts through Facebook ads (Özbek et al., 2017). On the other hand, Museum of Modern Art (Istanbul, Turkey) promotes modern art to a wider audience by sharing artistic content, exhibition tours, and interviews with artists on its Facebook page (Akbulut and Sade, 2021). Bursa Uludağ National Park (Bursa, Turkey) increases customer loyalty by offering special discounts and the opportunity to spend enjoyable time in nature to its Facebook followers (Gülertekin Genç and Genç, 2024).

Another example of applications that create content for digital media in the tourism industry is the store called Unifree Duty Free. Unifree Duty Free is a retail store that sells products in various categories, including fashion, beauty, food and beverage and technology brands, on the international air side of IGA Istanbul (Turkey) Airport. It is noteworthy that Unifree Duty Free, which provides information about its services and areas of activity on its website https://www.unifree.com/, has social media accounts such as Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn, which it uses to reach potential and existing customers, and that these accounts are actively used. In addition, Unifree Duty Free, which is seen to have created a content plan that promotes its store with impressive content by collaborating with influencers on its Instagram account, also has a score of 4.4 out of 5.0 on Google Comments and receives positive comments from many local and foreign customers (Buluk Eşitti, 2024).

A travel guide and travel blog for tourism businesses and destinations that aim to create content for digital media, a travel guide is defined as articles that contain detailed information about touristic places around the world (Peel and Sørensen, 2016). Travel guide content offers its readers tips, ideas, background information, and even local perspectives regarding travel. Pegasus, one of the most preferred airlines in Turkey, offers a detailed travel guide to its potential customers. On this page, where the detailed information provided is divided into headings, the section that directs to purchase a plane ticket is one of the first elements that attracts readers' attention at the top of the page, on the right side. The visual at the top of the New York guide page of Turkish Airlines' e-magazine Skylife is followed by a live map filtered with "General Information", "Accommodation", "To Do List" and "Food and Drink" buttons. Among the information provided in separate sections on the rest of the page, readers are directed to the New York Pass sale and Turkish Airlines' mobile application. Thus, through travel guides, companies can both promote themselves and provide the opportunity to reach potential customers (Taktak, 2023).

Podcast contents has become popular as a product of the digital transformation process with the widespread use of mobile devices (Grett and Jakobs, 2021). Podcasts aim to create brand awareness, demonstrate expertise and authority, promote products or services, develop customer relations, and create a loyal audience by providing valuable content to the target audience of a brand or company. By providing content related to the brand in podcast, it is possible to ensure that listeners get to know the brand or company (Beck et al., 2022). The popularity of podcast publishing in the tourism industry has also started to increase, especially with Covid-19 (Bajaj and Singh, 2022). The agency sales department of Germany's second largest tour operator, Dertour Group, is broadcasting a podcast with the conversation format "Around the Globe-The Travel Talk". In the broadcast, the agency invites experts from its own travel agencies as well as external travel experts to talk about various travel destinations, and in addition to tips about the destination, it also provides information about trips that inspire guests and encourage them to travel later. In addition, it is stated that many concrete tips are given about travel and tourism culture of the countries planned to be traveled, such as what to consider when traveling alone, which country is best for beginners in Africa, and tipping is not a good idea in Japan. The agency states that podcast broadcasting offers them a flexible broadcast format and thus allows them to reach a wide audience, and that podcast broadcasts provide the opportunity to interact directly with listeners, which creates a deeper connection with travel enthusiasts.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The world is constantly in a rapid process of change and transformation. The most defining feature of this period is undoubtedly digitalization. Digitalization inevitably has an important place in the lives of all people, brands and businesses. It is proven by studies that technology-based movements in the tourism industry have increased with digitalization and that classical applications have been replaced by digital applications over time. It is also an undeniable fact that digital applications have a strong impact area that makes business promotions easier, cheaper and allows them to reach large audiences. In addition, studies show that technologies in the tourism industry have a more facilitating effect on personnel and tourists.

Digital content creation, one of the results of the digitalization process, is the creation of written and visual content or applications that are produced to be published on various digital platforms, motivating, inspiring, informing and educating. In digital content creation, an audience is created by sharing content through social media platforms, blogs, YouTube channels, podcasts, other online channels or applications. Creativity and content quality are important in terms of attracting the attention of viewers and creating a loyal follower base. Digital content creation makes significant contributions to the increase in the opportunities to differentiate and enrich visitor experiences in the tourism industry. Again, with digital content creation, tourism businesses and destinations have the opportunity to produce touristic services with awareness and to ensure that demand is sustainable. This is especially important in terms of regional development and residents in the context of tourism destinations. Because the sustainability of touristic demand and services to the region will be effective in reducing internal migration mobility in the country in terms of both employment and regional welfare, as well as reducing development differences between regions. From the tourists' perspective, the decrease in tourists' travel costs, their access to faster information about different tourist destinations in a shorter time and their access to more tourist destinations will also be effective in the development of local tourism.

As a result, based on the studies conducted, it can be stated that digital content creation increases brand awareness by providing valuable information to target audiences, specifically for tourism businesses and destinations, and makes them successful by encouraging interaction. In this context, it can be stated that it will not be difficult for tourism businesses and destinations to become a brand in the world tourism market if they produce highly competitive digital content.

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE FACILITIES (BEFORE COVID-19 AND AFTER COVID-19): THE TURKEY EXAMPLE

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ABSTRACT: *Various measures need to be taken in accommodation establishments within the scope of sustainable tourism. One of these and the most important of these is environmentally friendly facilities and practices. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization are developing various practices and projects in order to popularize and encourage environmentally friendly facilities. One of these is the green key application. Thanks to the green key application, water, electricity, fuel savings are provided and recycling is given importance. The aim of this study is to make a comparative analysis of the number of environmentally friendly facilities before and after the coronavirus. According to the findings obtained from the research there has been a decrease in the number of environmentally friendly facilities after the coronavirus. The ratio of the number of environmentally friendly facilities to the number of accommodation facilities in Turkey is calculated as 9.13%.*

KEYWORDS: *Sustainable tourism, green key, coronavirus*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism has emerged to reduce the negative economic, social and cultural effects of tourism and to provide long-term benefits for the society hosting the tourists (Paul, 2013: 759). Sustainable tourism is to increase the tourism capacity and the quality of tourism products without negatively affecting the natural environment and human resources that feed the sector (Cronin 1990:13).

Sustainable tourism means ensuring the continuity of the factors, assets and activities that constitute tourism activities without losing their quality and quantity. The aim of sustainable tourism is to minimize the negative effects of cultural heritage and businesses on the environment while maximizing the economic and social benefits of tourism (www.unwto.org/tourism&mdgsezine/).

Increasing tourism activities increase the pressure on the environment and the ecological environment is damaged. For this reason, sustainability activities are becoming very important for the tourism sector. World tourism and environmental organizations are taking measures to

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encourage practices aimed at taking permanent measures for the sustainability of tourism. Turkey is implementing many new regulations within this scope. The relationship between tourism and the environment is an inseparable whole. The main source of nutrition for the tourism sector is the natural environment and its elements, therefore the sector that has the most responsibility for the protection of the environment, nature and ecological life is the tourism sector. There is a strong relationship between sustainability and tourism. Since tourism is a sector with continuity, it must adhere to the basic principles of sustainability. Otherwise, we can talk about inefficient use and increasing costs due to inefficient use of resources.

Within the scope of sustainable tourism, in order to protect the environment, develop environmental awareness, and encourage and promote the positive contributions of touristic facilities to the environment, since 1993, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has granted the Environment Friendly Establishment Certificate (Pine Symbol) to accommodation facilities that request and meet the required qualifications. In 2008, the circular regarding the granting of the Environment Friendly Accommodation Facility Certificate entered into force. The circular covers the reduction of energy, water, consumption of environmentally harmful substances and the amount of waste, increasing energy efficiency, encouraging the use of renewable energy resources, planning and implementation of accommodation facilities in an environmentally friendly manner starting from the investment phase, the facility's compliance with the environment, arrangements and activities that beautify the environment, ecological architecture, raising awareness about environmental sensitivity, providing training and cooperating with relevant institutions and organizations (www.yigm.gtb.gov.tr). Businesses that will receive the Environment Friendly Accommodation Facility Certificate will also be certified with a green star. These facilities will contribute to the protection of the environment by taking additional measures to create a sustainable nature, and will gain privileges in promotion and marketing. The aims of increasing the number of environmentally sensitive facilities and encouraging them are to protect the environment, develop environmental awareness, and encourage facilities to obtain the certificate. What Does the Environmental Awareness Campaign Cover?:

- Saving water,
- Increasing energy efficiency,
- Reducing the consumption of environmentally harmful substances and the amount of waste,
- It includes the encouragement of the use of renewable energy resources,

• Environmentally sensitive planning of accommodation establishments from the investment stage,

• Environmental compatibility of touristic facilities, arrangements and activities that beautify the environment, ecological architecture, raising awareness on environmental sensitivity, providing training, cooperating with relevant institutions and organizations," (www.yigm.gtb.gov.tr).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In their study titled "Environmental Awareness in Accommodation Facilities", Türk and Harbalıoğlu (2015) concluded that the number of accommodation facilities with environmentally sensitive business certificates is low in Turkey in terms of both numbers and proportions. They also emphasize that this situation is an important problem for the Turkish tourism sector.

Ertaş et al. (2018) examined the web pages of accommodation facilities with green star certificates in their study titled "Evaluation of the Environmental Awareness of Accommodation Facilities within the Scope of Green Star Applications" and found that they did not provide information on their web pages regarding environmental management and green star applications. The businesses mostly added the awards and certificates they received related to the environment to their web pages. Similarly, Sezen-Doğancili and Akbulut (2015) examined the websites of hotels with green star certificates and conducted a study on their use of green marketing and showed that the businesses mostly addressed environmental issues on the home pages of their websites and that the awards and certificates tab was used the most.

Özoğul (2023), in his study titled "Analysis of Online Reviews on Tripadvisor for Environmentally-Friendly 5-Star Hotel Businesses: The Case of Marmaris", concluded that guests are generally satisfied with environmentally friendly facilities, and the main factors determining satisfaction are the physical features of the hotel, human resources and entertainment.

Acuner and Ergin (2021) in their study titled "Evaluation of the Mission and Vision of Environmentally Friendly Accommodation Facilities in Terms of Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria" concluded that accommodation businesses do not include mission and vision definitions.

Tülek and Altuntaş (2016), in their study titled "Green Star in Tourism: Environmentally Sensitive Accommodation Facilities", stated that the green star application should be widespread, some applications should be made mandatory, and thus the ecological environment will be better protected.

METHODOLOGY

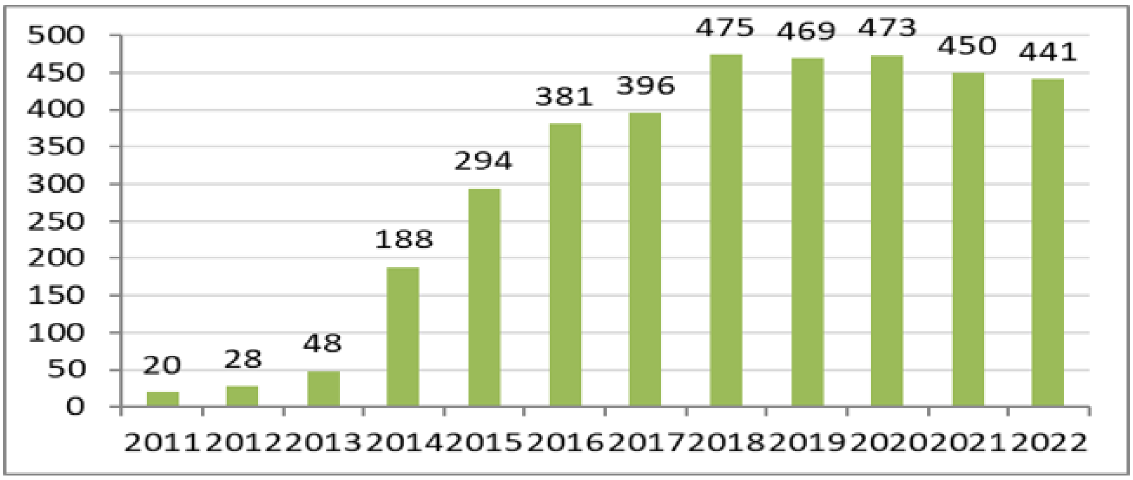
In this study, a case study design, which is one of the qualitative research designs, was used. The purpose of a case study is to examine a specific situation in depth and reveal detailed results (Köse, 2010: 107). The data were obtained from the open access data published on the official website of TUİK on 1-30 August 2024.

Content analysis was used in the analysis of data in the study. "The purpose of content analysis is to reach concepts that can explain the collected data. In content analysis, similar data are brought together within the framework of certain concepts and themes and interpreted in a way that the reader can understand" (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011: 227).

FINDINGS

In order to protect the environment, develop environmental awareness, and encourage and promote the positive contributions of touristic facilities to the environment, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism grants the "Environmentally Conscious Accommodation Facility Certificate" and plaque to accommodation facilities that have a "Tourism Facility Certificate" and operate in an environmentally sensitive manner, within the framework of the legislation. It is aimed to reduce the pressure of tourism on the environment. As of the end of 2022; The number of accommodation facilities with a Tourism Facility Certificate is 4,830, and 441 of these facilities (9.13%) have been certified with an environmentally sensitive accommodation facility certificate (green star).

Table 1: Number of Green Star Certified Facilities by Year



Source: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2023

The fact that only 9.13% of accommodation establishments have an environmentally friendly facility certificate is a very low rate. This rate should be at least 50% and above. For this, public authorities need to implement some encouraging practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

When the findings obtained from the research are examined, it is seen that the number of environmentally friendly accommodation facilities in Turkey is not sufficient in terms of quantity and proportion. It is very important for the future of the sector to minimize the pressure on the environment of the tourism sector, which is one of the most important sectors of the economy, and to ensure its sustainability. Otherwise, it is obvious that the inefficiency and depletion of scarce resources will negatively affect the future of the sector. As of the end of 2022, the number of accommodation facilities with Tourism Operation Certificate is 4,830, and 441 of these facilities (9.13%) are certified with the environmentally friendly accommodation facility certificate (green star).

The fact that only 9.13% of accommodation establishments have an environmentally friendly facility certificate is a very low rate. This rate should be at least 50% and above. For this, public authorities need to implement some encouraging practices.

When examined over the years, there has been a decrease in the number of environmentally friendly facilities after the coronavirus. The negative impact of the tourism sector during and after the coronavirus process has also negatively affected accommodation business investments. Investors may have been hesitant to invest in the tourism sector, which is very much affected by cyclical fluctuations. In addition, the economic crisis after the coronavirus may have delayed investments. While an increase in the number of environmentally friendly facilities has been observed over the years , the fluctuation after the coronavirus can be explained by economic reasons.

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ANALYSIS OF TOURIST BEHAVIOR OF TURKISH CITIZENS AFTER THE PANDEMIC

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Abstract: *There have been serious changes in human behavior and habits after the Covid-19 pandemic, which has affected all citizens and sectors around the world. Determining what changes have occurred on an individual level will be important to better understand human behavior in the following processes. While the changes experienced in the tourism sector, one of the sectors most affected by the pandemic process, have been shaped by changes in the demand market, it has also changed with some legal regulations.*

The aim of this study is to reveal the changes experienced in the tourism sector household demand market between 2021 and 2023 after the pandemic and to ensure that regulations are made by understanding the demand market in the future. According to the findings obtained from the research total expenditure, package tour expenditure, personal expenditure, average expenditure per trip increased between 2021-2023. When the data is examined, food and beverage, transportation, accommodation expenditures have generally not changed between 2021-2023. The highest expenditure item is in the food and beverage category. When the data is examined, visiting relatives ranks first according to the travel purpose between 2021-2023, and visits for "travel, entertainment, vacation" are second. When the number of overnight stays is examined according to accommodation types, accommodation at "friends and relatives' house" ranks first between 2021-2023. When the findings are interpreted, it is concluded that there is a 1.0% decrease in the average number of overnight stays between 2021 and 2023. When comparing 2021 and 2023, the number of trips increased while the number of overnight stays decreased. This shows that travelers tend to take short-term trips.

Keywords: *Tourist Behaviour, Travel, Covid-19*

Introduction

The coronavirus outbreak, which first appeared in China in December 2019, has affected the entire world in 2020. Turkey, where the first lockdown was experienced in March 2020, has experienced short and long-term lockdowns from time to time. The tourism sector is one of the sectors most affected by the coronavirus outbreak, which has negatively affected many sectors. In order to minimize the contraction in the tourism sector, international flights were allowed, and Turkey opened its border gates as of June 1, 2020 and started accepting foreign visitors. While the number of foreign visitors visiting Turkey in the first 11 months of 2019 was 42.9 million, this number decreased by 72% in the first 11 months of 2020 and fell to 12 million people. When we add our citizens living abroad to this figure, the total number of visitors in the first 11 months of 2020 was 14,486,632 people (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2020).

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The coronavirus pandemic has also caused many differences in tourist behavior. While there has been an increase in the number of people traveling individually, interest in camping and caravan camping sites has increased. There has been a significant increase in caravan sales. This change in tourists' preferences has made it necessary for supply providers to differentiate their products. The aim of this study is to reveal the change in the demand market after Covid.

Method

In this study, a case study design, which is one of the qualitative research designs, was used. The purpose of a case study is to examine a specific situation in depth and reveal detailed results (Köse, 2010: 107). The data were obtained from the open access data published on the official website of TUİK on 1-30 August 2024.

Findings

When evaluated on an annual basis, the total number of trips in 2022 decreased by 0.8% compared to the previous year, reaching 52 million 327 thousand. The total number of nights spent by those traveling this year decreased by 7% compared to the previous year, reaching 426 million 579 thousand. The average number of nights spent was 8.2 nights.

Table 1. Number of Trips and Overnight Stays of Travelers (2021-2023)

Year	Trip Number of (Thousand)	Change The rate (%)	Overnight stay Number of (Thousand)	Change The rate (%)	Average Overnight stay Number of
2021	52 774	23.2	458 872	-2.2	8.7
2022	52 327	-0.8	426 579	-0.8	8.2
2023	61 463	17.5	473 079	10.9	7.7

When the table is examined, the total number of trips in 2023 increased by 17.5% compared to the previous year, reaching 61 million 463 thousand. The total number of overnight stays of those traveling this year increased by 10.9% compared to the previous year, reaching 473 million 79 thousand. The average number of overnight stays was 7.7.

When the findings were interpreted, it was concluded that there was a 1.0% decrease in the average number of overnight stays between 2021 and 2023. When comparing 2021 with 2023, the number of trips increased while the number of overnight stays decreased. This situation shows that travelers tend to take short-term trips.

Table 2. Travel expenditures of people traveling (2021-2023)

Year	Total Spending (Thousand TL)	Change The rate (%)	Package tour Expenditure (Thousand TL)	Change The rate (%)	Personal Spending (Thousand TL)	Change The rate (%)	Trip Per Average Spending (TL)
2021	58 104 752	80.2	5 095 471	170.9	53 009 281	74.5	1 101
2022	114 317 183	96.7	10 774 129	111.4	103 534 055	93.3	2 185
2023	229 795 183	101,0	20 667 298	91.8	209 128 153	102.0	2 739

In 2021, total travel expenditures on domestic trips increased by 80.2% compared to the previous year, reaching 58 billion 104 million 752 thousand TL. Of these expenditures, 91.2% were personal expenditures at 53 billion 9 million 281 thousand TL, and 8.8% were package tour expenditures at 5 billion 95 million 471 thousand TL. The average expenditure per trip was 1,101 TL.

In 2022, total travel expenditures on domestic trips increased by 96.7% compared to the previous year, reaching 114 billion 317 million 183 thousand TL. Of these expenditures, 111.4% were personal expenditures with 103 billion 534 million 055 thousand TL, and 11% were package tour expenditures with 10 billion 774 million 129 thousand TL. The average expenditure per trip was 2,185 TL.

In 2023, total travel expenses in domestic travel increased by 101% compared to the previous year and reached 229 billion 795 million 451 thousand TL. 91% of these expenses were personal expenses with 209 billion 128 million 153 thousand TL, and 9% were package tour expenses with 20 billion 667 million 298 thousand TL. The average expense per trip was 3,739 TL.

When the findings are interpreted, total expenditure, package tour expenditure, personal expenditure, and average expenditure per trip increased between 2021 and 2023.

Table 3. Proportions of Expenditure Types in Total Expenditure (%) (2021-2023)

Year	Eating and Drinking	Transportation	Accomodation	Package Type Expenses	Clothing and gift furniture	Health	Before Travel Made expenses	Other Expenses
2021	31.4	26.3	14.0	8.8	7.8	4.2	1.2	6.4
2022	30.7	30.5	13.0	9.4	7.3	3.1	0.8	5.2
2023	32.0	26.3	17.0	9.0	7.6	2.9	0.5	4.7

When the distribution rates of expenditure types within travel expenditures are examined annually in 2021, the largest share was food and beverage expenditures with 31.4%, transportation expenditures with 26.3% and accommodation expenditures with 14%. When the change rates of these expenditure types compared to the same period of the previous year are examined, an increase of 54.7% in food and beverage expenditures, 62.6% in transportation expenditures and 118.9% in accommodation expenditures was seen.

When the distribution rates of expenditure types in travel expenditures were examined annually in 2022, transportation expenditures had the largest share with 30.7%, food and beverage expenditures with 30.5%, and accommodation expenditures with 13%. When the change rates of these expenditure types compared to the previous year were examined, an increase of 129.4% was seen in transportation expenditures, 91.3% in food and beverage expenditures, and 82.3% in accommodation expenditures.

When the distribution rates of expenditure types in travel expenditures were examined annually in 2023, the largest share was food and beverage expenditures with 32%, transportation expenditures with 26.3% and accommodation expenditures with 17%. When the change rates of these expenditure types compared to the previous year were examined, an increase of 111% was seen in food and beverage expenditures, 72% in transportation expenditures and 164.3% in accommodation expenditures.

When the data is examined, food and beverage, transportation and accommodation expenditures have generally not changed between 2021 and 2023. The highest expenditure item is in the food and beverage category.

Table 4. Distribution of Travel Numbers by Purpose (2021-2023)

Year	Relatives Visit	Travel, Entertainment Holiday	Health	Meeting, Conference Course, Seminar	Commercial Relationships Fair	Culture	Other
2021	58.8	30.2	5.8	1.0	1.2	0.3	3.4
2022	59.4	31.1	3.8	1.6	1.0	0.4	2.7
2023	58.3	33.1	3.7	0.7	0.6	0.5	3.1

When the purposes of travel were evaluated annually in 2021, "visiting relatives" ranked first with 58.8%, "travel, entertainment, holiday" ranked second with 30.2%, and " health" travels ranked third with 5.8%.

When the purposes of travel were evaluated annually in 2022, "visiting relatives" ranked first with 59.4%, "travel, entertainment, holiday" ranked second with 31.1%, and " health" travels ranked third with 3.8%.

When the purposes of travel were evaluated annually in 2023, "visiting relatives" ranked first with 58.3%, "travel, entertainment, holiday" ranked second with 33.1%, and "health" travel came third with 3.7%.

When the data is examined, visiting relatives ranks first among travel purposes between 2021 and 2023, followed by visits for "travel, entertainment, vacation" purposes.

Table 5. Distribution of Number of Nights Stayed by Accommodation Types (2021-2023)

Year	Friend and Relatives House	His own house	Hotel	Hostel	Other
2021	66.6	18.5	7.5	1.2	6.2
2022	67.7	17.2	8.1	1.0	5.9
2023	67.7	15.4	8.1	1.3	7.5

When accommodation types were evaluated annually in 2021, travelers stayed the most at "a friend's or relative's house" with 305 million 542 thousand overnight stays. "Their own house" came in second with 84 million 814 thousand overnight stays, while "the hotel" came in third with 34 million 218 thousand overnight stays.

When accommodation types were evaluated annually in 2022, travelers stayed the most at "a friend's or relative's house" with 288 million 905 thousand overnight stays. "Their own house" came in second with 73 million 478 thousand overnight stays, while "the hotel" came in third with 34 million 588 thousand overnight stays.

When the types of accommodation were evaluated annually in 2023, travelers stayed the most at "a friend's or relative's house" with 320 million 410 thousand overnight stays. "Their own house" came in second with 72 million 620 thousand overnight stays, while "the hotel" came in third with 38 million 263 thousand overnight stays.

When the number of overnight stays is examined according to accommodation types, accommodation at "friends and relatives' houses" ranks first between 2021-2023.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There are 1.0% decrease in the average number of overnight stays between 2021 and 2023. When comparing 2021 and 2023, the number of trips increased while the number of overnight stays decreased. This shows that travelers tend to take short-term trips.

When the findings are interpreted, package tour spending, personal spending, and average spending per trip have increased between 2021 and 2023. When the data is examined, food and beverage, transportation, and accommodation spending have generally not changed between 2021 and 2023. The highest spending item is in the food and beverage category. When the data is examined, visiting relatives ranks first among travel purposes between 2021 and 2023, and "travel, entertainment, and vacation" visits come in second. When the number of overnight stays is examined according to accommodation types, accommodation at "friends and relatives' houses" ranks first among accommodations between 2021 and 2023. While the tradition of visiting relatives, which is a part of Turkish citizens' holiday tradition, maintains its importance, accommodation at relatives' houses ranks first. Since this situation is the same in the pre- coronavirus data, travel purposes and accommodation preferences after Covid have not changed compared to before Covid.

According to the findings of the study, there has been no change in the travel purposes, spending types and accommodation preferences of Turkish citizens. There has been a decrease in the number of overnight stays.

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ASSESSING THE RECREATIONAL VALUE OF ECOLOGICAL TOURISM ROUTES IN FORESTED AREAS: THE VISUAL IMPACT OF THE "PLAIUL FAGULUI" NATURAL RESERVATION

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ABSTRACT: *The paper evaluates the recreational value of ecological tourist routes in forest areas, focusing on the visual appeal of the "Plaiul Fagului" natural reservation. Forests cover approximately 12.7% of the Republic of Moldova's land area, providing venues for various recreational activities such as hiking, cycling, and orienteering. Promoting forests for recreational purposes is a key element of sustainable forestry, with growing awareness of the societal benefits they offer. Forest tourism is positioned as a form of commercial tourism that fosters community development while maintaining an ecological balance between tourism and the environment. The study categorizes forest tourist routes based on their purpose, age groups of visitors, direction, and mode of travel. It also examines the classification criteria for hiking routes, including walking time, difficulty level, and required equipment. The methodology used to derive touristic route attractiveness scores for the "Plaiul Fagului" natural reservation that involves a Delphi panel survey. The survey assessed the attractiveness, accessibility, and informational content of the tourist routes. The findings highlight the importance of forest tourism in promoting sustainable forestry and community development while preserving the ecological balance. The "Plaiul Fagului" natural reservation serves as a living example of sustainable tourism, offering a rich biodiversity and natural beauty for ecotourism enthusiasts to explore.*

KEYWORDS: *natural reservation, recreational value, sustainable forestry and community development, touristic route attractiveness*

INTRODUCTION

Forests cover roughly 12.7% of the Republic of Moldova's land area and provide venues for hiking, cycling, orienteering, and other active and adventure sports. Promoting forests for recreational purposes is considered a key element of sustainable forestry, with growing awareness of the societal benefits they offer. Essentially, forest tourism is positioned as a commercial tourism form that fosters community development while acting as a catalyst for maintaining an ecological balance between tourism and the environment (Covali V, 2020).

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of "forest tourism" first emerged in the United States. Early in the 20th century, forester Benton McKay proposed creating a "pedestrian sanctuary"—a trail along the Appalachian Mountains. By 1922, a hiking trail spanning the entire mountain range from Maine in the northwest to Georgia in the southeast was established, stretching 3,300 kilometers. It quickly became a beloved destination for many Americans in the eastern United States, fostering a connection with nature. This model of trails soon spread globally. Beyond addressing educational and training challenges, forest trails aid in nature conservation by managing visitor flows in ways that reduce environmental impact. Defined routes also facilitate adherence to environmental protection laws by allowing better control over visitor numbers and ensuring compliance with regulations.

The primary objectives of developing forest tourist routes can be categorized into two groups:

Objective 1: Environment and Education- combine active recreation for forest visitors with expanding their knowledge base; foster an ecological culture as part of the broader culture of human relationships and interactions with nature.

Objective 2: Nature Protection - guide and confine forest visitors to well-defined routes to prevent disorderly movement, thereby protecting natural habitats.

CLASSIFYING FOREST TOURIST ROUTES. One of the primary criteria for classifying forest tourist routes is their purpose. According to this criterion, we can categorise routes as cognitive-walking, cognitive-touristic, educational, and thematic. Each type has its specific characteristics:

- ✓ Cognitive walking trails, often referred to as "weekend" trails, typically span 4-8 km. Whenever feasible, individual hikers are grouped together and guided along the entire route to acquaint them with nature, historical, and cultural landmarks. These routes address environmental and human interaction issues, the impact of economic activities on nature, and showcase the conservation efforts aimed at preserving the area's natural and cultural heritage.
- ✓ Cognitive-tourist routes vary significantly in length, from a few kilometers up to several tens of kilometers, and trips can last between 1-4 days. Similar to cognitive walking trails, these can be traversed individually or with a guide and should be well-marked. Before embarking on these trails, tourist groups must receive informational materials and training on safety practices and forest conduct rules.

✓ Educational trails are designed for ecological education and awareness, covering distances rarely exceeding 2 km, ensuring trips do not exceed three hours. These routes are primarily intended for school students, high schoolers, university students, and teachers but should be accessible to all visitor groups. Visitor groups generally follow the trail under the guidance of a forestry enterprise employee or a teacher. The trail must have appropriate signage and information stands, and brochures with relevant information should be provided.

✓ Thematic routes serve as communication tools for protected area administrations, especially in highly attractive areas that draw numerous visitors. These routes facilitate the interpretation of information and offer outdoor learning experiences. Typically, thematic routes enable guided excursions without necessitating a physical guide. They aim to provide an engaging experience by involving users in an interactive learning process about the place, coupled with an understanding of nature and local culture. Communication methods used include:

- Descriptive (text, graphics, tables, diagrams, and images)
- Interactive (engaging visitors in active learning)
- Sensory (incorporating senses like sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch).

✓ Thematic routes are characterised by a significant amount of detailed information and commonly use various interpretation infrastructures, such as information boards, numbered posts, brochure-linked information, interactive points, or sensory information points. They cover diverse subjects, including nature, civilized history, folklore, etc.

Forest tourist trails are also classified based on trail length or duration. There is no universally accepted classification for these criteria as they are relative and largely depend on the forest stand area. Ideally, forest tourist routes should not exceed 8 km in length. For educational purposes, the optimal trail length should not surpass 2 km.

✓ Forest tourist routes can be categorised based on the age groups of visitors. For instance, routes for preschoolers, primary school students, and those over 60 should be shorter and less challenging compared to those for younger individuals and middle-aged visitors.

Additionally, the themes and informational content of these routes vary according to the visitors' ages. Generally, it is impractical to design routes exclusively for a single demographic, so routes are typically created with the "middle-aged visitor" in mind, offering various options that cater to different groups.

Depending on their layout, forest tourist routes can be classified as:

Linear routes: Starting at point A and ending at point B, often used for longer routes connecting significant sites (e.g., parking lots to house-museums or information centres to lakes).

Circular routes: Starting and ending at the same point, ideal for returning visitors to their starting location and recommended for indirect interpretation.

Radial routes: Beginning and ending at the same point (A), where tourists travel outwards to multiple points of interest before returning to the start.

These routes can also be classified by mode of travel: 1. on foot - hiking, 2. by bicycle - cycle tourism, or on 3. horseback - equestrian.

Hiking, known as *randonnée pédèstre* in France, hiking, walking, rambling, hillwalking, or fellwalking in the UK, north walking or pole walking in Scandinavia, hiking, trekking, backpacking, thru-hiking, or tramping in the USA, bushwalking in Australia and New Zealand, and trekking in Nepal, India, Pakistan, and East Africa, *wandern or bergwandern* in Germany, is an outdoor leisure activity involving traversing a route on foot.

Hiking classification criteria include walking time, difficulty level, and equipment requirement. Walking time is noted on technical sheets and signs, expressed in hours, fractions of hours, and occasionally minutes. Calculations are as follows: flat ground or slight slopes, 4 km/h; uphill on developed paths, 350 m elevation gain per hour; uphill on undeveloped paths, 250 m elevation gain per hour; downhill on developed paths, 450 m descent per hour; downhill on undeveloped paths, 400 m descent per hour. Add 10 minutes of rest for each hour of walking. Distance in kilometres is used only for routes where over 80% is flat, and slopes do not exceed a 10-degree incline. Measurements are made both on the ground and on maps.

Cycle trails in the forest back. Bicycle touring is a sport and leisure activity that involves long-distance bicycle trips. The duration of these trips can be one day or several days, in which case it also requires the transport of certain luggage (clothes, food, tools, sleeping bag, tent, etc.). Excursions can be individual or group, planned ahead of time or spontaneous, on known or unknown routes. The touring bicycle must be robust, comfortable and capable of carrying the tourist and luggage over long distances and over varied terrain. For the transport of luggage, it must be equipped with racks on the rear wheel or on both wheels. The cycling routes take place on the existing communication routes, accessible by bicycle, with the most scenic character as possible from the landscape point of view and as little motorized traffic as possible, chosen according to the rank, type and degree of the route. Cycle routes are classified as follows: − according to the criterion of the type of communication path used, in two types: off road and road; - according to the difficulty level criterion, in three degrees: medium, high and "expert". Principles for organizing cycle paths in the forest background: The road surface of the communication paths used for cycle paths is as rough as possible in all cases, with the exception of "expert" grade cycle paths. The average and maximum slope and the total level difference and for each ascent of the cycle paths are in accordance with the degree of difficulty.

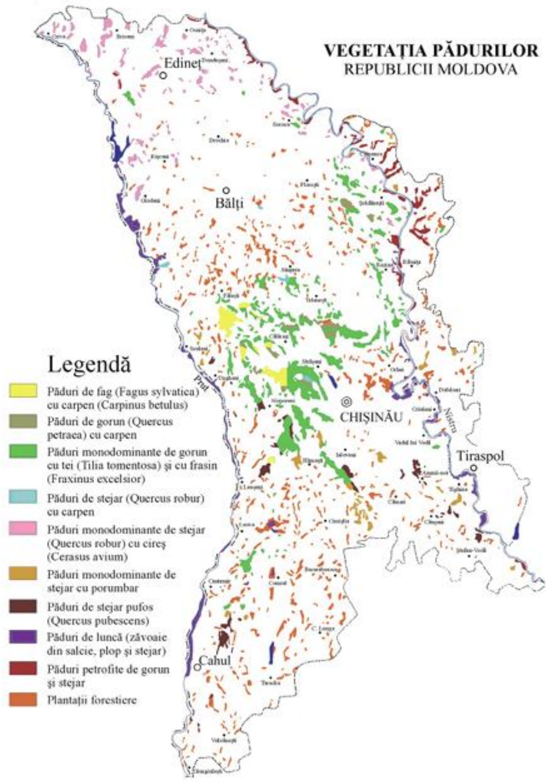

Figure 1. Map of the forests of the Republic of Moldova
Source: Covali V. (2020) Annex 3, pp.37

Currently, the national forest fund constitutes 12.7% of the country's territory (table 1). Most of the land covered with forests (87.2%) is owned by the state, the rest being owned by municipalities (12.2%) and only 0.6% - by private owners. Although it has a relatively insignificant participation, the forest fund, privately owned, is constantly growing. The Republic of Moldova has 49.1 thousand ha of forest vegetation outside the forest fund, expressed by 29.8 thousand ha of protective forest curtains (of agricultural fields, roads, rivers and water basins, etc.) and 19.2 thousand ha - other types of forest vegetation.

Table 1. Structure of the national forest fund according to the General Land Cadastre

Categories of holders	Total area/ share of thousand hectares/ %	Area covered with forests/ share, thousands of hectares/%
public property of the state	362,0/ 86,4	326,4/87,2
public property of the administrative territorial units	54,5/ 13,0	45,7/ 12,2
private property	2,6/ 0,6	2,4/ 0,6
Total	**419,1 /100**	**374,5/100**

Source: Moldsilva data

The dispersion and fragmentation of forest resources, coupled with their unequal distribution across the country, poses a negative impact on the environment's beneficial eco-protective influences. This situation hinders the creation of comfortable living conditions for the population and affects the availability of wood and non-wood products. According to Article 39 of the Forestry Code of the Republic of Moldova, titled "*Use of the forest for recreation purposes*," local public administration authorities, forest fund land managers, and other enterprises, institutions, and organizations (with consent) are responsible for developing forest sectors and socio-cultural services for the population. These activities occur in the forests of green areas around localities and other recreational forests, ensuring the preservation of the forest environment, natural landscapes, architecture of suburban areas, and compliance with sanitary requirements. Forests managed by administrative-territorial units (54.5 thousand hectares or 13% of the national forest fund) are designated as land and soil protection forests, providing protection against harmful climatic and industrial factors. Moldova's forests fall under functional group I, focusing exclusively on environmental protection. Within this framework, five functional subgroups can be distinguished (Tab. 2).

Table 2. Forest structure by functional subgroups, %

Types of forests	%
forests with water protection functions	1,6
forests with soil and lands protection functions	7,9
forests with functions to protect against harmful climatic and industrial factors	47,4
forests with recreational functions	1,6
forests with scientific interest and protection of the gene pool and the forest eco-pool	16,7

Source: Moldsilva data

Scientific research in forestry is primarily conducted within the research institutions of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova and at universities that specialize in training forestry experts. This is done in collaboration with the Institute of Forestry Research and Development (ICAS) and the scientific reserves managed by the "Moldsilva" Agency.

During 2006-2007, the Forest Research and Development Institute's scientific and technical activities centered on two main areas: forest biodiversity and sustainable forest sector management. Alongside their forest management tasks, ICAS specialists researched plant diversity within forest ecosystems in state-protected natural areas included in the forest fund overseen by the "Moldsilva" Agency:

- *Landscape reservations*: "Rudi-Arioneşti", "Holoşniţa", "Dobruşa", "Climăuţii de Jos", "Poiana Curătura", "Hlingeni", "Saharna", "Cosăuţi", "Trebujeni", "Ţapova", "Pohrebeni";

- *Botanical nature monuments* (representative sectors with forest vegetation): "Cuhureşti", "Bălţata";

- *Natural reserves*: "Cobâleni", "Vâscăuţi", "Teleneşti", "Ghiliceni", "Codrii", "Plaiul Fagului", "Pădurea Domnească", and "Prutul de Jos".

Moldova offers a variety of ecotourism routes, with an ever-changing number as new trails are developed and existing ones evolve. Some of the most sought-after ecological and nature-focused tourism paths include:

- Orheiul Vechi: This national cultural and historical reserve features picturesque landscapes, hiking trails, and ancient monasteries.

- Padurea Domneasca Natural Reserve: Renowned for its forest trails, birdwatching opportunities, and views of Moldova's native wildlife.\

- Codru Reserve: The oldest scientific reserve in Moldova, offering diverse hiking trails through dense forests.

- Nistru River Route: Ecological tours along the Nistru River that include boating, birdwatching, and riverside hikes.

- Tipova Monastery and Surroundings: A nature trail combining spiritual and ecological significance, leading to one of the oldest cave monasteries in the region.

- Saharna: An area that merges natural beauty with cultural heritage, featuring trails to the Saharna Monastery and waterfall.

- Purcari Wine Region: Ecotours that blend the natural vineyard landscapes with local wine traditions.

As the country focuses on sustainable tourism and conservation, the number of official ecotourism routes is expanding. Ecotourism associations and local guides often design customized routes based on interests such as wildlife, cultural heritage, or river landscapes.

"Plaiul Fagului," one of Moldova's significant ecological attractions, provides an excellent opportunity for ecotourism enthusiasts to explore the country's rich biodiversity and natural beauty. The reserve covers over 5,600 hectares and is predominantly comprised of beech forests, from which it derives its name ("Plaiul Fagului" translates to "Beech Ridge"). Besides the grand beech trees, the reserve also features oak, hornbeam, and other tree species that form a lush, green canopy over its hilly terrain. This diverse flora is accompanied by various fauna, including deer, wild boar, foxes, and numerous bird species, making it an ideal destination for wildlife enthusiasts.

The methodology used to determine the recreational scores for the Plaiul Fagului natural reservation presents the final scores for the region that were employed in impact modeling. Beyond their application in impact assessments, these recreational scores have intrinsic research value because they can help infer the relative contribution of different silvicultural attributes to the overall recreational value of forests.

Table 3. Steps for obtaining touristic route attractiveness scores

Preparation for the survey
Survey design
Survey implementation
Analysis of results
Dissemination to participants

A Delphi panel was convened to apply the survey for Moldova. The survey was conducted in the region between June and August 2024, with participation from 25 experts. Two rounds were needed to achieve response stability. The questionnaire featured a score-sheet encompassing three matrices that evaluated touristic route attractiveness, visitor accessibility, and information.

Table 4. Criteria for evaluating touristic route attractiveness

Evaluation criteria[1]	**"Plaiul Fagului" natural reservation**	**Characteristics**
The attractiveness of the touristic route	• Visitor centers; target group; • Recreational activities; • Distance, travel time • The concept of the route, including: name of the route, itinerary (name of localities, forest sector), mode of travel, length of the route (km), travel time (h), type of route (linear, circular, radial), basic theme of	Plaiul Fagului is a protected area, with efforts focused on preserving its unique biodiversity. Visitors are encouraged to follow eco-friendly practices during their visit, such as staying on designated trails, avoiding littering, and respecting the wildlife. The reserve plays an important role in the conservation of Moldova's natural forests and

[1] Normele metodologice privind elaborarea și aprobarea rutelor turistice https://mei.gov.md/sites/default/files/ordin_364_din_2019_norme_metodologice_rute_turistice.pdf

	the route, the purpose of the route, the target group, stopping places, tourist attractions along the route. • The natural and cultural value • Safety of visitors	serves as a living example of sustainable tourism. **Key Features of the Route:** • Hiking and Nature Trails; • Wildlife; • Educational and Research Center; • Picnic Areas and Recreation.
Accessibility of visitors	Facilities: • Parking lots • Access road to the land; • architectural groups at the beginning and end of the route.	Plaiul Fagului is easily accessible by road from Chișinău, the capital of Moldova, with a drive of approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. Visitors can arrange for guided tours, it's recommended to take advantage of local guides to fully appreciate the ecological and cultural aspects of the region.
The information	• Information panels • Direction and distance indicators	Limited information accessible

Source: based on the authors' research

Experts involved in the study were asked to score each cell on a ten-point scale, reflecting their views on how potential visitors might value a particular forest stand for recreational purposes. They were also asked to give comments or notes explaining their decisions. Participants were encouraged to utilize the entire range of scores from 1 to 10 throughout the score sheet.

After Round 1, the scores and comments were compiled, and an initial analysis was conducted. Questionnaires for Round 2 were then prepared and distributed. These questionnaires were customized for each participant, containing a table with first-round results from all panel members, including comments. Additionally, a new score-sheet displayed their individual scores from Round 1 on a separate page. Participants were asked to reconsider their previous ratings in the context of the group's collective feedback and modify or comment on them as necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

The research highlights the significant recreational value of ecological tourism routes in forested areas, with a particular focus on the "Plaiul Fagului" natural reservation from Moldova. The study underscores the importance of promoting forests for recreational purposes as a key element of sustainable forestry. This approach not only fosters community development but also maintains an ecological balance between tourism and the environment.

The findings reveal that forest tourism, when properly managed, can serve as a form of commercial tourism that benefits both the community and the environment. The categorization of forest tourist routes based on their purpose, age groups of visitors, direction, and mode of travel provides a comprehensive framework for developing and managing these routes effectively.

The methodology used to derive touristic route attractiveness scores, involving a Delphi panel survey, proved to be effective in assessing the attractiveness, accessibility, and informational content of the tourist routes. The results of this survey based on scores provided by 25 national experts highlight the "Plaiul Fagului" natural reservation as a prime example of sustainable tourism, offering rich biodiversity and natural beauty for ecotourism enthusiasts to explore.

Overall, the research emphasizes the potential of forest tourism to promote sustainable forestry practices, enhance community development, and preserve ecological balance. The "Plaiul Fagului" natural reservation serves as a living example of how ecological tourism can be successfully integrated into forest management strategies to achieve these goals.

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM POTENTIAL AS THE MAIN FACTOR OF ECONOMIC POLICY

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ABSTRACT: *Sustainable formation and development of tourism and digital modification of this sector are important tasks facing the state. In developing and solving such problems, coordination, government efforts, and close partnership with the private sector are not just necessary but crucial. The productivity of local tourism destinations is an important factor in the state's economic policy. The growth of the travel and tourism industry is reflected in the increase in population demand for a broader range of goods and services than ever before, stimulating the manufacturing and service sectors and contributing to the growth of economic activity and consumption. This factor in the tourism sector, caused by the seasonal mass movement of tourists to specific tourist destinations and the increase in the number of tourists, supports the comprehensive economic development of the country's tourist destinations. The growing demand for tourism services is accompanied by the gradual formation of a distinct offer of tourism services, the number and structure of which require constant improvement of the relevant organizational and economic programs and organizations capable of orienting the services offered to tourists. One of the main negative factors that has significantly impacted the global travel industry was uncertainty caused by the coronavirus. Cross-border tourism has declined sharply as countries have imposed strict travel bans to limit the spread of the disease. The stagnation of global public life has affected the tourism industry and visits to restaurants, theater performances, and events.*

KEYWORDS: *sustainable tourism development, COVID-19 pandemic, government policies, tourism entrepreneurship.*

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus outbreak has disrupted economic activity worldwide and damaged tourism in many parts of the world. To restore the global economy, it was necessary to agree on global policies to increase travelers and ensure economic and environmental stability. This underscores the urgent need for global cooperation in the recovery process. The COVID-19 pandemic itself was devastating in terms of human losses. The pandemic also had a physical and emotional impact on many people worldwide, forcing them to live in isolation from society. At the same time, governments in developed countries were forced to bear the financial costs

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of preparing for the pandemic and assisting businesses and citizens. In 2020, the travel and tourism industry were affected by the coronavirus epidemic. Many parts of the world have imposed travel bans and restrictions to control the rapid spread of the disease, which in turn has had a sharp negative impact on business relationships in many countries, including the tourism industry. Thus, it should be noted that in the first five months of 2020, there was a significant decrease in the number of travelers from all over the world compared to the same period in 2019. It should be noted that from January to May 2020, the number of tourist arrivals worldwide decreased to 300 million compared to 2019. Economic losses in international tourism revenues reached US$320 billion. The global financial and health crisis has caused unprecedented disruptions to the economies of the world's leading countries.

Tourism can positively and negatively impact society (Mtapuri et al., 2023). The limitations and gaps in tourism research are systematized in a review study published in 2023 (Khizar et al., 2023). L. Alves sees community-based tourism as a means to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda (Alves et al., 2024). In his research, V. Vrana noted the need to identify tourism's shortcomings and take measures to reduce them (Vrana, 2023). S. Han, H. Ramkissoon, E. You, and M. Kim believe that to ensure sustainable tourism development, it is necessary to consider the impact of tourism on all aspects of residents' lives, both tangible and intangible, and to focus on ensuring long-term benefits (Han et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

Sustainable formation and development of tourism, digital modification of this industry are important tasks facing the state. In developing and solving such problems, coordination, government efforts and close partnership with the private sector are necessary. The productivity of local tourism destinations is an important factor in the state's economic policy. The growing demand for tourism services is accompanied by the gradual formation of a clearly defined offer of tourism services, the number and structure of which require constant improvement of the relevant organizational and economic programs and organizations capable of orienting the services offered to tourists. In the post-pandemic period in Azerbaijan, the tourism sector is seen as a way to further develop the country's non-oil sector. Thus, given the rise in oil prices and the need to generate additional income by attracting more tourists to our country, the state strategy for tourism development has become a priority.The main methods used in this study are statistical analysis methods. Data banks, which are publicly available on the websites of the

National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova and the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, were used to identify trends in tourism development. To better assess the scale of the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector, the dynamics of the main indicators characterizing tourism activity for 2010-2022 were analyzed. The subject of the study is tourism in Azerbaijan and Moldova. The choice fell on these countries, since there are common characteristics between them. Firstly, in both countries, agriculture is one of the leading industries, which is very relevant today, from the point of view of the development of rural tourism. Secondly, wine tourism is currently developing in Azerbaijan and Moldova.

Traveling helps tourists see not only the world around them. Traveling is a great opportunity to change their usual environment. You don't need to take a vacation or wait for one. You can go to a neighboring city or region for the weekend or walk along a locally known route, and this will also be a trip. It is not enough for a real traveler to just see something with his own eyes, it is also important for him to feel the atmosphere, the energy of the place and immerse himself in the local flavor. In this context, it is important to work among the local population to popularize rural tourism. Various forms of attraction are possible here, from television to billboards on city streets.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The share of tourism in Azerbaijan's GDP by the end of 2022 was 1.6%, while in 2019 it was 2.4%. In this regard, studying tourism's role in Azerbaijan's modern economy is vital. The increase in health-related travel has led to the growth of the hotel market. Another industry that has benefited from tourism is air travel. With the digitalization of the travel industry, many travelers now use the services of online travel agencies to book their trips. The leaders in the online travel market are Booking Group and Expedia Group. These two companies occupy first and second place with revenues of USD 6.8 billion and USD 5.2 billion, respectively 2020.

In 2022, the number of tourists and participants in tourism organized by travel agencies and tour operators from Moldova recorded 477.2 thousand people, 48.7% more than in 2021. The largest share is for outbound and domestic tourism (68.0% and 25.9%) (Figure 1); the lowest share is inbound tourism - 6.1% (Tourism, 2023). The dynamics of this type of tourism are reflected in Figure 2.

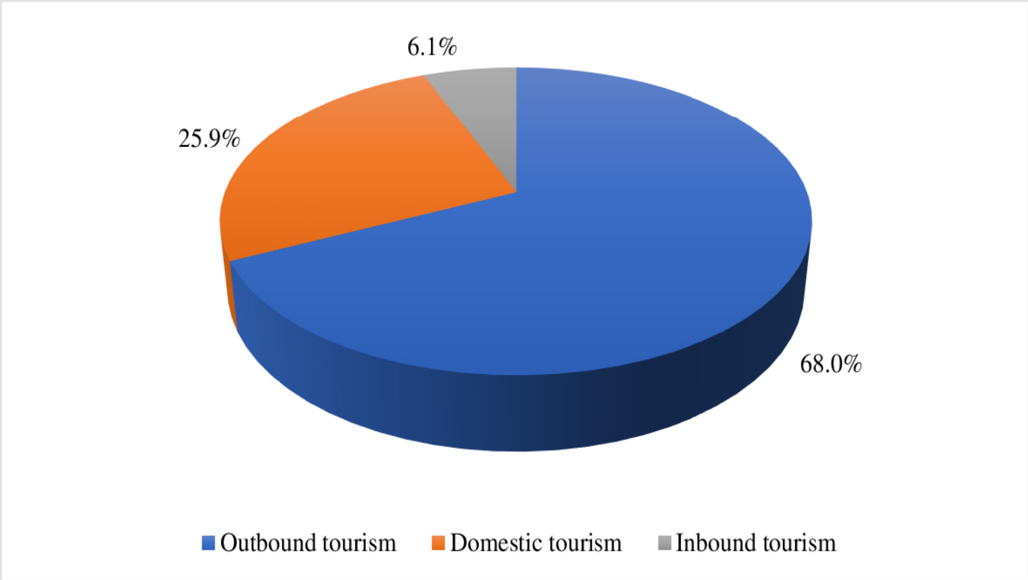

Fig. 1. Tourism structure (number of tourists) by types of tourism in Moldova, 2022 (%)

Source: *Elaborated using data (Tourism, 2023)*

According to the State Statistics Committee data, inbound tourism accounted for 53.5% of Azerbaijan's total in 2022, while domestic tourism accounted for 46.5%, which is 7% less than in 2021 (Samadov (www.anarsamadov.net), n.d.). This is evidence that the tourism sector tends to increase inbound tourism.

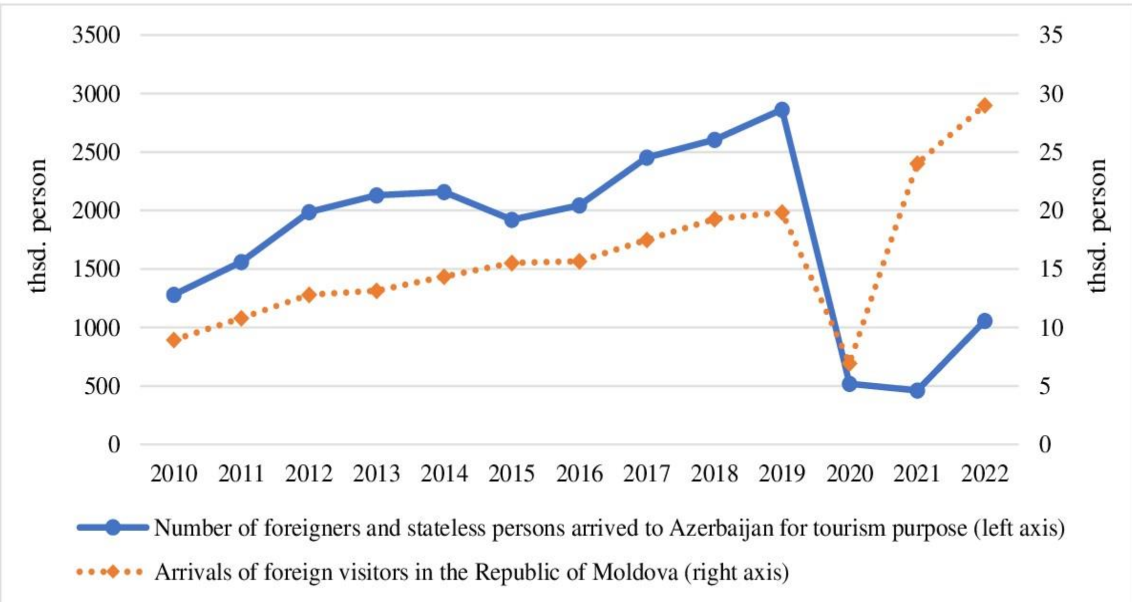

Figure 2. Arrivals of foreign visitors in Azerbaijan and Moldova

Source: *Elaborated using data (Tourism, 2023) and (Samadov (www.anarsamadov.net), n.d.)*

The data in Figure 2 shows that the pandemic has sharply reduced the number of tourists visiting both countries. The 2022 data is more than the 2020-2021 data, but for Azerbaijan, it is less than the 2010-2019 data. To achieve sustainable tourism, management, marketing, promotion, product development, and capacity building must be fully integrated with ethical and responsible approaches and must meet the requirements of the current global situation.

The legal framework for the tourism sector in Azerbaijan was formed on June 27, 1999, when the Law "On Tourism" was adopted. This law defined the foundations of state policy and aimed at defining the principles of using tourism resources to ensure the effective socio-economic development of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Based on this and considering the country's great potential, many local and international companies and organizations have focused on new projects and programs to promote Azerbaijan as a tourism brand.

In 2001, Azerbaijan was admitted to the membership (UN-WTO), which was the first stage of Azerbaijan's entry into the world tourism arena. Membership in the UN WTO has been important for promoting Azerbaijan as a major tourist destination. In 2002, with the participation of international tourism companies and the support of the UN WTO, the first international tourism exhibition called "Azerbaijan International Travel and Tourism Fair" (AITF) was organized, becoming the region's most prominent tourism exhibition. In light of the AITF, industry professionals participate in this event every year and find new partners and clients.

To activate the process of developing the tourism sector in the formalization of state budgets and stabilization of the trade balance for 2010-2014, a new State Program was developed and adopted in Azerbaijan. According to the state strategy, the volume of investments in the tourism industry has increased significantly; in 2014, the increase was 38%. Accordingly, the number of tourists has increased. According to the State Statistics Committee, tourist flows to the country expanded rapidly. In 2018, 2.605 million foreign tourists visited Azerbaijan, 23% more than in 2016. Increasing the flow of tourists, indicating the activation of this sector, simultaneously brought to the fore the problems associated with the proper organization and management of tourism infrastructure. To adequately receive many tourists, the country's government reformed the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and created the State Tourism Agency. These measures were necessary legislative and executive steps to change Azerbaijan's tourism policy. The state program served as the basis for implementing the new state policy in the field of tourism.

In 30 years, the Moldovan tourism industry has gone from an undervalued activity to an effective sector promoting Moldovan culture. The Government of the Republic of Moldova has approved the National Tourism Development Program "Tourism 2026" for 2022-2026 (Particip.gov.md, 2022), which aims ***to develop the tourism sector as competitive, sustainable, and resilient*** to challenges caused by external factors.

As a result of promoting the State Complex Program on Tourism, 2011 was declared the "Year of Tourism." Major international events were held, particularly the 10th Azerbaijan International Tourism and Travel Exhibition (AITF-2011) and the Eurovision Song Contest. These events increased the number of tourists.

On September 10, 2015, the Decree of the Closed Joint-Stock Company "Shahdag Tourism Center" was issued in Azerbaijan. Shahdag is a mountain of 4243 m in the northeast of Azerbaijan in the Guba-Gusar region. It is located in the Greater Caucasus in Azerbaijan next to the Shahdag National Park, which has excellent natural conditions for winter tourism. After the decree, new infrastructure was built in the region - 3 tourist hotels with a capacity of 500 people, seven cableways with more than 6,000 m length, and 11 ski areas with a length of 13,000 m of tracks. On November 29, 2016, the "ASAN Visa" system was approved, so foreigners could obtain an electronic visa by entering their data in the electronic application form posted in this system. This system is a fundamentally new introduction to tourism policy.

Developing the "ASAN Visa" system has become one of the most significant steps in developing Azerbaijan's tourism policy. Such simplification of the visa regime has caused an increase in the number of tourists from this region. In addition, tourists from Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan could visit Azerbaijan without a visa for up to 90 days. Applying the visa regime to many countries limits the flow of tourists from various destinations.

On September 21, 2018, the "Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on ensuring the activities of the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan" was issued. This agency is responsible for measures on administration and management in the field of tourism. The main areas of activity of the agency are participation in the formation of state policy in the relevant area, ensuring the implementation of this policy, and preparing targeted programs for developing inbound and domestic tourism in the Republic of Azerbaijan. This agency's essential task is to take appropriate measures to attract investment in the country's tourism infrastructure and industry.

As we can see, the income of Azerbaijani tour operators in 2022 compared to 2020 increased by 3.3 times, which is evidence that the income in 2022 is 10 million manat less than in 2019 (Figure 3). It should be emphasized that the capital, Baku, ranks first among all the regions of the country's tourism sector. It leads to the number of hotels and their capacity. Being the most developed economic region, the capital factor and its location on all major transport routes of the country make Baku, in terms of tourism infrastructure, the most developed region of Azerbaijan. In 2018, 955,105 tourists were accommodated in Baku hotels, which is 77% of the total number of tourists accommodated in hotels throughout Azerbaijan, indicating insufficient use of regional infrastructure.

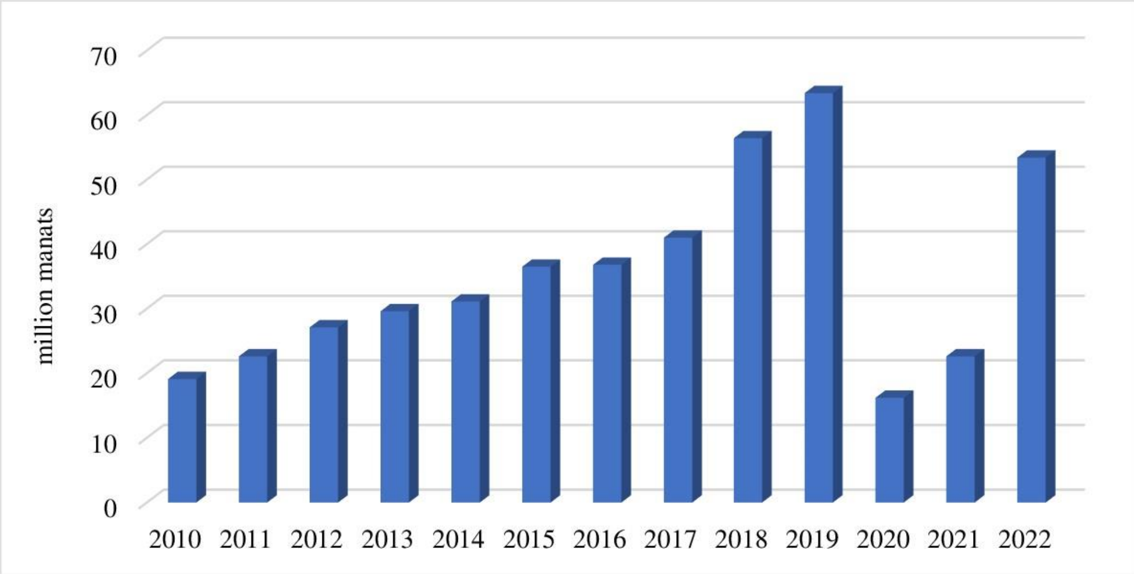

Fig. 3. Gross income of travel agencies and tour operators in Azerbaijan, million manat

Source: *Elaborated using data (Samadov (www.anarsamadov.net), n.d.)*

As a result, tourists mainly visit Baku and stay there, which also has a negative factor because the city itself suffers from "over-tourism." In recent years, domestic tourism has begun to develop actively. Due to the coronavirus epidemic, domestic tourism in Azerbaijan decreased by 2.5 times in the first half of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. The number of domestic tourists who traveled in January-June 2020 decreased significantly and amounted to 841.1 thousand people; in 2019, the figure was 2 million 97 thousand people. Such a significant decrease in domestic tourism was due to the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions on movement in the country's regions. During the same period of 2020, tourist spending decreased by 2.7 times - to 532.8 million manats. The bulk of expenses (25.2%) were spent on purchasing various goods – 134 million manats (a 2.8-fold decline), transportation costs – 100 million manats (a 2.6-fold decline), and food – 108.7 million (a 2.6-fold decline).

The dynamics of hotel revenues show that the peak was in 2019, while the pandemic has sharply reduced the profitability of the tourism sector in both Azerbaijan and Moldova. A comparative analysis of 2022 compared to 2020 shows that hotel revenues have increased by three times in Azerbaijan, but at the same time, they have not reached the peak of 2019. We can also observe an increase in the length of stay of tourists, which is also a positive trend for the subsequent prosperity of tourism in our countries.

Until 2019, the number of hotel nights in Azerbaijan and Moldova had been trending upward (Figure 4). In 2020, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the given indicator decreased considerably in both countries. In 2022, Moldova restored the level before the pandemic, but Azerbaijan still did not reach the level of 2019.

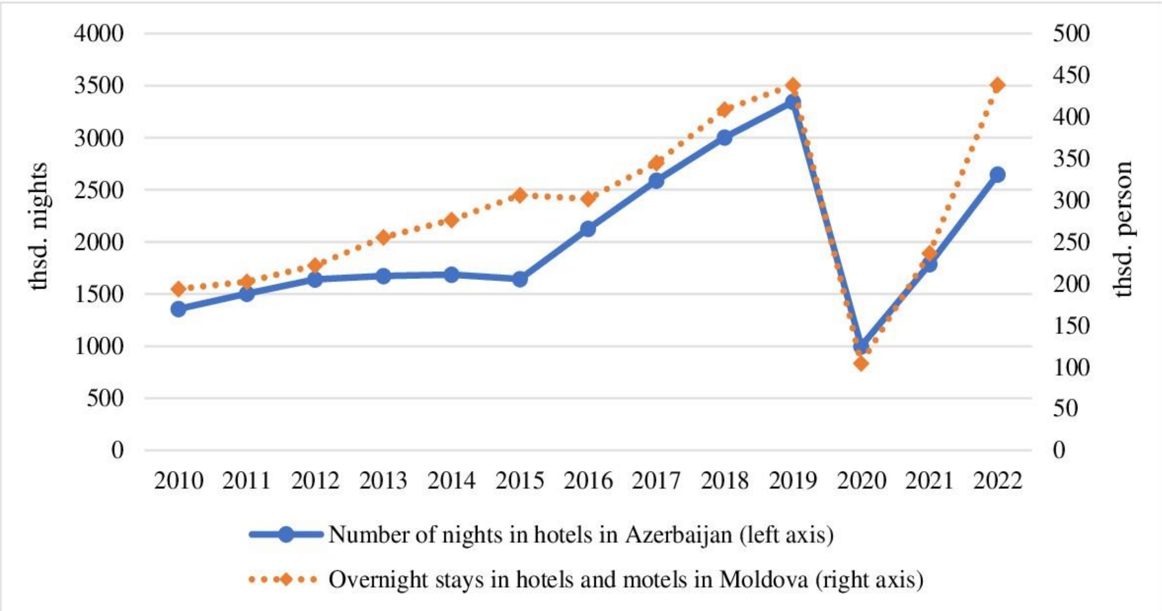

Figure 4. Number of nights in hotels in Azerbaijan and Moldova

Source: *Elaborated using data (Tourism, 2023) and (Samadov (www.anarsamadov.net), n.d.)*

Wine tours are popular in both Azerbaijan and Moldova. The best gastronomic and wine tours in Azerbaijan are Yasıl Bazar Green Market, Yasıl Bazar Green Market, Vedra Bazaar, Vedra Bazaar, etc. The most popular in Moldova are underground wineries "Cricova" and "Milestii Mici." In 2005, "Milestii Mici" was registered in the Guinness Book of Records, which has the world's most extensive collection of wines, approx. 1.5 million wine bottles (Guinness World Records, 2005). In the fall of 2024, the Republic of Moldova will host 22 member states of the "ITER VITIS" Federation and representatives of the Council of Europe.

On October 17-19, 2024, the General Assembly of "ITER VITIS - Les Chemins de la vigne," which integrates the wine heritage of the member countries, will take place in Moldova.

The type of tourism that has not yet been developed in Moldova is medical tourism (Gutium and Gojaeva, 2023), although the healing properties of grapes and honey have been known since ancient times.

An analysis of the situation in the tourism sector in Azerbaijan shows that the shortcomings in the existing strategies and developments are:

- Concentration on tourist structures, mainly in Baku.
- Low quality of services and infrastructure.
- Deficit of tourism infrastructure in the regions of the country.
- High prices for air tickets.
- Lack of differentiation and a structured system for classifying hotels.
- Visa regimes to many countries.

Azerbaijan's participation in many mega-projects, in addition to great opportunities in trade and transport, will increase the influx of tourists into the country, attract investment in the tourism industry, and promote the development of tourism entrepreneurship.

Disadvantages faced by tourism in Moldova:

- Insufficiently developed infrastructure.
- Restricted air messages. Although many tourists say Chisinau airport is very cozy and beautiful, there are few direct flights to other countries.
- Compared to countries where tourism is developed, Moldova has a low-quality service.
- Limited range of entertainment for active recreation.
- Political instability is the neighborhood with countries where military actions are introduced.

For the stable development of tourism in Moldova and Azerbaijan, the following strategic steps must be taken:

- The development of infrastructure starts with the rural environment.
- In the era of digitization, tourism needs digitalization.
- Invest in the tourism sector.
- Further development of domestic tourism.
- Improvement of service quality.
- Promotion of the country at the international level.

But still, despite this, speaking about the great tourist potential of Azerbaijan and Moldova, it is important to note that there are many ways to achieve this goal. It is necessary to find non-standard approaches to attracting tourists. It would be great if, following this logic, the regions that we know as the most attractive for tourists developed "their own brand", by which they would be recognized outside the country. As examples, the regions of Azerbaijan that are attractive for their specificity. For example, the tradition of holding regional events, such as the Pomegranate Festival in Goychay, the Apple Festival in Guba, the Jam Festival in Gabala, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic has impacted tourism internationally, forcing policymakers to rethink innovation in sustainable development strategies. The pandemic has damaged stock markets and fueled inflation. It has also impacted social assistance programs. Scholars involved in travel and tourism research typically focus on the influence of perceived socio-economic and cultural factors and their impact on the population of a destination. The coronavirus outbreak has impacted tourism and travel, leading to a decline in global travel in mid-March 2020. The coronavirus epidemic has made travel and tourism one of the hardest-hit sectors worldwide, with countries suspending all domestic and international flights. Travel bans existed in almost all countries, and tourist destinations worldwide were closed. Many airlines almost went bankrupt due to flight cancellations. Shipping was severely affected worldwide, and rail services to most destinations were also suspended. Thus, amid fears about the disease, an unimaginable threat has emerged for the tourism industry worldwide. The outbreak has resulted in the tourism industry losing revenue. This has sent shock waves through the entire global economy.

In addition, an intensive short-term increase in the number of tourists can lead to high tourism density and may exceed this sector's capacity. Rapid tourism growth can have a negative impact on tourist destinations, complicate the lives of citizens, and reduce the quality of visitors' experiences.

Azerbaijan and Moldova are rich in nature, flora and fauna, ancient architecture, unique national culture, national cuisine, ancient monuments. Therefore, tourism is a source of both direct and indirect state income, stimulates the development of various industries not directly related to tourism infrastructure, but due to the multiplier effect.

Thus, the legislative framework and the measures taken at the present stage create favorable conditions for the development of tourism in Azerbaijan and Moldova. This sector is becoming an important factor contributing to the creation of additional jobs, accelerated development of road and hotel construction, stimulation of the production of all types of vehicles and the promotion of the national culture of the country.

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DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES IN LODGING FACILITIES: A CASE STUDY IN HOTELS IN THE CITY OF JOÃO PESSOA - PB

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ABSTRACT: *In the hotel industry, the use of technological resources and digital strategies is crucial to customize services, build customer loyalty, and strengthen the company's authority. This study aimed to identify the digital marketing strategies applied in hotels in João Pessoa, PB, to promote the enterprises and improve customer communication. The selection of hotels with over 80 hotel units (HU) and located on the waterfront of João Pessoa was based on two main reasons: first, these hotels generally have a more robust infrastructure and are better placed to implement and test advanced digital strategies and, second, the waterfront of João Pessoa is an area with great tourist potential, which makes it a strategic location for evaluating the effectiveness of digital strategies in a context of strong demand and visibility. The research was carried out as a descriptive and qualitative case study, with questionnaires and interviews done with the management and marketing experts of these hotels, registered with Cadastur (Registry of Tourist Service Providers). This study provides an up-to-date review of digital strategies in an underexplored sector, potentially leading to improved marketing practices in Paraíba. Hotels in João Pessoa are adjusting to digital demands by utilizing social media and digital marketing methods to stay competitive and achieve maximum outcomes. Consistent internet presence and strategic planning are vital components.*

KEYWORDS: *Strategies. Digital marketing. Hospitality. João Pessoa.*

INTRODUCTION

The internet has contributed to the growth of enterprises focused on new e-commerce models, creating new ways to communicate with potential customers, and connecting people who share similar interests. In the hotel industry, the use of technological resources and digital marketing strategies aims to personalize products, attract and build customer loyalty, increasing the company's authority in the market, and generating competitiveness.

According to Torres (2010), digital marketing improves communication, trust, and consumer purchase decisions. Therefore, for hotels, it is crucial to adopt digital strategies to align their marketing plans with market demands. In this context, this study aimed to identify

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the digital marketing strategies used by hotels in João Pessoa, PB to promote the enterprises and improve customer communications. The relevance of this research lies in the need to assess the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in the hotel industry in João Pessoa, as these aim to promote the enterprises, develop customer relationships, and strengthen the company's position in the digital environment.

Digital Marketing: a general overview

Marketing has evolved over the years to meet the changing needs of society. According to Kotler and Keller (2018), selecting target markets is the art and science of acquiring, retaining, and multiplying customers by providing greater value.

Digital marketing emerges in parallel with the transition of communication and interaction relation to digital media. Torres (2010) defines it as a combination of web-based tactics for adapting to new consumer behavior.

Azevedo and Ferreira Júnior (2015) define it as a way of promoting products and services, establishing dynamic communication with customers, and evaluating immediate responses. Understanding digital marketing is critical for brand growth, ensuring the organization's longevity and dynamism in the digital marketing environment. Torres (2010) proposes seven strategic actions for digital marketing, including Content Marketing, which involves creating relevant content to engage customers; Social Media, which focuses on promotion and interaction on digital platforms; Viral Marketing, which refers to content that spreads quickly; Email Marketing, which uses personalized messages to engage leads; Online Advertising, with targeted digital ads; and Online Research and Monitoring, which focus on analyzing and adjusting marketing metrics.

Digital Marketing and Digital Strategies Applied to Lodging Facilities

Digital marketing is essential in the hotel industry for driving direct sales, focusing on defining personas and market segmentation. By combining multiple digital tools with marketing strategies, hotels may adapt to changes in customer behavior, enhancing proximity and sales of hotel services. Solid planning is essential to increase the hotel's attractiveness and sales.

According to Agostini (2022), the main digital marketing strategies for lodging facilities include: social media, which involves promotion and interaction on digital platforms; internet ads, which focus on paid advertising for audience segmentation; SEO (Search Engine

Optimization), which aims to improve search engine positioning; and hotel E-mail Marketing, which employs targeted e-mails to promote offerings; Videos and YouTube, devoted to developing audiovisual content to engage the public; Google Analytics analyzes website performance; Google My Business which manages business presence on Google; Content Marketing generates relevant content to attract and engage customers; and Hotel Inbound Marketing seeks to attract and convert consumers through personalized content and experiences.

Applying these strategies may produce effective outcomes, thus it is vital to plan and define the fundamentals and strategies that best apply to the hotel positioning.

Hotels in João Pessoa - PB /Hospitality in João Pessoa – PB

João Pessoa's hotel growth began in the 20th century with the Luso-Brasileiro Hotel, Parahyba Hotel, and Hotel Globo in the central region. Hotels concentrated on the city's coastline starting in the 1980s, and are currently operated by large hotel chains (Vanzella and Brambilla, 2022).

Almeida, Brambilla, and Vanzella (2016), highlight three events that represent the current hotel phase in the capital: the emergence of hotels on the waterfront, the focus on sustainability, such as the Hotel Verdegreen, and the development of three and four-star hotels in the Tambaú neighborhood, following the Brazilian System of Classification of Lodging Facilities - SBClass.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive and qualitative approach to assess digital marketing strategies applied by hotels along João Pessoa's coastline. Data was collected using surveys and interviews with hotel marketing managers. The questionnaires were distributed via email and, when possible, completed in person. Interviews were performed either in person or remotely. The hotels were selected based on their registration with Cadastur, prioritizing those with more than 80 rooms because they often have a more solid infrastructure and are better positioned to deploy and execute sophisticated digital strategies. In February 2023, 27 hotels were identified on the João Pessoa waterfront, of which 12 met the research criteria. The selection of waterfront hotels was based on two main reasons: first, the concentration of these hotels in an area with great tourist potential allows for a more significant evaluation of digital strategies in a context of high demand and visibility. Second, hotels with more than 80 rooms are more prepared to deploy and evaluate advanced digital marketing strategies.

Analysis and discussion of results

To maintain the confidentiality of the respondents and to avoid identifying the hotels, we chose to use letters to name the hotels which were renamed N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, Y and Z. Of the twelve hotels listed in Table 1, eight agreed to take part in the research. As a result, the hotels named N, O, P, and Q were not included in this analysis.

TABLE 1 - Lodging facilities registered with Cadastur

Bairro	**Hotel**	**Number of Hotel Units**
Cabo Branco	Nord Luxxor Cabo Branco	123
	Ba'ra Hotel	123
	Atlântico Cabo Branco	96
	Ibis Cabo Branco	101
	Littoral Hotel	108
	Netuanah Praia Hotel	82
Tambaú	Atlântico Praia Hotel	84
	Nord Luxxor Sapucaia	83
	Laguna Praia Hotel	85
	Nobile Suítes Tambaú	147
Manaíra	Hardman Praia Hotel	136
	Verde Green Hotel	138

Source: Research data, 2023.

Hotels R, V, W, and Z all have an active marketing department, with two employees working in each hotel, performing similar responsibilities in the application and promotion of digital marketing. On the other hand, hotels T, U, and Y have only one employee in the marketing department. Hotel T focuses on content management for digital media, Hotel U works in collaboration with the commercial department, and Hotel Y does not specify its team. Hotel S outsources its entire marketing department to an agency, with a team of nine people specializing in various areas such as creativity, performance, market intelligence, and social media. Hotels T and U also use outsourced marketing services as necessary.

In this way, process management can be carried out in-house or outsourcing, and each approach has distinct characteristics that impact on operation and efficiency. In-house management refers to direct control and internal responsibility over activities, allowing for greater supervision and potentially lower costs, but requires a significant investment of time and internal resources. In contrast, outsourcing involves delegating functions to specialized third parties, which can offer access to external expertise and reduce internal workload but can result in higher costs and less control over the process. The choice between these approaches should consider factors such as desired control, costs, and available resources.

When asked about digital marketing and its importance for the hotel industry, the interviewees from hotels R, T, and Z stressed that digital marketing is important because it improves the company's positioning in the market, as well as increasing the hotel's reach and visibility by reaching a larger audience than would be possible with traditional marketing strategies. The respondent from Hotel S considered that digital marketing includes strategic measures targeted at promoting the hotel through online campaigns. Respondents from hotels V, W, and Y emphasized how digital marketing improves customer relations. All the interviewees stressed the importance of using digital marketing in the hotel industry to increase hotel revenue.

Regarding conducting research to identify the profile of hospitality consumers, the hotels stress the importance of conducting market research to diagnose the sector, allowing them to identify opportunities and threats in the market.

The study examined the digital marketing strategies adopted by lodging facilities, using the research by Torres (2010) and Agostini (2022) as a reference. Table 2 below details the specific strategies applied by the hotels.

According to Table 2, all the responding lodging facilities use digital marketing strategies such as Social Media, Hotel Email Marketing, Google Analytics, Google My Business, Content Marketing, and Monitoring Strategies. Azevedo and Ferreira Júnior (2015) highlight the importance of digital marketing for dynamic communication with customers, while Torres (2010) suggests strategic actions such as Content Marketing, Social Media, and Email Marketing. These strategies aim to engage customers and analyze metrics, and the choice between in-house or outsourced management may influence the effectiveness and results of implementing these actions.

TABLE 2 – Digital Marketing Strategies for the Hotel Industry R, S, T, U, V, W, Y, Z.

Digital Marketing Strategies	Hotel R	Hotel S	Hotel T	Hotel U	Hotel V	Hotel W	Hotel Y	Hotel Z
Social Media	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Online ads		x	x	x	x	x	x	
SEO		x		x		x		x
Hotel Email marketing	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Videos and YouTube	x	x		x	x	x		
Google analytics	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Google my business	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Content Marketing	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Inbound Hospitality Marketing		x		x		x		x
Viral Marketing				x		x		
Online advertising	x	x		x	x	x		
Online Research		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Monitoring Strategies	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Source: Research data, 2023.

For the interviewees, these strategies are the most effective for the hotel market, as they increase the hotel revenue, can be implemented in a simplified way and at a low financial investment cost, as well as having lasting effects on the permanence of the enterprise in the market and consequently bringing the company closer to the customer.

The Internet advertising and Online Search strategies are applied by six hotels - S, T, U, V, W and Y - representing 75% of the lodging facilities interviewed. As these are strategies that require greater investment, they are still very much present in the hotels that took part in the research.

The strategies of Videos and YouTube and Online Advertising, as shown in Table 1, are used by the following hotels: R, S, U, V, and W. According to the interviewee from Hotel R, the Videos and YouTube strategy "makes it possible to show the hotel in the most real way possible, by creating and publishing videos on digital platforms such as YouTube, bringing the service closer to the consumer".

TABLE 3 – Digital Media used by hotels R, S, T, U, V, W, Y e Z, and Update Frequency.

Hotel	Social Media	Update Frequency
R	Instagram, Facebook, Linkedin, Youtube	Not specified
S	Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube, Tik Tok	3 times a week.
T	Instagram, Facebook, Linkedin, Whatsapp	2 to 5 posts per week, and a social media platform with stories.
U	Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, Youtube	Weekly
V	Instagram, Facebook, Linkedin, Youtube	Not specified
W	Instagram, Facebook, Linkedin, Blog, Youtube	Not specified
Y	Instagram, Facebook, Blog	Not specified
Z	Instagram, Facebook	Not specified

Source: Questionnaire from field research, 2023

Looking at the social media used by the hotels participating in the survey in Table 3, all 8 hotels use the digital tools of the social media platforms Instagram and Facebook. According to Cardoso Júnior (2020), social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram allow companies to create their profiles and promote their services using promotional resources. Engagement on the social media platforms can vary according to the investment power of each company, as well as making it possible to apply personalized marketing.

TABLE 4 – Planning a Digital Marketing Budget for Hotels.

Hotel	**Budget**	**Planning**
R	Variable	Based on seasonality, tourist occupancy, and holidays.
S	Fixed	It's allocated 3% of the previous year's profits.
T	Fixed	4% per year. and it is reset each year based on the previous year's outcome.
U	Fixed	Between 2 and 4% of the annual profits.
V	Variable	The monthly investment value varies according to the profits obtained in the previous months.
W	Variable	Strategic and meticulous, taking into account various factors: company objectives, target audience profile, market trends, and results achieved in previous campaigns.
Y	Variable	It depends on the goal of the campaign.
Z	Variable	Planning is conducted based on demand and scheduled campaigns; therefore, the budget is variable and subject to change as needed.

Source: Research data, 2023.

About the budget to be invested in digital marketing (fixed or variable), hotels R, V, W, Y, and Z have a variable budget, which is planned according to the profits made in previous campaigns and changes according to the needs of the campaign. The interviewee from Hotel R says that the budget is always planned in advance. The interviewee from Hotel W says that planning is "done strategically and carefully, taking into account various factors such as the company's objectives, the profile of the target audience, market trends, and the results obtained in previous campaigns". The variable budget allows companies to allocate additional resources at times of high demand or market opportunities.

Hotels S, T, and U use a fixed annual budget. Hotel S's budget is equivalent to 3% of the previous year's profits. Hotel T's budget is fixed at 4% per year and is renewed according to the previous year's profits. And finally, Hotel U's fixed budget planning is between 2 and 4% of annual profits. The fixed budget in digital marketing plays a fundamental role in the management and planning of a company's marketing activities. By having a defined amount, the hotel can prioritize the strategies that best align with the business objectives, optimizing the use of available resources. This allows for an efficient allocation of funds, ensuring that investment is directed towards the marketing initiatives that will bring the best results for the company. In this way, the fixed digital marketing budget plays a strategic role in maximizing return on investment and achieving business objectives.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study examined digital marketing strategies used by hotels in João Pessoa, highlighting the significance of responding to digital demands to remain competitive in the hotel industry According to the findings, an active presence on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook plays a crucial role in customer visibility and engagement, reflecting the hotel's capacity to respond to changes in consumers' digital behavior. Diversifying the strategies used, such as content marketing and analytics analysis, helps to optimize campaigns and gain a better understanding of customer preferences and behaviors

Despite the gains identified, the study reveals that there remains a need for further investigation into the effects of digital marketing in the hotel business. Future research should look into how different digital methods affect hotel performance and what best practices exist for tailoring these strategies to the individual demands of each establishment. Longitudinal and comparative studies can provide additional insights into the evolution of digital marketing practices and their long-term impact. This approach will allow hotels to adapt more effectively to emerging trends and strengthen their competitive position in the market.

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A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS: A STUDY OF THE GREEN MARKETING ACTIONS OF THE VERDE GREEN HOTEL IN JOÃO PESSOA-PB, BRAZIL.

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ABSTRACT: *The study analyzes the green marketing actions of Verde Green Hotel, located in João Pessoa-PB, to understand how these practices are communicated through Instagram. Growing environmental awareness has led companies to adopt green marketing strategies, seeking to combine environmental preservation and competitiveness. Using a descriptive-exploratory approach, this study examines seven posts on the hotel's profile promoting sustainable practices, such as using metal straws, selective waste collection, its own vegetable garden, composting, and bicycle rental. The results demonstrate how well the hotel uses Instagram to communicate sustainable practices, engaging its followers and reinforcing its image as an environmentally conscious brand. In addition, these initiatives help to differentiate the experience for guests, such as offering fresh ingredients grown on-site. Bicycle rental and composting are also examples of initiatives to reduce environmental impact. The findings of this study indicate that the hotel's sustainable practices not only strengthen its image in the hotel industry but also contribute to educating consumers about environmental issues and encouraging more responsible behavior. The study proposes that Verde Green Hotel serves as a model for other companies seeking to integrate sustainable practices into their operations, promoting awareness and transforming society to preserve the environment. For future research, a quantitative analysis of consumer perception of these actions is suggested.*

***KEYWORDS**: Green marketing. Hospitality. Instagram. João Pessoa/PB.*

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of marketing over the century can be attributed to a succession of changes in the social, economic, and technological spheres, which have significantly impacted its practices and theories. Marketing is a set of processes that creates, communicates, and delivers value to consumers, companies, and society (American Marketing Association, 2017)

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Over time, marketing has increasingly kept pace with current movements and consumer demands, and, in this sense, sustainability-oriented marketing represents a business strategy that has emerged in response to growing awareness of the significant environmental impacts caused by human activities (Kotler and Kotler, 2022). Referred to as green marketing, it seeks to reconcile the preservation of the environment, improving quality of life and sustaining the economic system, promoting the profitability of organizations by minimizing or eliminating the adverse environmental impacts resulting from their operations, giving them greater competitiveness in the market (Lemos and Santos, 2021).

As one of the world's fastest-growing industries, and because it is directly related to the environment, understanding the fundamental role that marketing plays in the tourism sector means strengthening the identity of destinations, managing public perception and fostering local development (Moretti et al., 2018), which calls for tourism marketing strategies applied to the environment, namely green marketing, which involves environmentally beneficial practices that reduce impacts on nature throughout the product life cycle, from obtaining raw materials to after-sales service (Dias, 2019).

Green marketing represents a business strategy that has emerged in response to the growing awareness of the significant environmental impacts caused by human activities, seeking to reconcile the preservation of the environment, the improvement of quality of life, and the sustainability of the economic system, promoting the profitability of organizations by minimizing or eliminating the adverse environmental impacts resulting from their operations, giving them greater competitiveness in the market (Lemos and Santos, 2021). This means adopting environmentally beneficial practices that reduce impacts on nature throughout the product's life cycle, from obtaining raw materials to after-sales service.

With this in mind, the general aim of this study was to analyze the green marketing strategies adopted by the Verde Green Hotel in the city of João Pessoa-PB, through its Instagram, given the growing interest in sustainable practices on the part of tourist demand.

It should be noted that green marketing allows accommodation establishments to stand out in the market, emerging as a vital strategy for companies wishing to stand out in a competitive and sustainable scenario. Therefore, the question that guided this study was: how does Verde Green Hotel use green marketing strategies on its Instagram profile?

The Verde Green Hotel was chosen because it is the main lodging establishment operating in the sustainability segment in the city of João Pessoa-PB, in the northeastern region of Brazil, and because the municipality is experiencing a growing tourist flow that is accompanied by environmental impacts, demonstrating the need for the hotel sector in the city to adopt sustainable practices, since the integration of green marketing in tourism is not only a response to consumer expectations but also a necessity for the long-term sustainability of the sector.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive-exploratory approach, a type of study often used in practical research carried out in companies and other organizations, as highlighted by Gil (2002). The descriptive-exploratory nature is appropriate for understanding and analyzing social and organizational phenomena in depth, allowing the researcher to describe existing practices and explore new areas of knowledge.

The data for this research was collected from the Instagram profile of the Verde Green Hotel located in João Pessoa/PB. Instagram was chosen because it is a platform widely used by hotels to advertise their services and because it contains data in the public domain.

In this sense, posts were selected that show green marketing actions, i.e. practices aimed at promoting environmental sustainability and social responsibility. The posts analyzed are in the "highlights" of the hotel's profile, which are a collection of stories, highlighted by the establishment to remain visible to followers indefinitely.

These highlights represent the main strategies and initiatives that the hotel wishes to emphasize as part of its sustainable marketing communication. The posts were analyzed to identify the main green marketing practices used by the hotel and to understand how these practices are communicated to the public through social media. In this way, 7 posts highlighting sustainability on Verde Green's profile were analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Green marketing actions have become increasingly necessary in the strategic context of companies. To this end, measures such as encouraging the adoption of metal straws and selective waste collection are effective ways of building sustainable actions. In this context, the Verde Green Hotel has adopted practices to encourage these actions on its Instagram profile, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. The use of straws

Source: Verde Green (2024)

Figure 2. The importance of selective waste collection

Source: Verde Green (2024)

Figures 1 and 2, show the Verde Green Hotel's actions towards sustainability, highlighting the brand's concern with waste separation and the use of straws within its establishment. Both posts are inviting, making the establishment's followers feel engaged and motivated to adopt sustainable practices in their daily lives. In addition, the posts reinforce its positive image as an environmentally conscious brand, attracting customers who value sustainability.

In addition to the selective collection and the use of metal straws, the establishment also has a vegetable garden on its premises, which can be seen in both Figure 3 and Figure 4.

Figure 3. Vegetable garden within the hotel premises

Source: Verde Green (2024)

Figure 4. View of the vegetable garden

Source: Verde Green (2024)

Both figures reflect the venue's commitment to environmentally responsible practices, promoting a direct connection between cultivation and the customers' gastronomic experience. This highlights the hotel's concern with actions such as preparing dishes using on-site-grown ingredients and ensuring greater control over the quality and sustainability of products offered to customers.

In addition, the hotel has a composting system (see Figure 5) where leftover food is decomposed to reduce waste. On the other hand, figure 6 shows the hotel's efforts to promote the use of sustainable transportation.

Figure 5. Composting system

Source: Verde Green (2024).

Figure 6. Bicycles rental

Source: Verde Green (2024).

The composting system aims to reduce the impact of the waste generated in the hotel's operation and is characterized as another green marketing action. Another relevant action is that the hotel has bicycles for rent during guests' stay, allowing them to use them as a means of transportation to reduce the gases generated by cars.

Another of the hotel's actions is the disposal of cooking oil, which is done separately (see Figure 7) and transformed into soap or detergent by other sustainable companies.

Figure 7. Disposal of cooking oil

Source: Verde Green (2024)

One of the company's strategies is to separate the cooking oil from the other items that go to waste. This oil is separated by the staff into a gallon and sent to third-party companies to turn it into soap and detergent. This is an assertive strategy, as it demonstrates the hotel's concern about contamination, as shown in Figure 7 this oil can contaminate up to 25,000 liters of water.

The findings of this study show the significant role of true marketing actions carried out by the hotel, which may interfere with the traveler's purchasing decision process. Thus, through Instagram, the Verde Green Hotel demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainability by adopting environmentally friendly practices that are communicated to its followers.

As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, with simple actions such as selective collection and the use of metal straws, the hotel has instituted green marketing practices. In this sense, green marketing actions are also part of the context of social marketing, as they seek to improve society today and for future generations (Lemos and Santos, 2021).

Figures 3 and 4 increasingly reinforce the hotel's concern with the customer experience, since the establishment can bring fresh, locally grown ingredients, promoting a commitment to sustainability. This sustainability is a commitment that companies make to the customer in their marketing actions because the sustainable customer is increasingly concerned about their well-being (Kotler and Kotler, 2022).

From this perspective, Figures 5, 6, and 7 show the composting system used to reduce the hotel's waste, bicycle rental, and the separation of cooking oil. All of these are green marketing actions aimed at improving and preserving the environment for future generations, reducing pollution, and reusing materials that would otherwise be discarded.

The hotel's marketing actions become effective, mainly by increasing its competitive advantage in the market by bringing sustainability into context. Verde Green's strategies can serve as a model for other hotels seeking to integrate sustainable actions into their operations. On the other hand, with these actions, Verde Green also makes its consumers aware of their environmental responsibility, promoting the formation of individuals who are more aware of and concerned about the environment.

CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of Verde Green Hotel's green marketing actions reveals a solid commitment to sustainability, which is communicated effectively through its social networks, especially Instagram. The adoption of practices such as selective collection, the use of metal straws, cultivating its own vegetable garden, the composting system, and the proper disposal of cooking oil demonstrates the hotel's focus on minimizing its environmental impact. These actions not only reinforce the positive brand image but also attract consumers who value ecologically responsible behavior.

The study also highlights that integrating these sustainable practices into its operations provides a differentiated experience for guests by offering fresh, locally grown ingredients, promoting customer well-being. In addition, bicycle rental encourages the use of non-polluting transportation, in line with the trend to reduce the emission of gases harmful to the environment.

It can be concluded that these initiatives increase the hotel's competitive advantage in the market, positioning it as an example of a company that integrates green practices into its strategy. In addition, Verde Green contributes to the environmental education of its consumers, encouraging them to adopt more sustainable behaviors daily. In short, the hotel not only promotes sustainability within its operations but also plays an important role in raising awareness and transforming society for the preservation of future generations. In this context, for further research, we recommend carrying out a quantitative survey with consumers, identifying their perception of these green marketing actions.

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THE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP REPRESENTS A PROMISING MODEL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT: *A review of global experience indicates that, at the present time, public-private partnerships (PPPs) represent a promising model for the development of transport systems. PPPs are one of the most effective mechanisms for addressing and improving the problems of infrastructure shortage in transport systems. PPPs allow the resources and experience of the public and private sectors to be combined for the creation and modernisation of vehicles.*

The article examines the PPP model as a mechanism and set of relationships that facilitate the transport sector's ability to attract private investment, thereby enhancing the quality of transport services provided. A review of global experience reveals that this model incorporates a multitude of innovative, investment and management mechanisms that can expedite the development of the transport system. Ultimately, these mechanisms result in the construction of a more modern and efficient transport infrastructure.

KEY WORDS: *public-private partnership (PPP), transport system, risks, optimization, investment.*

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that the transport system constitutes an autonomous economic sector and a pivotal instrument for attaining the objectives of social and foreign economic policy at the national level. It offers a multitude of prerequisites for the sustenance of contemporary society. The transport system as a whole provides the means of communication between different regions of the country, ensures international integration, facilitates trade and tourism development, and improves the standard of living of the population.

It is also widely acknowledged that the construction and upkeep of transport infrastructure necessitates substantial financial outlays. From this perspective, in the contemporary context, PPPs represent an effective mechanism for mobilising private investments in transport infrastructure. As a result of the implementation of PPP mechanisms, private companies contribute not only financial resources but also advanced technologies, innovations and management methods to the relevant field.

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A review of international experience reveals that the responsibility for the implementation of all tasks and obligations related to the construction and sustainable development of transport infrastructure cannot be borne solely by the state. Nevertheless, complete privatisation of the transport system is not a viable option in all instances, whether due to strategic, economic or ideological considerations. In light of the aforementioned considerations, PPPs have emerged as a pivotal instrument within the state's investment strategy. They are currently regarded as a promising avenue for the attraction of private investment into the transport system. A review of international experience reveals that a variety of PPP models and mechanisms are being adopted with increasing frequency in the transport sector. This is particularly evident in the construction of highways, large tunnels and bridges, and other intra-city transport infrastructure, which have emerged as the result of the successful implementation of unified transport infrastructure programmes under state control.

The most significant factor that renders the implementation of PPP mechanisms in the transport system a compelling proposition is the inadequacy of the financial resources allocated by the state to guarantee the construction of infrastructure that meets the requisite modern standards. Consequently, the aforementioned mechanisms represent the primary means of attracting private investment into the transport sector.

However, from the perspective of transportation system development, the state's interest in collaboration with private enterprises extends beyond the aforementioned considerations. To illustrate, the state addresses the following issues in addition to encouraging private enterprise involvement in the development and management of road infrastructure, which constitutes an essential component of the transport infrastructure (Maksimov V.V., 2011):

- enhancing the calibre of design and construction works, in addition to the provision of transport services;
- the state's ability to save budget funds is contingent upon the financing of operating costs incurred during the operation of these facilities by private companies. However, this must be done in a manner that preserves the state's ownership rights over the transport infrastructure facilities;
- reducing costs by optimising business processes, reducing the time taken to design and construct, and ensuring the involvement of advanced and innovative technologies.

It is evident that the initial phase of attracting private investment to the transport system and other areas necessitates substantial budgetary support. Consequently, an analysis of international experience demonstrates that it is exceedingly challenging to attract private capital to the implementation of large capital-intensive, long-term discounting transport infrastructure projects without financing from the state budget. It is important to note, however, that during the implementation of PPP projects, budget funds do not serve as the primary financial source. These funds are intended for the specific purpose of stimulating the flow of private investment into the transport system. In this regard, budget funds are mobilised during the implementation of PPP projects with the objective of ensuring the guarantee and reimbursement of the capital invested by the private business partner.

It can be argued that the implementation of PPP mechanisms within the transport system represents a significant factor in stimulating the construction, modernisation and sustainable development of transport infrastructure. This is achieved through the joint mobilisation of public and private sector resources, ensuring the interests of both partners are met, a proportional distribution of risks and the establishment of fair 'game rules'.

In light of the analysis of international experience and the distinctive characteristics of the transport sector, a definition can be proposed for the category of PPP in this field, specifically in relation to the implementation of transport infrastructure projects – *"A public-private partnership in the transport system is a legally formalised system of relations that ensures the equitable distribution of responsibilities and risks between the partners involved in joint investment projects in the transport sector".*

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the public-private partnership (PPP) model in transport system development. The methodology includes the following steps:

1. Literature Review: A review of academic and industry sources on PPPs in transport was conducted, focusing on successful models, challenges, and outcomes.

2. Comparative Analysis: A comparison of different PPP projects was done to identify patterns in structure, risk allocation, and effectiveness.

3. Data Collection and Validation: Data was collected from both secondary (literature, reports) and primary (interviews) sources, with cross-verification to ensure accuracy.

4. Limitations: Limited data availability for some projects and the focus on transport may affect the generalizability of findings.

This approach provides a structured analysis of PPPs in transport, highlighting both practical insights and challenges.

DISCUSSION

ADVANTAGES OF APPLYING PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP MECHANISMS IN THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM

The World Bank's 2022 report on the role of the private sector in the implementation of infrastructure projects indicates that the transport sector, while maintaining its leading position in this regard, significantly surpasses other sectors. As evidenced in the report, the private sector invested a total of 62.1 billion US dollars in 85 infrastructure projects within the transport system during the year 2022. This represents a significant proportion of the total private investments made in infrastructure projects during that same period, accounting for 68% of the total. Concurrently, this indicator represents the second highest level of investment over the past decade. The considerable rise in the proportion of private sector involvement in transport infrastructure projects can be attributed to the implementation of numerous large-scale road construction initiatives in China and India, financed through PPPs (Private Participation in Infrastructure (PPI) Acknowledgement & Disclaimer, n.d.).

In the context of constrained financial resources, addressing the challenge of renewal and modernisation of core infrastructure, including transport, is of paramount importance. The implementation of PPP mechanisms ensures the aforementioned problem is solved by allowing the innovation and investment base of specific transport projects that require significant investment at the global and regional levels to be ensured.

A review of global experience reveals that PPPs have become a crucial mechanism for developing transport systems, not only in developed Western countries but also in developing countries. The principal reason for this is that PPP mechanisms afford the following advantages with respect to the transport system: an enhancement in the quality of the provided transport services; an efficient and optimal distribution of financial resources allocated to the transport system in the state budget; the provision of transport services that may not be provided earlier; the application of innovative management methods in the transport sector; the assurance of financial transparency of transport projects; a reduction in the state budget deficit by the saving of state spending aimed at the transport sector. It is also important to note that the implementation of PPP models that are properly regulated ensures a balanced distribution of risks between the partners involved in the implementation of transport projects and the provision of various types of transport services (Minin M.V., 2012).

The implementation of the PPP model ensures the transfer of part of the functions of the state, which holds the majority of the assets and, as a rule, has a monopolistic position, to the private sector in projects implemented in the field of the transport infrastructure complex. The advent of competition has resulted in a contingent remuneration structure, whereby the remuneration for services rendered is contingent upon the quality of the service provided (Pankratov A.A., 2010).

The main advantages of the application of PPP mechanisms in the transport system from the state point of view are as follows (Minin M.V., 2012).

- The optimal distribution of risks and obligations between partners, along with the attraction of private investors within the principles of PPP;
- The effective utilisation of the knowledge, abilities and experience of the private partner in the delivery of transport services by state or local self-government bodies;
- Monitoring of the activity of a private partner involved in transport projects, including the forecasting and auditing of said activity;
- The potentiality for the state to transfer the rights to provide transport services to a private partner. The private partner is responsible for the construction, modernisation and reconstruction of the transport infrastructure object, which will become state property at the conclusion of the project implementation period. Furthermore, the private partner is required to operate the infrastructure for the duration of the project;
- The implementation of PPP has resulted in an increase in both taxes and GDP, which have subsequently been incorporated into the state budget.

The main advantages of the implementation of the PPP mechanism in the transport sector for business (private partner) are as follows (Minin M.V., 2012):

- Obtaining the right to implement long-term, minimum profitability transport projects with a state guarantee;
- Once all legal issues and contractual conditions have been resolved prior to the implementation of the project, the state's capacity to exert influence and pressure on the activities of the private partner will be significantly diminished.;
- having prospects for increasing the level of profitability of the project due to increasing labor productivity and innovative decision-making methods.

In summary, application of the PPP model in the transport system presents the following benefits in terms of the sector's development as a whole:

1. Efficiency: They are capable of mastering and applying advanced technology and modern management methods that can enhance the efficiency and quality of private business transport services in a more expeditious manner than the state;

2. Savings: The PPP) model enables the financing of large-scale transport projects that are costly and require significant budgetary resources, which may detract from the attraction of private investment;
3. The distribution of risks associated with the implementation of transport projects within the framework of PPPs is conducted in a manner that is optimal for both the state and the private sector. This enables each party to assume the risks that they are able to manage.

Let us now undertake a more detailed examination of the three approaches previously outlined. The implementation of state-private partnership projects within the transport system has been demonstrated to enhance the efficiency of the system on numerous occasions. This is due to a number of factors, as outlined below:

- Optimising the mobilisation of non-financial resources. The implementation of PPP projects in the transport sector provides an opportunity for the optimal utilisation of the resources of both partners. Consequently, during the implementation of these projects, the state assumes the role of regulator and controller, while the private partner assumes the role of implementer, utilising their expertise, abilities and experience to manage and operate the project and infrastructure facility;
- Implementing innovations. It has been demonstrated that private companies are more expeditious in the adoption of advanced technology and contemporary management methodologies, which have the potential to enhance the efficacy and caliber of transportation services. Such technologies and management methods include automated control of transport flows, organization of transport-expedition work based on artificial intelligence, and application of intelligent transport management systems.
- Cost reduction: As previously stated, PPP initiatives within the transport sector result in the development of transport infrastructure and a reduction in operational costs within this domain. Consequently, through the utilisation of PPP mechanisms, private enterprises assume direct responsibility for the financing of these projects, thereby implementing more sophisticated construction and operational methodologies. Consequently, this results in a reduction in project costs and an enhancement in project efficiency.
- Improving the quality of transport services provided: Private businesses are interested in analysing the transport services market, conducting comprehensive marketing research in order to fully study and meet the demands of consumers in this market, and gaining a customer base that is both loyal and long-lasting. This, in turn, results in an enhancement of the quality of the provided transport services.

The implementation of PPP mechanisms in the transport system has been demonstrated to result in improvements in accessibility, reliability and quality of transport services. These improvements have been shown to promote economic development as a whole and to enhance the standard of living of the population.

It is evident that the primary benefit of utilising PPP frameworks within the transportation sector is the enhancement of financial strategies. In this regard, there are several factors that contribute to the efficacy of the PPP model in the transport sector:

- The ways in which private investment can be attracted: The implementation of PPP mechanisms in the transport sector presents a potential avenue for the state to attract private investment in the financing of large-scale transport projects, which are often characterised as being costly. This, in turn, results in a notable increase in financial resources allocated to the development of transport infrastructure;
- Reduction of pressure on the state budget: The utilisation of PPP mechanisms enables the financing of a proportion of the costs associated with the construction and operation of transport infrastructure, with the financial burden being borne by the private sector. This subsequently results in a reduction in the financial strain on the state budget;
- Risk sharing: The financing and implementation of transport projects PPPs ensures that all risks are distributed between the public and private sectors in an optimal manner. Consequently, the state is exposed to a reduced level of risk;
- Ensuring sustainable financing: The involvement of private enterprise in the pursuit of long-term, stable profit opportunities, coupled with the advent of PPP mechanisms that facilitate such opportunities, gives rise to the formation of a more sustainable and sustainable source of financing for transport projects.

In general, PPP mechanisms have the potential to markedly enhance the financial viability of a transportation system by furnishing the requisite financial resources for its development and modernisation. Nevertheless, the attraction of private investment hinges on the establishment of a conducive investment climate, encompassing precise and transparent regulatory frameworks, the safeguarding of investor rights, and an equitable distribution of risks.

The fair distribution of risks among partners represents another advantage created by the implementation of the PPP model in the transport system. The fair distribution of risks between partners allows for the achievement of the following:

- In general, all risks associated with the financing and implementation of transport projects undertaken through PPPs, including financial risks, are allocated in a proportional manner between the public and private sectors. This, in turn, serves to reduce the financial burden borne by the state and the financial risks it indirectly assumes, particularly during the implementation of large and long-term transport projects;
- Transferring of the operational risks to a private partner: In the context of PPPs in the transportation sector, private enterprises assume operational risks pertaining to the construction, maintenance, and operation of transportation infrastructure. This encompasses maintenance, personnel management, and the organisation of security measures, among other responsibilities.;
- Stimulation of innovation: The fair distribution of risks is driven by the need to identify new and more efficient solutions that can stimulate the application of modern methods, techniques and technologies. This, in turn, aims to minimise the risks borne by the private partner and to maximise the potential profit they will receive;
- Improving the quality of transport services provided: In the context of PPPs in the transport sector, it is customary for the private partner to assume responsibility for risks pertaining to the quality of the services provided. This, in turn, encourages the private partner to provide high-quality transport services by undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the transport services market.

The fair distribution of risks within the framework of PPP projects has the effect of improving the efficiency and quality of transport services, while simultaneously reducing the financial and operational risks faced by the state. Nevertheless, the fair distribution of risks necessitates the implementation of precise and transparent regulatory frameworks, coupled with a balanced equilibrium between the public and private partners (Antonio Estache, Ellis Juan, Lourdes Trujillo., 2007).

APPLICATION TRENDS OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP MECHANISMS IN THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM

As evidenced in the 2022 World Bank report on infrastructure projects, the transport sector is the second most prevalent sector in terms of the number of PPP projects implemented in developing countries (middle and low-income countries) between 2013 and 2022. Consequently, in 2022, a total of 62.1 billion US dollars were invested in PPP projects in the transport sector for developing countries, representing a 44% increase compared to 2021.

Concurrently, the aforementioned report indicates that in 2020, due to the ramifications of the global pandemic, there was a notable decline in the volume of investments allocated to the transport sector, largely attributed to the stagnation in international tourism, the closure of borders, and the disruption of the supply chain across various countries. However, between 2021 and 2022, this sector witnessed a considerable surge in private investment (Figure 1). (Private Participation in Infrastructure (PPI) Acknowledgement & Disclaimer, n.d.).

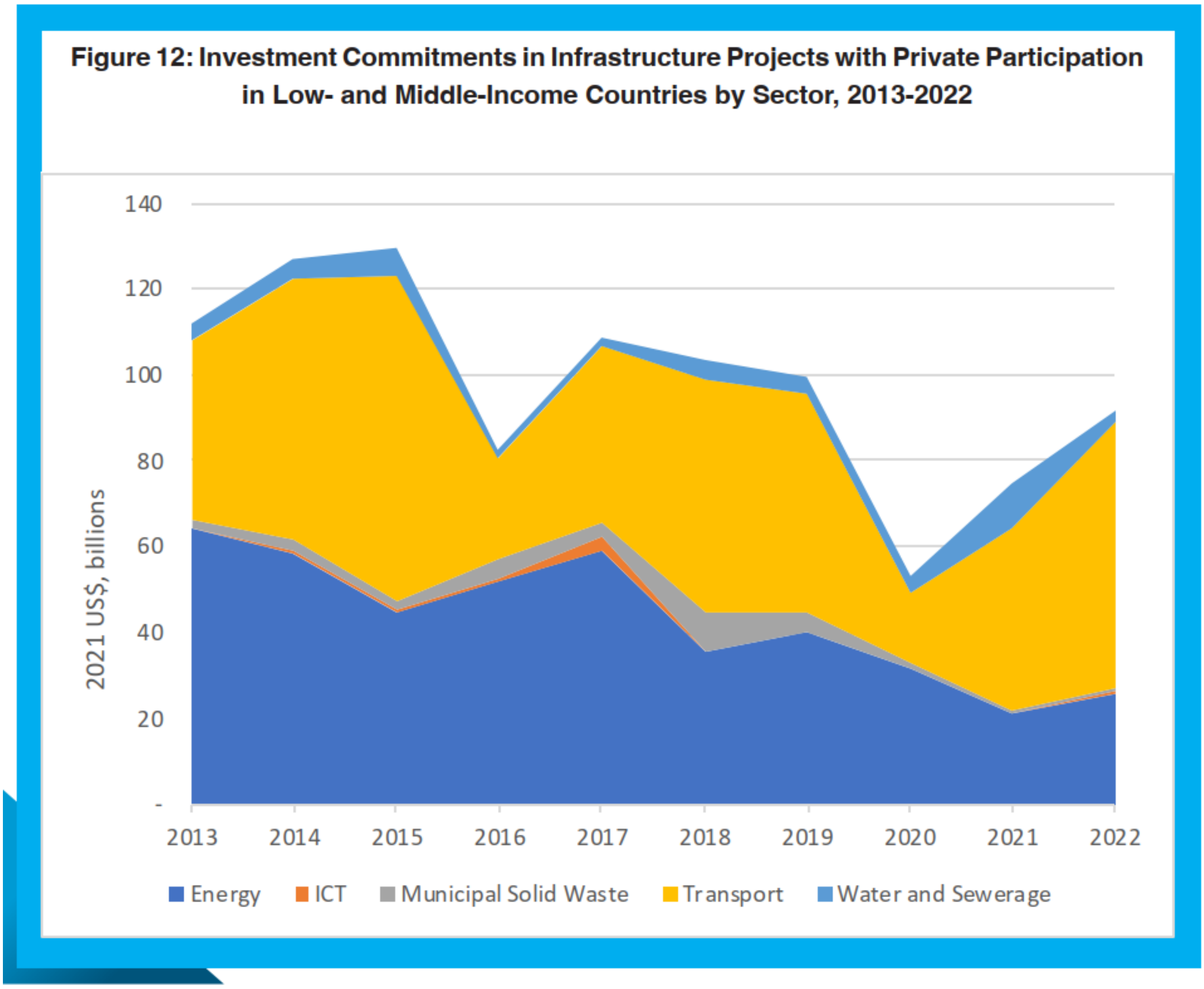

Figure 1. The volume of private investments directed to the implementation of infrastructure projects in economic fields in low- and middle-income countries in 2013-2022 years

The principal factor contributing to this significant surge in the transportation sector is the proliferation of PPP (PPP) initiatives in highway construction over recent years. The report indicates that, between 2013 and 2022, the volume of investments in the construction of highways within the framework of PPP projects in developing countries (middle and low-income countries) consistently ranked first. This is evidenced by a doubling of the volume of investments in the construction of highways compared to 2020, and a continuation of this trend in 2022 (Figure 2).

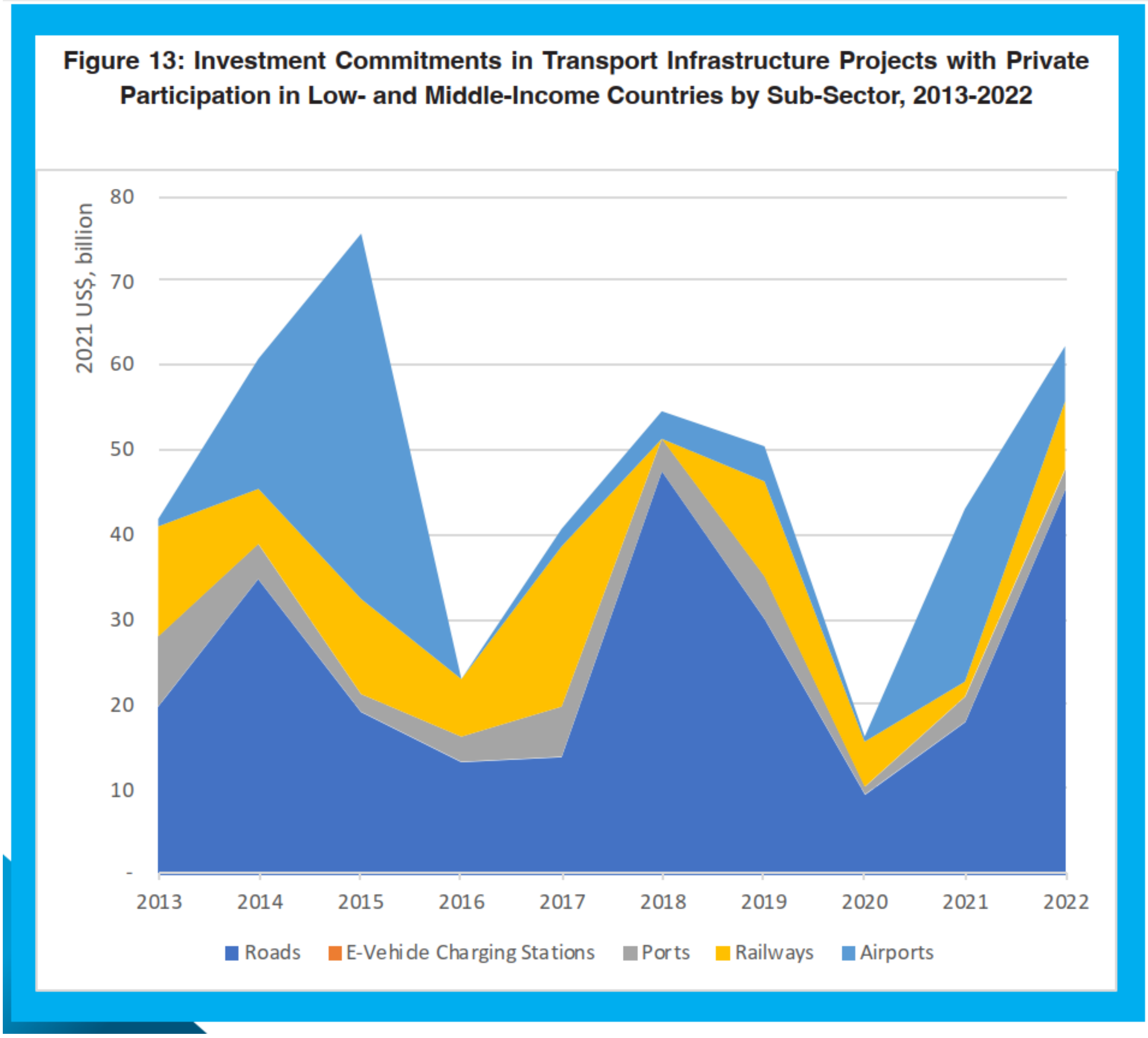

Figure 2. The volume of private investments made in various areas of the transport sector in low and middle-income countries in 2013-2022 years

Additionally, the aforementioned report indicates that another domain where PPP mechanisms are actively employed in the development of transportation infrastructure is the construction of charging stations for electric and hybrid vehicles. Consequently, the inaugural PPP project in this domain is the "Dushanbe E-Mobility" initiative, which is being executed in Turkmenistan with the involvement of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Private Participation in Infrastructure (PPI) Acknowledgement & Disclaimer, n.d.).

In light of the notable surge in the importation of electric and hybrid vehicles to Azerbaijan over the past five years, it becomes evident that the establishment of an appropriate infrastructure for these vehicles hinges on the implementation of effective PPP mechanisms in our country (Avtosfer.az, 2024).

It is also crucial to consider the various forms of PPP in the transport system, as this is widely regarded as a crucial factor influencing the success of the project at the national, project and operational levels. The following forms of PPP are observed in the transport system (Antonio Estache, Ellis Juan, Lourdes Trujillo., 2007):

- "Starting from scratch BOT (Built – Operate - Transfer)" projects. In accordance with the terms of these agreements, the private entity assumes responsibility for the design, construction, financing, and operation of the transportation infrastructure facility for a specified duration. The financing of such projects entails the borrowing and repayment of debt obligations, as well as the assurance of an adequate level of profitability and investment. Upon the expiration of the modified concession agreement, the assets (transport infrastructure facility) are transferred to state ownership in accordance with the terms set forth in the contract. The aforementioned form of partnership represents the most prevalent variant of public-private collaboration within the transport sector, with applications based on diverse approaches across varying contexts. These include regional differences, the distinctive features of individual countries, and the influence of geopolitical circumstances. At the end of this form of partnership, there is also an alternative form "BOO (Build – Own - Operate) in which the private partner has ownership of the infrastructure object".
- Traditional concession projects (Mirzayev F.M., 2024). In the context of the implementation of this form of PPP, the existing transport infrastructure facility is made operational by the private partner. At this juncture, the private partner assumes the majority of the commercial risks associated with the project. In the majority of cases, such a partnership is established through the formation of joint or joint venture agreements between the state and the private partner, whereby the two parties share responsibility for financing and exploitation, as well as the associated risks;
- A partnership based on the provision of transportation services on behalf of the state (on a tender basis) by a private partner. At this juncture, the income of the private partner is principally constituted by a portion of the profit derived from the provision of services or by payments made by the state. While this form of partnership does not typically entail financial risk, it can potentially give rise to a profitability risk in specific instances.

CONCLUSIONS

It is important to note that in the selection of one of the aforementioned forms of PPP, the ultimate decision rests with the state. This choice is contingent upon the criteria outlined below:

- from the functions and obligations to be performed (transfer of functions on design, construction, management, operation, etc.) that the state is ready to transfer to a private partner within the framework of a specific transport project;
- from the scale of the project;
- from the quality control system during project execution;
- from the fair distribution and management of risks between a public and private partner;
- from the mechanism of payment of expenses of the private partner (from the application of which payment mechanism).

From the above, it can be concluded that the process of selecting the appropriate form of PPP for implementation in the transport system is dependent upon the specific characteristics of the project in question and the goals of the state. Even when the relevant criteria are met, the procedure is inherently challenging.

A review of World Bank reports reveals that the overwhelming majority (70%) of PPP projects implemented in the transport system in developing countries (middle and low-income countries) over the past 30 years have been based on traditional concession projects. (Antonio Estache, Ellis Juan, Lourdes Trujillo., 2007).

It is important to highlight that the application of PPP mechanisms is not feasible for the implementation of any transport project. It can be observed that PPPs in the transport system facilitate the joint implementation of projects between public and private partners, the joint establishment of transport infrastructure, and the provision of transport services based on the optimal distribution of existing obligations, rights, risks, and financial burdens between partners. This is a collection of economic and legal relationship models and mechanisms.

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STREET ART AND THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study analyzes the dynamic relationship between graffiti, street art and the hospitality industry in Bucharest, Romania. Through an analysis of Bucharest's transforming urban landscape, the presentation explores how street art has become a powerful tool for enhancing the appeal of hotels, restaurants, and cafes. By incorporating street art into their interiors and exteriors, businesses can create visually stimulating environments that attract both local residents and tourists, differentiating themselves from competitors. Furthermore, the research highlights how street art has contributed to the cultural vibrancy of Bucharest, enhancing its reputation as an artistic hub. Case studies analysis of different revitalized areas of neighborhoods surrounding Carol I Park will illustrate how collaborations between local artists, businesses and local organizations have resulted in successful revitalization efforts, turning neglected spaces into vibrant cultural hotspots, including the transformation of former industrial zones into vibrant, sought-after destinations for both locals and tourists.*

KEYWORDS: *street art; hospitality industry; culture; revitalization; Bucharest*

INTRODUCTION

Graffiti culture in Bucharest began to emerge in the 1990s, following the Romanian Revolution of 1989. During this period, the city experienced significant political and social changes, leading to more freedom of expression. The 2000s saw a growing interest in more elaborate street art. Artists began to create larger murals, exploring themes beyond politics, such as social issues, cultural identity, and personal expression (Cercleux, 2021).

By the 2010s, street art had gained wider acceptance in Bucharest. It was no longer seen as vandalism but as a valuable form of public art that can enhance urban spaces. This shift in perception was partly due to collaborations between artists, businesses, and local authorities. In recent years, Bucharest's street art scene has continued to thrive, drawing interest from both locals and tourists.

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This article explores the symbiotic relationship between street art and the hospitality sector in Bucharest, examining how murals and graffiti contribute to the city's identity, promote cultural tourism, and foster a sense of community while enhancing the overall appeal of hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality venues. Join us as we dive into the colorful world of Bucharest's street art and discover its profound impact on the hospitality industry.

METHODOLOGY

In exploring the intersection of street art and the hospitality industry in Bucharest, Romania, this study takes a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. The methodology includes mostly 2 parts: literature review and case studies. Even though urban art is a poorly studied field in Romania, there are a few articles that explore the history of this phenomenon and the relationships it develops with the involved parties.

More than that, the research is based on field observations in areas rich with street art allows for an understanding of the interaction between art, public spaces, and hospitality venues. This will include documenting how street art influences the ambiance and customer flow in local businesses. Additionally, discussions were held with entrepreneurs and street artists to highlight a complete picture of the phenomenon.

In documenting this study, the main question we addressed was "How can street art contribute to the hospitality industry?". Several of the answers we identified formed the hypotheses for this research. Five key areas where the integration of this artistic form can significantly impact a city's hospitality sector are:

1. **Creating unique atmospheres**: Street art may be a strong visual component that gives a place charm and character. Hospitality facilities, such as hotels, restaurants, and cafes, can differentiate themselves from competition by implementing murals, graffiti, or installations. Customers looking for an experience that is more engaging and memorable are drawn in by these distinctive visual identities.

2. **Cultural engagement:** Hospitality establishments can actively connect with this community by commissioning new works and supporting local artists, exhibiting the city's artistic legacy and encouraging a sense of local pride. This enhances Bucharest's position as a cultural hub and draws visitors eager to experience the city's unique artistic environment.

3. **Photogenic spaces for social media**: Tourists who want to capture their experiences on camera find street art to be a very desirable addition to visually appealing and picturesque areas. Travelers can use these eye-catching murals and installations as organic photo and video

backgrounds, sharing their experiences in Bucharest with a larger audience on social media. As a result, the city becomes more visible and appealing, attracting more tourists looking for comparable artistic experiences.

4. **Urban revitalization**: Hospitality venues may make a positive impact on the local landscape and encourage a sense of pride in the history and development of the city by integrating street art into their designs. This may result in neighborhood revitalization, draw in new companies, and eventually boost the city's economy as a whole.

5. **Storytelling and branding**: For branding and narrative, street art can be an extremely effective tool. Hospitality establishments might develop a distinctive brand identity that appeals to guests by collaborating with artists to create murals that capture the history and culture of the community. This can entail using visual tales to highlight historical personalities, folklore, or cultural customs from the area, providing visitors with an engaging experience.

RESULTS

By incorporating street art into their interiors and exteriors, businesses can create visually stimulating environments that attract customers, both tourists and locals. Artworks can set a unique tone and differentiate a venue from competitors. Also, businesses that promote local artists contribute to the cultural vibrancy of Bucharest, enhancing its reputation as an artistic hub. That is the case for *Heavy Yard*, a restaurant located in the old part of Bucharest city, on Vasile Lascăr Street. In June 2024, a team of young local street artist painted a mural on the entire wall of an old house.

Fig. 1 - *"Real friendships overcome the biggest waves"* – Heavy Yard, Vasile Lascăr st. by Format C: (Pavel, 2024)

This kind of mural paintings have spread all over the city recently, mainly in the older neighbourhoods, revitalising a lot of dilapidated buildings and yards. Also, in addition to street art, more and more bars, restaurants and cafes, like *Heavy Yard*, have started promoting young artists like singers, comedians etc. in an attempt to diversify and attract more customers (fig. 1).

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on global tourism, leading to travel restrictions and reduced visitor number, affecting primarily the hospitality industry. Shortly after the economy began to recover, bussiness owners started looking for options to become more attractive for tourists, focusing mostly on outdoor spaces.

After the Romanian Revolution of 1989, the country entered a deindustrialisation process. In Bucharest a lot of former factories and industrial facilities were abandoned in the 2000s and became a problem to the community. As many of those spaces remain abandoned and are affected by vandalism, some of them were reconverted into restaurants, hotels and nightclubs. For example, we can take a look at the neighborhood surrounding the Carol I Park, located near the city centre. Here we can find two former industrial facilities transformed by private investors in a restaurant and a club.

- *Fabrica* (the romanian word for factory) - a former socks factory that today hosts a club and a restaurant;
- *Expirat* – a club located in an originally 1877 factory which now hosts one of the cultural hotspots of Bucharest.

Street art also had an important role to play in the revitalization of these locations, embellishing the old unappealing industrial look without needing a lot of exterior renovation to be done.

In the same area there is located an unique street of Bucharest, which became one of the first street art related tourist attractions of the city. Xenofon Street is one of the few step streets of the city and was first painted in 2014 by local street artists with representations of Bucharest landmarks (fig. 2), the mural being repainted one year later by Eva Radu as a waterfall (fig. 3). Unfortunatelly, at present, the street painting has degraded considerably, leaving Xenofon st. with an umpleasant appearance, reducing a lot its tourist potential. This is not the only instance where street art is insufficiently leveraged for tourism purposes. Many other streets in the city, especially in old neighborhoods, are affected by degradation, with older street art pieces left to deteriorate alongside the buildings they were painted on.

As the phenomenon continues to grow, Bucharest has developed multiple street art centres, the majority of them being located in old central neighbourhoods. Some streets that host multiple mural paintings are: Ion Brezoianu st., Arthur Verona st., Eremia Grigorescu st. etc. Those venues also host a bunch of cafes and pubs that try to It is also important to mention Outline StreetArt Festival organised by EDIT Association. This project's main goals are revitalising the urban space, reducing vandalism and promoting the street art attractions of Bucharest.

Fig. 2 - Xenofon st. in 2014 (a mural representing the National Opera, the Romanian Atheneum and the Arch of Triumph)

Fig. 3 - Xenofon st. in 2015 by Eva Radu (source: www.paginademedia.ro)

DISCUSSION

By incorporating street art into their design, marketing, and community outreach, hospitality venues can create a truly distinctive experience that resonates with both residents and national or international visitors.

Opportunities include creating unique atmospheres, fostering cultural engagement, creating photogenic spaces for social media, and participating in urban revitalization. There is also a growing need for guided tours and other touristic facilities that include urban art.

Although there are currently a few guided tours and events related to street art in Bucharest, their number is limited and doesn't even come close to covering the city's high potential. However, challenges also exist, including overcoming negative perceptions of street art, navigating legal and ethical considerations, ensuring sustainability and preservation of the artwork, and finding effective marketing and promotional approaches.

While challenges exist, the opportunities presented by street art in Bucharest are substantial. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities, the hospitality industry can contribute to the city's cultural vibrancy, attract new tourists, and foster a sense of community around the unique art that defines Bucharest's urban landscape.

CONCLUSIONS

Street art and graffiti have contributed significantly to a cultural renaissance in Bucharest, transforming the city into a vibrant canvas that reflects its dynamic social and historical narratives. This art form has helped position Bucharest as a contemporary cultural destination, enhancing its appeal to both local residents and international tourists.

The rise in street art has stimulated economic activity in several neighborhoods, benefiting local businesses and fostering economic revitalization. As tourists explore these areas, the increased foot traffic supports the hospitality and retail sectors, contributing to the city's economic recovery post-COVID.

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COVID-19 AND HOTEL TOURISM: SOME ASSESSMENTS FROM FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF THREE EUROPEAN NATIONS*

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates, with the analysis of financial statements, the economic-financial performance of 18,841 Italian (6,253), French (4,604) and Greek (7,984) hotels in the decade encompassing the pandemic crisis (2013-2022). We studied the trend of the profitability ratio, ROA (Return on Assets), and the capitalisation ratio, which reflects financial structure, and conducted appropriate statistical analyses. The results show that Covid-19 affected profitability; otherwise, it was positive everywhere but not high. On the other hand, although improving, the financial structure is disappointing because the companies are undercapitalised. Relatively homogeneous trends in the three countries for profitability but not for equity/debt ratios. Future research with other variables, as well as the integration of quantitative data with qualitative data, will be helpful.*

This study stimulates and encourages a culture of space-time comparisons, re-evaluating the potential of accounting information systems to promote growth and development strategies based on appropriate reporting information. It also contains valuable pointers for public authorities that often support tourism.

KEYWORDS: *ROA, Indice di patrimonializzazione, Anova, Performance economico-finanziaria, Pandemia.*

INTRODUCTION

The recent pandemic has significantly impacted international tourism, severely affecting hotel management dynamics. Lockdowns, travel restrictions, and social distancing have temporarily reduced tourist demand, negatively affecting accommodation facilities' economic and financial performance (Gössling et al., 2020). This situation highlighted the vulnerability of hotels and similar businesses operating in competitive environments with high fixed costs and limited margins of operational flexibility (Baum & Hai, 2020).

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* This article is the result of collaboration between the two authors. *Guido Migliaccio* designed the research. He also analysed the literature and drafted the final considerations. The paragraphs 'Introduction', 'Literature Review', and 'Conclusions' can be attributed to him. *Noemi Romeo* selected the sample, identified and processed the data and represented them in tabular and graphical form. All other paragraphs can therefore be attributed to her. The paper derives from a dissertation presented by the two authors during the 15th Scientific Meeting of the Italian Society of Tourism Sciences (ISTS) on the topic 'Tourism between conditions of sustainability and promotion policies: islands, inland areas and fragile territorial systems' held in Messina and Taormina (Italy) on 16-17-18 November 2023.

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This study evaluates the impact of the pandemic crisis on hotel companies' financial statements in three European countries: Italy, France, and Greece. Through the analysis of economic and financial indicators taken from company financial statements, it will be possible to assess the extent of the losses incurred and the impact on their financial structure. The choice of the three countries is based on their significant contribution to European tourism and their structural and regulatory differences, although they share a bathing coastline and a significant number of islands with a tourist vocation.

Several studies have explored the impact of catastrophic events on tourism, highlighting how health, economic or political crises can significantly affect tourism flows and business dynamics in the sector (Hall et al., 2020; Sigala, 2020). In this context, the analysis of company financial statements offers a valuable tool to assess the concrete impact of the crisis on hotel businesses and to identify possible avenues for recovery.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The international literature has examined the factors underlying hotel profitability by adopting a multifactorial and interdisciplinary perspective, as is necessary for any approach related to tourism. Some studies (Sharma, 2017; Taylor et al., 2018) have investigated the link between culinary innovation and hotel performance. On the other hand, other authors (Lado-Sestayo & Vivel-Búa, 2018) have proposed models highlighting how hotel structural characteristics, location and competitive environment affect performance. Management innovation has also been shown to be crucial in responding to changing demand, as pointed out by Sandvik et al. (2014).

The importance of localisation has emerged in various studies (Lado-Sestayo et al., 2016, 2018, 2020), accompanied by digital promotion strategies (Makki et al., 2016) and building a solid reputation (Anagnostopoulou et al., 2020).

The services' quality also positively impacts revenues (Aznar et al., 2016).

Other relevant factors are the socioeconomic conditions of customers and the market structure (Iyengar & Suri, 2012; Krakhmal, 2012), with the price variable remaining a key determinant (Chen & Chang, 2012).

Structural and contextual differences between countries have been explored in various contexts, including Malaysia (Singh et al., 2017), Nigeria (Olagunju et al., 2020) and other studies conducted in Southern Europe (Dimitrić et al., 2019).

A similar approach to this study was by Ben Aissa & Goaied (2016), who used return on assets (ROA) to assess the efficiency of Tunisian hotels, followed by Xu (2017) and Sami & Mohamed (2014), who also explored the link between operational efficiency and profitability.

In the Italian context, Migliaccio (2018) conducted a similar analysis, providing a valuable comparison for the current study. This was followed by a further, more in-depth study (Pavone et al., 2023) with data referring to 2009-2018. With the contribution of Noemi Romeo, Migliaccio then developed the theme with comparisons between Italian geographical macro-areas to assess the impact of Covid on profitability (Migliaccio & Romeo, 2022b) and the financial structure of hotels (Migliaccio & Romeo, 2022a). Following the same track and with a similar methodology, this paper extends the analysis to the European context, comparing the Italian situation with those of Greece and France, focusing on the effects of pandemic closures. In this way, the aim is to increase the scientific reflection on hotel performance, which, after Covid -19, has increased considerably (Polemis, 2021; Sharma et al., 2021; Singh & Corsun, 2023; Kauatuuapehi et al., 2023; Pemo et al., 2024; Witarsana & Adyatma, 2023; Koutoupis et al., 2022; Hamsal et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2024).

In the three tourism countries, the following is expected:

H1: A high and positive profitability, except the most acute year of the pandemic;

H2: An optimal balance between internal and external sources everywhere for self-financing processes;

H3: Similar trends in the two ratios analysed in the three countries, with no statistically significant differences.

METHODOLOGY

The financial statements of a sample of Italian, French and Greek companies from the Orbis Europe Full by Moody's Corporation database were analysed. We characterised all hotels by the NACE Rev. 2 code 5510 and similar accommodation. We processed data on the profitability ratio (ROA - Return on Assets) and a financial structure ratio (the capitalisation ratio) for 18,841 hotels: 6,253 in Italy, 4,604 in France, and 7,984 in Greece. However, since data were not always available, we explicitly stated the number of observations. To broaden the opportunities for reflection, we calculated various descriptive statistics. The annual average ratios made it possible to outline the ten-year trend (2013-2022) represented graphically with the relevant interpolation curve obtained with a polynomial equation of degree 6 that maximises the R^2 value. Cross-country comparisons were made using the ANOVA test.

RESULTS AND FIRST EVIDENCE

ROA

ROA assesses the profitability of invested capital. It is calculated using the following formula: operating profit/total assets %. It considers characteristic and extra-characteristic management as well as equity and debt investments. It is, therefore, considered a 'global' profitability ratio.

Table 1 shows the available data and the annual average of the ratio to determine the ten-year trend.

Table 1: ROA - Observations and annual average values						
	Available data			Annual average values		
Year	France	Greece	Italy	France	Greece	Italy
2013	2912	1269	3963	1,97	-0,60	-0,97
2014	2693	1199	3915	1,44	-0,10	-0,50
2015	2428	1000	3881	0,81	0,57	0,56
2016	2004	897	3838	-0,18	1,00	1,15
2017	1794	856	3796	0,99	1,51	1,57
2018	1600	832	3738	1,72	1,46	1,47
2019	1456	809	3683	1,75	1,48	1,56
2020	1283	754	3608	-9,89	-3,60	-3,02
2021	1128	636	3503	-1,10	1,71	1,44
2022	412	37	587	5,40	4,59	4,41
Source: Orbis Europe full data processing.						

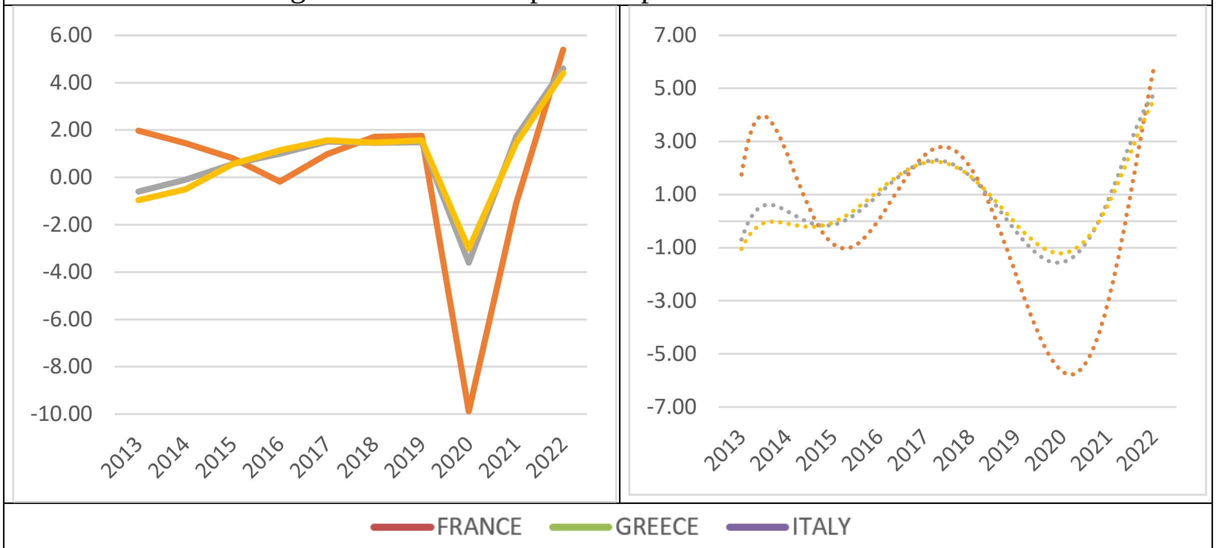
The lowest values characterise France. On the other hand, Roa has higher values in Greece and Italy, reaching peaks of almost 5% in 2022 but surpassed by France. The decline in profitability due to the closures imposed by the pandemic in 2020 is evident everywhere.

To plot the trend graph of annual average values, we first determine the interpolating equation that maximises the R^2 value (Table 2).

Table 2: ROA - Interpolating equations and R^2		
France	$y = -0{,}0059x^6 + 0{,}2032x^5 - 2{,}6908x^4 + 17{,}162x^3 - 54{,}282x^2 + 77{,}905x - 36{,}542$	$R^2 = 0{,}697$
Greece	$y = -0{,}0031x^6 + 0{,}1036x^5 - 1{,}3195x^4 + 8{,}09x^3 - 24{,}727x^2 + 35{,}398x - 18{,}24$	$R^2 = 0{,}697$
Italy	$y = -0{,}0023x^6 + 0{,}0753x^5 - 0{,}955x^4 + 5{,}7911x^3 - 17{,}427x^2 + 24{,}837x - 13{,}371$	$R^2 = 0{,}697$
Source: Our elaboration.		

Thus, Figure 1 shows the development of the ratio over the decade with a broken straight line and its interpolating curve.

Figure 1: ROA - Graphical representation of the trend



Source: Our elaboration.

The trend of the average Roa data can be further elaborated by calculating some descriptive statistics (Tables 3, 4 and 5).

Table 3: ROA - Descriptive Statistics - France

Year	Average	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance	Min	Max	Variation
2013	1,97	64,84	15,0383959	226,15	-97,22	85,35	182,57
2014	1,44	60,31	14,8796074	221,4	-99,73	99,66	199,39
2015	0,81	56	14,9281888	222,85	-98,71	85,46	184,17
2016	-0,18	52,13	15,4717165	239,37	-97,26	96,74	194
2017	0,99	48,3	14,7815237	218,49	-98,47	88,09	186,56
2018	1,72	44,9	15,2157505	231,52	-99,63	95,61	195,24
2019	1,75	41,4	15,3689031	236,2	-96,8	92,91	189,71
2020	-9,89	38,11	18,3407764	336,38	-99,95	89,3	189,25
2021	-1,1	35,1	16,4337262	270,07	-99,99	93,11	193,1
2022	5,4	34,82	13,5218961	182,84	-69,28	76,54	145,82

Source: Our elaboration.

Table 4: ROA - Descriptive Statistics - Greece

Year	Average	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance	Min	Max	Variation
2013	-0,6	0,01	8,2	67,16	-98,85	86,97	185,82
2014	-0,1	0,07	8,2	67,19	-95,89	85,56	181,45
2015	0,57	0,22	8,06	64,89	-97,31	73,03	170,33
2016	1	0,35	7,97	63,53	-94,79	66,45	161,24
2017	1,51	0,57	8,97	80,39	-91,65	92,33	183,98
2018	1,46	0,62	9,35	87,43	-96,49	81,97	178,47
2019	1,48	0,63	9,01	81,09	-97,78	83,97	181,75
2020	-3,6	-1,37	12,04	145,1	-99,54	99,58	199,12
2021	1,71	0,63	10,05	100,9	-93,9	85,8	179,69
2022	4,59	1,86	11,49	131,9	-88,88	70,93	159,81

Source: Our elaboration.

Table 5: Roa - Descriptive Statistics - Italy							
Year	Average	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance	Min	Max	Variation
2013	-0,97	-0,03	8,68	75,33	-98,85	86,97	185,82
2014	0,50	0,04	8,44	71,26	-94,8	85,56	180,36
2015	0,56	0,19	7,99	63,85	-96,39	73,03	169,42
2016	1,15	0,34	8,12	65,91	-94,79	66,45	161,24
2017	1,57	0,53	8,98	80,62	-86,48	84,14	170,62
2018	1,47	0,56	9,52	90,65	-96,49	80,96	177,45
2019	1,56	0,61	9,09	82,55	-97,78	83,97	181,75
2020	-3,02	-0,67	12,68	160,8	-99,54	99,58	199,12
2021	1,44	0,49	10,28	105,7	-93,9	85,8	179,69
2022	4,41	1,75	11,5	132,3	-88,88	70,93	159,81
Source: Our elaboration.							

The data in Greece and Italy show a median that deviates little from the average. The data distribution is, therefore, asymmetrical: most of them have values below the average. In France, on the other hand, there is a symmetrical distribution.

ROA has a wide range of variations almost everywhere. An initial observation of the graphs and careful evaluation of the descriptive statistics do not reveal any significant differences between the three countries.

In order to better assess the differences, the annual average ROA data were subjected to the ANOVA test (Table 6).

Table 6: ROA - Anova testing						
SUMMARY						
Group	*Count*	*Sum*	*Average*	*Variance*		
France	10	2,91	0,291	15,6643656		
Greece	10	8,01708009	0,80170801	4,31111326		
Italy	10	7,66884631	0,76688463	3,84837269		
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE						
Origin of the variation	*SQ*	*dof*	*MQ*	*F*	*Significance value*	*F crit*
Between groups	1,6283384	2	0,8141692	0,10252362	0,902906491	3,35413083
In groups	214,414664	27	7,94128383			
Total	216,043002	29				
Source: Our elaboration.						

F is less than F crit. There are, therefore, no statistically significant differences. The Tukey-Kramer test is not necessary.

Capitalisation Ratio

The capitalisation ratio expresses the ratio of equity to total investments. It is, therefore, calculated using the formula: Share Capital/Total Assets * 100. Table 7 shows each year's available data and average ratio value.

Table 7: Capitalisation Ratio - Comments and annual average values						
	Available data			Annual average values		
Year	France	Greece	Italy	France	Greece	Italy
2013	2.854	5.239	3.966	32,87	38,10	31,32
2014	2.819	5.123	3.919	33,69	37,48	31,14
2015	2.469	4.876	3.885	32,72	36,88	31,41
2016	2.234	4.734	3.845	32,63	37,15	32,07
2017	2.084	4.657	3.805	32,05	37,39	32,24
2018	1.954	4.576	3.748	32,46	37,59	32,56
2019	1.819	4.499	3.694	31,97	38,05	33,32
2020	1.612	4.373	3.622	24,38	39,74	37,90
2021	1.426	4.148	3.516	24,74	43,34	42,29
2022	237	623	591	33,24	43,68	43,30
Source: Orbis Europe full data processing.						

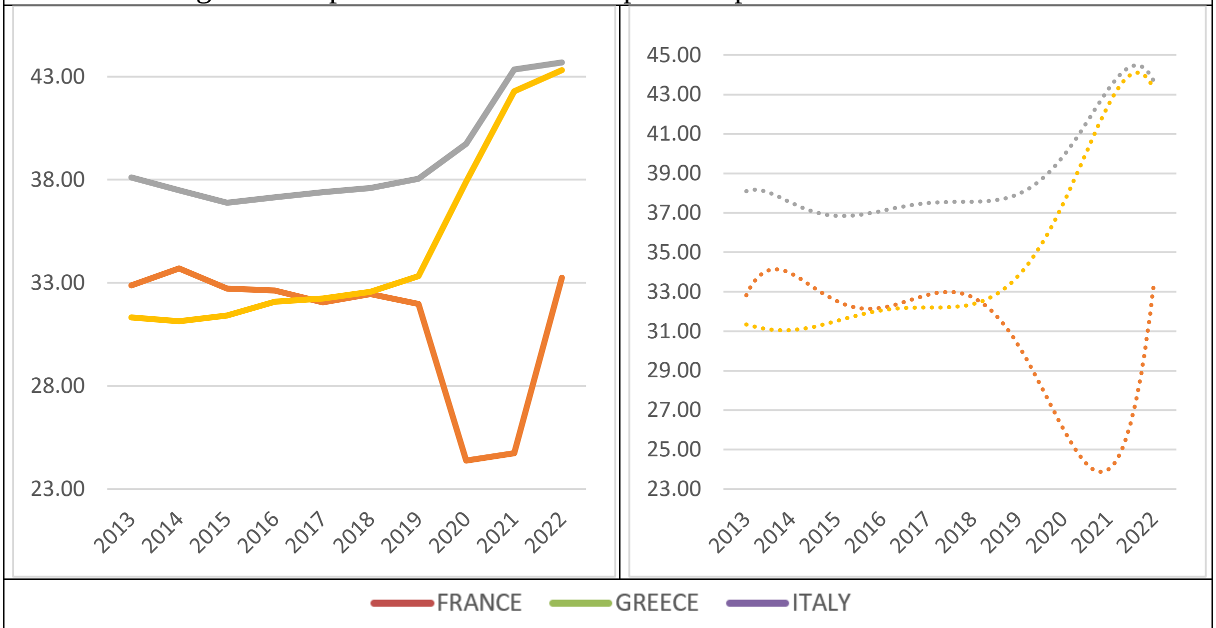
Greece has higher values than the other two countries in all years considered. From 2019, France has the lowest values, below 25% in 2020. The peak is reached for all three nations in 2022, the year Greece and Italy reached their highest peak (almost 45%).

In order to draw up the trend graph of the annual average values, we first determine the interpolating equation that maximises the R2 value (Table 8).

Table 8: Capitalisation Ratio - Interpolating equations and R^2		
France	$y = -0,0001x^6 + 0,019x^5 - 0,4171x^4 + 3,5687x^3 - 13,898x^2 + 23,485x + 20,062$	$R^2 = 0,9347$
Greece	$y = -0,0018x^6 + 0,0555x^5 - 0,6519x^4 + 3,7102x^3 - 10,449x^2 + 12,958x + 32,475$	$R^2 = 0,9992$
Italy	$y = -0,0012x^6 + 0,0305x^5 - 0,2865x^4 + 1,1833x^3 - 1,9607x^2 + 0,7472x + 31,627$	$R^2 = 0,9975$
Source: Our elaboration.		

The results are shown in Figure 2, which shows the development of the ratio over the decade with a broken line and its interpolating curve.

Figure 2: Capitalisation Ratio - Graphical representation of the trend



Source: Our elaboration.

Tables 9, 10 and 11 present descriptive statistics useful for a better interpretation of financial performance.

Table 9: Capitalisation Ratio - Descriptive Statistics - France

Year	Average	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance	Min	Max	Variation
2013	32,87	32,06	36,1534046	1307,06866	-98,43	100,00	198,43
2014	33,69	33,46	36,1895242	1309,68166	-98,40	100,00	198,40
2015	32,72	32,48	37,1909734	1383,16851	-99,29	100,00	199,29
2016	32,63	33,27	37,5954887	1413,42077	-99,12	100,00	199,12
2017	32,05	32,00	36,9546741	1365,64794	-99,76	100,00	199,76
2018	32,46	33,07	37,1059933	1376,85474	-97,16	99,98	197,14
2019	31,97	32,45	37,7615863	1425,9374	-99,45	99,99	199,44
2020	24,38	23,29	39,1678789	1534,12274	-99,49	99,99	199,47
2021	24,74	24,16	38,2042472	1459,56451	-98,16	99,99	198,15
2022	33,24	33,19	37,2437671	1387,09819	-94,97	100,00	194,97

Source: Our elaboration.

Table 10: Capitalisation Ratio - Descriptive Statistics - Greece

Year	Average	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance	Min	Max	Variation
2013	38,1	34,83	32,05	1.027,03	-82,76	100	182,76
2014	37,48	33,66	32	1023,73	-96,82	100	196,82
2015	36,88	32,37	31,22	974,59	-93,6	100	193,6
2016	37,15	32,38	30,89	954,32	-98,65	100	198,65
2017	37,39	32,96	31,13	969,16	-96,01	100	196,01
2018	37,59	33,4	31,05	963,99	-96,47	100	196,47
2019	38,05	34,04	30,87	952,72	-94,74	100	194,74
2020	39,74	39,59	33,6	1129,23	-98,24	100	198,24
2021	43,34	44,49	32,6	1062,93	-99,8	100	199,8
2022	43,68	44,45	32,47	1054,1	-95,71	99,92	195,63

Source: Our elaboration.

Table 11: Capitalisation Ratio - Descriptive Statistics - Italy							
Year	Average	Median	Standard Deviation	Variance	Min	Max	Variation
2013	31,32	25,8	29,31	859,25	-82,76	100	182,76
2014	31,14	25,46	29,35	861,47	-96,82	100	196,82
2015	31,41	25,83	28,71	824,11	-93,6	100	193,6
2016	32,07	26,34	28,53	814,11	-98,65	100	198,65
2017	32,24	26,33	28,55	814,92	-96,01	100	196,01
2018	32,56	26,86	28,61	818,52	-96,47	100	196,47
2019	33,32	27,69	28,62	819,35	-88,51	100	188,51
2020	37,9	36,66	33,35	1112,5	-98,24	100	198,24
2021	42,29	43,05	32,46	1053,86	-99,8	100	199,8
2022	43,3	44,29	32,61	1063,73	-95,71	100	195,71
Source: Our elaboration.							

The data in all countries show a median that deviates little from the average. The distribution of the data is, therefore, asymmetrical. The standard deviation and the variance have high values, expressing high variability.

The ratio has negative minimum values in 2021 in Greece and Italy, while positive maximum values are widespread everywhere. The range of variation is, therefore, very high.

An initial observation of the graphs and a careful evaluation of the descriptive statistics reveals significant differences between France, Greece and Italy to be assessed with the ANOVA test (Table 12).

Table 2: Capitalisation Ratio - Anova testing						
SUMMARY						
Group	*Count*	*Sum*	*Average*	*Variance*		
France	10	310,753045	31,0753045	12,0505217		
Greece	10	389,402916	38,9402916	6,41473889		
Italy	10	347,556916	34,7556916	21,8040102		
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE						
Origin of the variation	*SQ*	*dof*	*MQ*	*F*	*Significance value*	*F crit*
Between groups	309,713831	2	154,856916	11,5366069	0,000239187	3,35413083
In groups	362,423437	27	13,4230903			
Total	672,137268	29				
Source: Our elaboration.						

F is higher than F crit. There are, therefore, statistically significant differences. The Tukey-Kramer test would be needed to identify significant differences between the nations. Anticipated developments in the study will determine this.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is a critical sector in the three countries investigated. This study sketched the economic and financial performance of accommodation facilities using the ten-year profitability trend and financial structure ratios. The analysis relatively confirms the H1 hypothesis, recording positive but not high profitability, except in the most acute year of the pandemic. Therefore, the support interventions governments provided were insufficient to offset the deleterious effects of the closures.

Hotels are undercapitalised, although the situation is improving everywhere. Therefore, H2, which advocated an optimal balance between internal and external sources due to self-financing processes, cannot be confirmed. This may be due to low profitability. The effects of Covid-19 were different in the three countries.

H3 can only be confirmed for profitability, which identifies trends without statistically significant differences, but not for financial structure, which shows heterogeneity.

This study contributes to the literature on tourism economics, using quantitative methodologies that integrate aspects of effectiveness, efficiency and productivity.

However, the work is limited to analysing a rich sample of only three European countries, which should certainly be extended in the future.

Entrepreneurs can, however, benefit from the results of this study to guide their strategies. Furthermore, the results may also be helpful to external stakeholders such as banks, consultants and trade unions.

Future studies should consider other indices, deepen statistical analyses, and consider qualitative variables.

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POST COVID-19 COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF TOURISM UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' LEARNING MODALITIES

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ABSTRACT: *The Covid-19 pandemic has affected various spheres of human life, including education. The present study aims to investigate the learning modalities of university students who were high school students during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Learning style preferences, functional brain asymmetry, and visual-auditory-kinesthetic profiles of the students, post-covid enrolled in the Tourism programs in Bulgarian university, were comparatively analyzed.*

KEYWORDS: *brain hemisphere, VAK, LSP, FBA, teaching quality, teaching efficiency*

INTRODUCTION

Understanding students' preferred learning styles emphasizes how crucial it is to modify instruction and learning process approaches appropriately (Obreshkov, 2020a; Hallin, 2014). Each student learns in a unique way using his or her own cognitive techniques and depending on student's age, gender, or culture (Barmeyer, 2004) or culture, gender, level of education and area of specialization (Joy and Kolb, 2009), these learning styles can vary. Teachers must regularly evaluate groups because learning styles tend to vary over time, however the frequency needed can be negotiated (Hallin, 2014). An evaluation of teaching strategies in producing successful learners should be successfully implemented in order to create a workforce with notable human capital and expertise (Jamil, Baharuddin and Maknu, 2015). Innovative approaches aimed at generating and maintaining students' desire to learn are applied by Bulgarian teachers in the secondary education system (Kostova, 2022a, 2022 b). Universities must adjust to shifting student learning preferences in addition to the various conflicting demands that are brought about by every new class of students, as the profile of entering students is ever-changing (James, D'Amore and Thomas, 2011). At the same time, students' learning preferences remain unchanged over the five years of undergraduate study at King Saud University (Asiry, 2016). Teachers ought to be imaginative in broadening instruction strategies in lesson by being delicate with students' learning needs (Obreshkov, 2018; Othman and

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Amiruddin, 2010). A recent study focuses on developing students' writing achievement by catering to the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (VAK) learning style, which is the mixture of the three primary learning styles (Ramadian, Cahyono and Suryati, 2020). The use of a variety of instructional media that takes into account the different learning styles of the students is a sign that teachers are cognizant of students' learning preferences and students who prefer different learning styles may become bored throughout the teaching and learning process if only one form of teaching media is used, such as only text-based media (boards, textbooks), or only audio-based media (teaching audio) (Mashoedah et al., 2018) and for certain students, inappropriate teaching methods might cause real learning challenges (Lashley and Barron, 2006).

The significance of students' learning styles in Australia (Lashley and Barron, 2006), in Barbados (Ojeh et al., 2017), in France (Barmeyer, 2004), in Germany (Barmeyer, 2004), in Indonesia (Suaib, 2019), in Iran (Kazemi, Amir Mahdavi-Zafarghand and Abdorreza Tahriri, 2016), in Malaysia (Ibrahim and Zulkipli, 2022), in Nigeria (Abidoye and Olorundare, 2020), in Spain (Alfonseca et al., 2006), in the UK (Lashley and Barron, 2006), and in Türkiye (Hulya and Pınar, 2016) was studied. The nation's culture must unavoidably be taken into account as a critical component in order to understand the various learning styles (Yamazaki, 2005).

Kurgun and Işıldar (2016) and Lashley and Barron (2006) particularly studied the learning preferences of hospitality and tourism students. The degree of qualification of the workforce determines the provision of high-quality services, which is crucial for enhancing tourist happiness and the destination's reputation (Ilieva et al., 2017). Nestorova (2013) talks about the kinesthetic approach that is required of bachelor's degree students studying tourism. The impact of kinesthetic approach, or thematic practical courses, on students pursuing careers in hospitality is assessed by Ilieva and Kaludova (2013).

According to Obreshkov (2017), the promotion of high-quality graduates is largely dependent on how students learn new material. Data for undergraduate (Obreshkov, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017, 2020a) and graduate (Obreshkov, 2017, 2018) students are included in our earlier research. Obreshkov (2020b, 2020c) investigated how the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic affected university tourism students' attitudes and actions. The aim of the current study is to determine the learning styles of first year (2023/24) tourism and hospitality students (class of 2027).

METHODOLOGY

All first-year students majoring in tourism and hospitality at the University of Food Technologies – Plovdiv, Bulgaria enrolled in first year were given structured questionnaires containing nineteen, eight, and twelve questions, respectively, in order to determine the functional brain asymmetry, learning style preferences, and visual-auditory-kinesthetic profile of the students. Data were collected when the students were in the university. The data obtained were processed with MS Excel and Origin.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was set at the beginning of fall semester (course "Introduction to Tourism") as well as in spring semester ("Food and Beverages Quality") in 2023/24 within the first two weeks of the beginning of the relevant semester. In most cases, the response rate (Table 1) was more than 0.8, i.e. more than 80 % of all potential 60 students participated in the surveys. Each student could participate in three surveys, namely for evaluating the learning style preferences (LSP), functional brain asymmetry (FBA), and visual-auditory-kinesthetic (VAK) profile of the students in Tourism (M1F), in Hotel and Restaurant Management (MF2), and Nutrition and Tourism (M3F). One survey was excluded due to incomplete responses.

Table 1. Sample: Full-time students from University of Food Technologies in Tourism

Major	MF1	MF2	MF3
Professional field	Tourism		Food Technologies
Period of data acquisition	Sep 2023		Feb 2024
Number of potential respondents	16	27	17
Response Rate FBA/LSP/VAK	0.88 / 0.88 / 0.81		0.88 / 0.82 / 0.88
Gender F:M ratio FBA/LSP/VAK	1.85 / 2.17 / 1.92		0.88 / 1.00 / 0.88
Discipline	Introduction to Tourism		Food and Beverages Quality

The total surveys analyzed were 155. Responses were provided from students in tourism and hospitality from three origins: Bulgarian, Serbian, and Ukrainian. There were four left-handers (three males and one female) in the full-time class (Total). Thus, almost 8% of the sample were left-handers. The three male left-handers were represented by one representative in each of the examined specialties, namely M1F, M2F, and M3F. The female left-hander was enrolled in M3F.

The analysis of the obtained results reveals that in the professional field of Tourism there is a clear distinction between respondents, regarding the dominant use of the right and left cerebral hemispheres (Figure 1). A more detailed analysis reveals that respondents in the M1F specialty are left-brain dominant, while in the M2F specialty there is parity, that is, an equal number of respondents are dominated by the left and right brain hemispheres. At the same time, among the respondents in the M3F engineering tourism specialty, about 13% of the respondents stand out, in which no dominant brain asymmetry is revealed (the respondents are male). In the class of 2027, the full-time respondents with a dominant left hemisphere generally predominate, and the ratio of left-dominant to right-hemisphere dominant is almost twice, i.e. 2:1. This is observed in both male and female respondents.

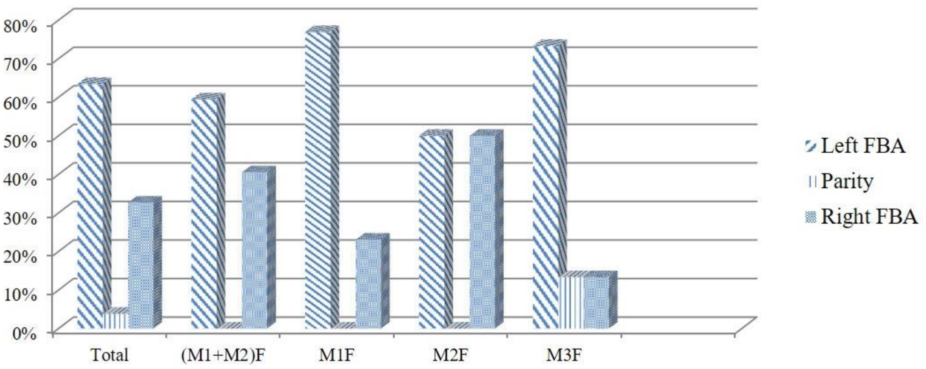

Figure 1. Left and right brain hemisphericity in full-time class of 2027 evaluated in 2023/24

A careful analysis of the obtained data demonstrates that the M1F specialty is dominated by respondents who study effectively alone (54% of the specialty), while the M3F specialty is dominated by respondents who study effectively in a group (79% of the specialty).

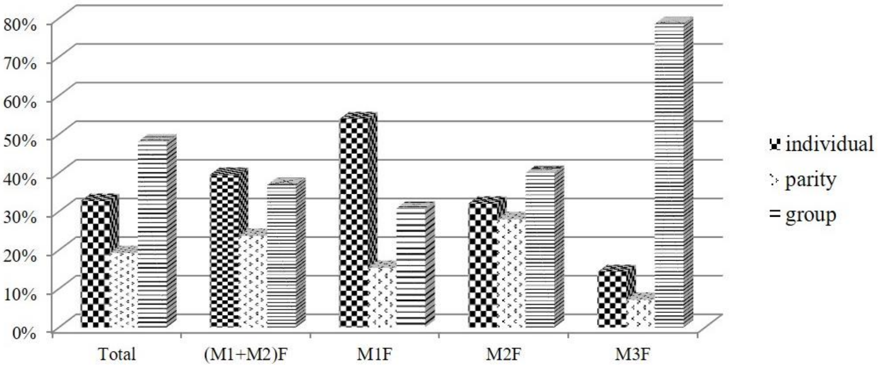

Figure 2. Learning style preferences in full-time class of 2027 evaluated in 2023/24

In the M2F specialty, the shares of respondents who learn effectively alone and those who learn effectively in a group are 32% and 40%, respectively, and bimodal respondents represent 28% of the sample. For the class of 2027 (Figure 2), the ratios are 33%, 48%, and 19%, respectively. Among male respondents, the number of those who learn effectively alone and the number of those who learn effectively in a group are approximately equal, while among female respondents, those who learn effectively in a group predominate.

The data obtained from the research reveals the diversity of modalities between the different majors in the class of 2027 (Figure 3).

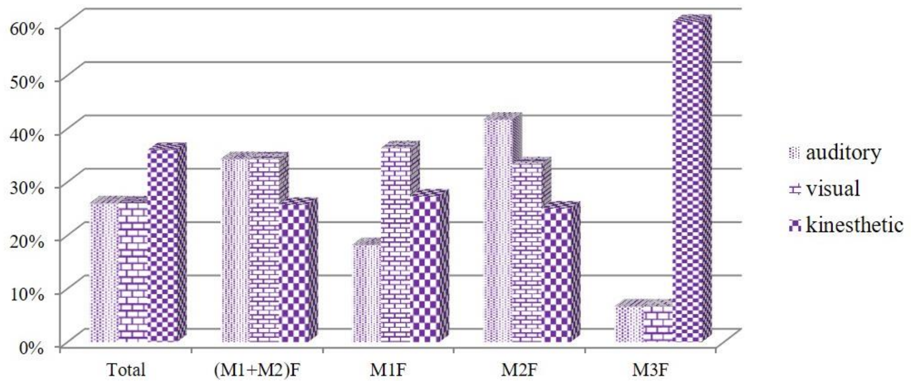

Figure 3. The predominant VAK modalities in full-time class of 2027 evaluated in 2023/24

For the M1F specialty, the visual preference is dominant, followed by kinesthetic and auditory preferences. Compared to a previous study (Obreshkov 2020a), first-year students admitted in 2019/20 (class of 2023), i.e. first year at university during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic start are dominated by the kinesthetic preference.

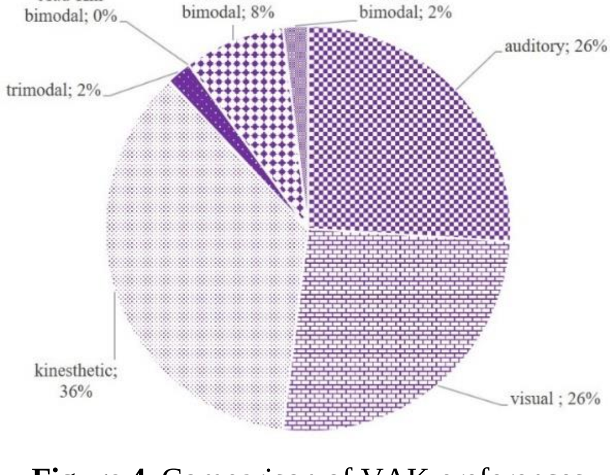

Figure 4. Comparison of VAK preferences

In the M2F specialty, the other specialty in the professional field of tourism, the preferences follow the order: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic, while in the specialty M3F kinesthetic is clearly expressed (60% of the sample), followed by auditory and visual (each with 7%). Comparison of VAK preferences among the first-year tourism and hospitality students is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 5. Ratio distribution between the unimodal learning styles

Only one male respondent shows a trimodal learning style. The distribution of unimodal learning styles for the full-time class of 2027 is presented on Figure 5.

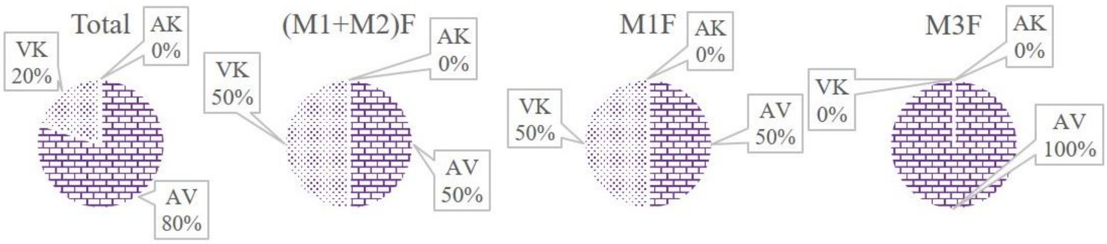

Figure 6. Distribution of bimodal learning styles

Bimodal learning styles are missing in the M2F specialty. In specialty M1F, there are expressed distinct Aud-Vis (AV) and Vis-Kin (VK) bimodalities, and in specialty M3F – only Aud-Vis (AV) bimodality. The distribution of bimodal respondents for the class of 2027 is revealed in Figure 6.

CONCLUSIONS

The three studied tourism specialties show a different profile in terms of dominant brain hemisphere, i.e. in two of the specialties the left hemisphere dominates, while in one of the specialties M2F – there is parity between students who are dominated by the left brain hemisphere and by the right hemisphere. Nevertheless, for all majors, respectively for the entire class of 2027, the share of respondents with a dominant right brain hemisphere is not less than

10%. Similar observations have been registered in relation to learning style preferences. The share of respondents who learn effectively alone or the share of those who learn effectively in a group dominate in different majors. In one major there is almost a parity between individualistic, group-oriented or bimodal respondents. In the sample that concerns visual-auditory-kinesthetic profiles of the students, each of the three researched specialties is dominated by either visual, auditory, or kinesthetic preference when perceiving new information. Just one respondent who is male exhibits a trimodal learning style, while two male and three female respondents are bimodal. The major finding from our study is that the obtained results suggest a different approach when offering the study content for each of the three tourism specialties at the Bulgarian university.

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PECULIARITIES OF ACCOUNTING FOR EXPENSES OF A TRAVEL COMPANY

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ABSTRACT: *Tourism is one of the formative sectors of the economy of many countries. And the accounting of travel companies has its own peculiarities, and first of all in terms of revenue and expenses, this is due to the fact that travel companies form and sell various travel products, provide services, etc. From a methodological point of view, it is necessary to specify the procedure for accounting for the cost of the purchased travel package from the supplier, expenses for future periods, expenses incurred as a result of unforeseen situations (pandemic, etc.). In this article, the author, analyzing the theory and practice of accounting for travel companies in terms of expenses, reveals the procedure for organizing accounting for such elements of financial statements.*

KEYWORDS: *cost, expenses, travel company*

INTRODUCTION

A positive trend in the development of the tourism sector of the economy of any country is characterized as quantitative indicators, affecting: the growth of exports of services, foreign currency flows into the country, as well as qualitative indicators of the economy: the growth of the country's image, its rating, etc. At the same time, it should be noted that the dynamics of the tourism industry is influenced by many factors: the season, tourist routes, the epidemiological state in the world, inflation, the economic crisis and many other factors.

All these factors affect the income and expenses of a travel company, thereby forming a financial result. It should be noted that the methodology of accounting for the expenses of a travel company has not been sufficiently developed. First of all, this is due to the various services provided by a travel company, as well as the need for proper classification of travel company costs, their distribution and accounting. It should be noted that the expenses of a travel company are related to income from travel services.

In this regard, let's consider the dynamics of revenue of travel companies in the Republic of Moldova in recent years.

The dynamics of revenue of travel companies in the Republic of Moldova is shown in the following figure.

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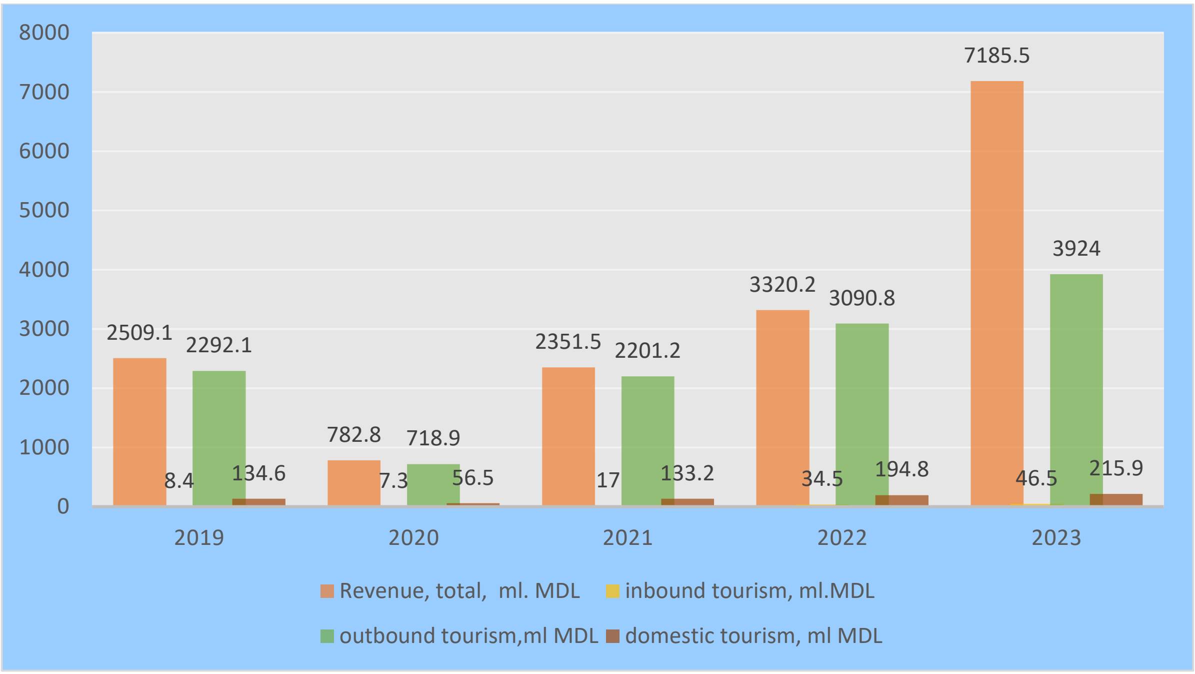

Figure 1. *The revenue of Moldovan travel companies in dynamics.*
Sourse:elaborated by the author based on statistical data (Activ 2023)

Analyzing the data in Figure 1, it can be stated that the conditions of the pandemic have significantly reduced the revenues of companies in the tourism industry of the Republic of Moldova. However, they increased the expenses of travel companies, in addition to the usual ones, they also added expenses related to force majeure events. The appropriate allocation of expenses for the reporting period or for the future, correct classification and reflection on the accounts, leads to the correct disclosure and presentation of information in the financial statements and the correct determination of the financial result.

METHODOLOGY

During the research, methods were used that relate to both general scientific and private ones. The following general scientific methods were used: the historical method, which involves the study of various processes and phenomena in chronological order; the study and generalization, analysis of the results and information obtained; comparison; synthesis; induction and deduction; analogy; classification.

Private research methods have also been applied, which are used in certain branches of knowledge and are necessary to study individual, specific issues. For example: a method of analyzing documents based on the study of information (document) recorded in written or printed form, on magnetic film, in electronic form. The application of this method gives the author the opportunity to determine the structure and elements of the system under study, establish the relationships that exist between these elements, study the functioning of this system, and acquire the information necessary to change it.

DISCUSSION

The main problems of the methodology and practice of accounting for tourism activities are the issues of formation and accounting of the cost of services rendered. Tourism companies can form and sell various tourism products, which, in accordance with Law 352/2006 "On the organization and implementation of tourism activities in the Republic of Moldova" (352 2006), represent a set of property and services offered to consumers, while a package of tourism services represents at least two different types of tourism services for the implementation of a single tour or vacation, which are sold or offered for sale as a single product, while the cost of each service is not determined separately.

The sale of travel packages is the provision of services, respectively, in accounting, the costs of their formation are taken into account according to the rules established for this type of activity. The cost of a tourist product is a cost estimate of the material and other resources used in the process of formation (production) and sale of a tourist product, as well as other costs for its production and sale. The main problem of cost formation is the allocation of costs and their accounting. The general rules for cost accounting are regulated by the National Accounting Standards of the Republic of Moldova "Inventories" (Inven 2014), which establishes that the costs associated with the provision of services are recorded in accordance with the Methodological Guidelines on accounting for production costs and cost calculation of products and services.

Travel companies independently develop methods for including costs in the cost of travel services and products. However, the cost accounting methods adopted by the enterprise should not contradict the provisions of the Law 287/2017 "On Accounting and Financial Reporting" of the Republic of Moldova, which establishes that a travel company must ensure the development, approval and application of accounting policies in accordance with accounting standards. (Law 2017).

The cost of a tourist product is a cost estimate of the material and other resources used in the process of its production and sale, as well as other costs incurred to provide the relevant services. According to the provisions of the NAS "Inventories", the cost of services of a tourist company includes material costs, personnel costs and indirect production costs. Seasonal fluctuations in demand have a significant impact on the organization of accounting for costs and expenses of tourist activities, therefore, special attention should be paid to accounting for costs and expenses in the off-season period.

Thus, the costs incurred by a tourist enterprise in a given reporting period, but related to the following reporting periods, are preliminarily taken into account as part of expenses of future periods. This facilitates their uniform inclusion in the cost of services produced and rendered during both high and low seasons.

The specifics of the activities of tourist enterprises affect the organization of cost accounting and cost calculation of a tourist product. When forming the cost of a tourist product, enterprises can choose one of the cost calculation methods: simple, process, order-based, standard or other method established in accounting policies. As a rule, the object of cost accounting and cost calculation is a separate order for the formation of a specific tourist product or a group of typical tourist products. For tourism activities, the order-based method of calculating the cost of a tourist product is the most acceptable.

The calculation of the cost of services provided not only allows you to determine the amount of resources spent, but also serves as a basis for setting the price of the sale of a tourist package and for making optimal management and financial decisions. When calculating the cost of a travel package, travel companies can divide the costs into fixed and variable, direct or indirect. For example: the calculation of a travel package may include:

- *Direct costs:* Transportation services, accommodation costs, booking services, excursion, cultural and entertainment services, visa services, other direct costs,
- *Indirect costs:* Salaries and deductions for compulsory social insurance, travel expenses, depreciation of long-term assets, share of rent, other indirect costs.

Accounting of expenses for the formation of a tourist product can be carried out with or without the use of management accounts. When using the latter option, the formation of cost accounting for tourist products is carried out using the "Work in progress" account. Even if a travel company does not produce products, which means they do not have unfinished products, nevertheless, they may have unfinished production. This is the amount of costs for the production of a tourist product, an uncovered tourist product, an unfinished tour that was not sold in the reporting period. The rules for evaluating work-in-progress are prescribed in accounting policies and can be carried out for all cost items of calculation, or for direct production costs. Accounting for the costs incurred in the formation of a package tour is conducted on the calculation account "Main activity", in the development of which it is advisable to open second-order accounts for areas of tourist activity or types of tourism, for example:

- *the costs of forming a tourist product,*
- *the cost of forming a package tour,*
- *the cost of conducting excursions, etc.*

In practice, small enterprises of the tourism business attribute these costs directly to the cost of the product. In multi-profile tourism enterprises, costs related to different types of activities and different tourist products are reflected in the "Indirect production costs" account.

These costs are included in the cost of travel products by distributing them according to the selected base (income from the sale of services, wages of employees directly included in costs, etc.) for certain types of services and products. The coefficient of distribution of indirect costs is calculated as the ratio of the total amount of indirect costs and the distribution base provided for by the accounting policies of the tourist enterprise.

In accounting, the formation of the cost of a tourist product is reflected in the debit of the account "Main activity", in correspondence with the accounts that reflect:

• *used materials,*

• *low-value and quickly wearing items,*

• *direct wages and deductions for social security of employees of a tourist company directly involved in servicing tourists, etc.*

The following costs are collected separately in the account "Indirect production costs" in accounting:

- ✓ *business trip expenses,*
- ✓ *electricity, heating, water supply,*
- ✓ *other indirect costs for the provision of services.*

The information on costs generated in the accounts "Main activity", "Indirect production costs" should facilitate correct pricing of the services rendered. Then, indirect costs, based on the methodology approved in the accounting policies, are written off to the main activity by the following accounting entry:

Debit "Main activity"

Credit "Indirect production costs".

When forming the cost of tourism services, the following accounting entry is given:

Debit "Cost of sales"

Credit "Main activity"

It should be noted that from a methodological point of view, the cost of a package of travel services purchased from a supplier should not be included in the cost of services rendered, for this purpose a special account "Travel packages: cost of the supplier" should be introduced in the company's chart of accounts to account for direct costs of services and rights purchased from third-party organizations. At the same time, the cost of the rights and services received, used in the formation of the package, is reflected by the debit of this account in correspondence with the account "Short-term commercial obligations". This account must be closed for revenue from services rendered.

The following accounting entries are methodologically correct to record when purchasing turistic packages from suppliers for further sale:

- for the cost of travel packages received from the supplier:

Debit "Travel packages: cost of the supplier"

Credit "Short-term commercial obligations",

- for the amount of accounts receivable for the sold travel package purchased from the supplier:

Debit "Short-term commercial accounts receivable"

Credit "Travel packages: cost of the supplier"

- for the cost of the travel company's commission:

Debit "Short-term commercial accounts receivable" account

Credit of the "Revenue"

Such a system of accounting records contributes to the correct accounting of revenue and expenses and, accordingly, the presentation and disclosure of information in the financial statements.

To determine the full commercial cost of a tourist product, it is necessary to take into account the costs of promoting and selling the tourist product (sales costs are recorded into account on the separate account), as well as administrative expenses.

With regard to commercial expenses, please note that, in accordance with the specifics of the activities carried out by a tourist enterprise, expenses related to the promotion and sale of tourist products, participation in exhibitions, and advertising may relate to other reporting periods. In such cases, expenses are recorded in advance on the "Current expenses of future periods" account by an accounting record:

Debit "Current expenses of future periods" account - for the amount of business expenses,

Credit "Short-term commercial obligations"-for the cost of services provided by suppliers to promote a tourist product, *Credit "Materials" -for the cost of advertising materials.*

In the future, depending on the provisions of the accounting policies of the travel company, these expenses will be written off as business expenses, depending on the approved methodology.

It should be noted that in addition to the costs of creating a travel product, travel companies have a number of other costs of a managerial, administrative and commercial nature. These include salaries of administrative staff with corresponding deductions, advertising expenses, rent and maintenance of administrative premises, etc.

The process of forming and accounting for the corresponding expenses is regulated by the rules of the National Accounting Standards "Expenses" and the General Plan of Accounts of Accounting. If a travel company, in addition to promoting and selling its own tourism products, also sells other commercial services, cost accounting is carried out separately according to the types of activities carried out.

It should be noted that in practice, some travel companies reflect the cost of generated services as an asset, using such account as a "Products", and when writing off the cost of services sold, an accounting record is made:

Debit "Cost of sales"

Credit "Products"

It should be noted that from a methodological point of view, reflecting a tourist product initially as an asset on the "Products" account is not entirely correct, since it represents services, not products, which, when sold, form their cost.

Another controversial issue concerns the accounting of expenses and losses as a result of the pandemic and other similar expenses. Some accounting experts believe that these expenses should be reflected as other expenses from operating activities. The author is of the opinion that these are extraordinary expenses and for the correct preparation of a financial report, these expenses should be reflected under such an item.

CONCLUSIONS

It should be stated that in the conditions of economic crisis the expenses of tourist firms can increase significantly, first of all it concerns the cost of tourist products received by suppliers, the growth of advertising expenses, the increase in the number of canceled tours, etc. However, among the expenses of the period, accounting for the cost of services rendered is the most important.

In this regard, it should be noted that cost accounting and costing of tourist products and services of tour operators and travel agencies has its own peculiarities, which is reflected, in particular, in the realization of costs for the formation of tourist packages and services much earlier than the actual provision.

Special attention in the organization of cost accounting requires the choice of methods, techniques and options for determining, allocating, recognizing costs and the correct formation of the cost. It is one of the main economic instruments for regulating the production process and evaluating the activities of tourism businesses.

Analyzing the methodology for reflecting the cost of services rendered in the accounting, it should be noted that it should not include the cost of the travel package received from the supplier. For this, a special account "Tourist packages: supplier's cost" should be introduced, which will reflect the receipt and write-off of this cost. To correctly reflect financial information in the profit and loss statement, the amount of losses incurred from the consequences of the pandemic should be reflected in extraordinary expenses.

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BEYOND THE HEADLINES: QUANTIFYING INSURGENCY'S IMPACT ON NORTHEAST INDIA'S TOURISM- POST COVID-19

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ABSTRACT: *Insurgency poses a severe threat to the societal stability, economic development and tourism of any destination. Hence the present study analyzes the impact of insurgency on societal aspects, budgetary expenditure, and tourist arrivals in the India's Northeast Region (NER) encompassing a period of 27 years (1997-2023). Here regression analyses were employed to examine the influence of insurgency on these variables and their interconnectedness. The findings revealed a significant & negative correlation between insurgency incidents and 'societal impact (as measured by casualties), budgetary expenditure, and tourism arrivals' within the NER. As insurgency decisively undermines tourism performance by diminishing visitor numbers, this emphasizes the detrimental economic consequences of instability within tourist destinations. This can be viewed in the form of reduced tourism activity, lost revenue, decreased employment, and broader negative impacts on the regional economy. Apart from this, long-term effect of insurgency on the society has also maligned the destination's perceived safety, security, and overall reputation. Hence the present study proposes contemporary policy interventions (based on the findings), to mitigate these challenges and foster the NER's tourism potential.*

Keywords: *Tourist Arrivals, Insurgency, Societal Impact, Budgetary Expenditure, NER, India,*

INTRODUCTION

India's extraordinary diversity shines through its varied landscapes, regional cultures, and natural environments. The North-Eastern Region (NER) exemplifies this, boasting a remarkable range of terrain – from the heights of the Himalayas to lush rainforests – along with a spectrum of climates and unique cultural traditions. Positioned strategically with borders along Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, the NER serves as India's gateway to Southeast Asia (Toppo, 2016). Access to the NER from the rest of India depends upon a narrow stretch of land known as the "Chicken's Neck"(Hazarika, 2004). This region comprises of seven states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura – collectively known as the "Land of Seven Sisters."

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As far as insurgency is concerned it has complex roots, dating back to India's Independence and further compounded by an array of social, historical, and political factors (Kotwal, 2000). Ethnic diversity, coupled with historical isolation of tribal groups and governance challenges, later played a key role in exacerbating the instability (Riamei, 2023). The NER is home to over 40 active insurgency groups (Singh, 2019), including prominent names like the Naga Insurgent Group, Mizo National Front, United Liberation Front of Assam, People‘s Liberation Army, Bodo Security Forces, All Tripura Tribal Force and others (Chadha, 2015; Hazarika, 2004). These groups engage in conflicts with the central government and often with one another to establish dominance within the region. The tactics employed by some insurgent groups rely on extortion, kidnapping, and illegal taxation to fund their activities, which further contribute to the sense of insecurity within the NER (Chadha, 2015).

Hence the current research seeks to analyze the wide-ranging impacts of insurgency on the socio-economic aspects as well as their cumulative influence on the tourism sector of the North East Region. Following (Broadbent, 2007) assertion, "If you can't measure it, how can you manage it?", this study's findings will play a pivotal role in helping the government agencies and policymakers to develope targeted strategies, for addressing the multifaceted challenges in the NER and facilitating its overall progress and development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The complex nature of this study, aiming to evaluate and diagnose the impacts of insurgency in the NER, necessitates a multi-pronged methodological approach. Here's an outline of the key considerations and methods employed:

Objectives

1. To analyse the social impacts of insurgency incidents on the **North-Eastern Region** of India.
2. To examine the influence of 'insurgency & its social impacts' on the 'budgetary expenditure' of this region.
3. **To investigate the influence of insurgency incidents, social impacts, and budgetary expenditure on tourist arrivals in the North-Eastern Region of India.**

Sample Size and Sampling Method:

Geographic Focus: The study centers on the seven states comprising the North Eastern Region of India. ***Time Frame:*** To gain a comprehensive understanding of long-term trends, the analysis encompasses a 27-year timeline from 1997 to 2023. This period allows for the observation of patterns and potential correlations between insurgency, its social consequences, and subsequent impacts on tourism. ***Data Sources:*** While the research draws heavily on reliable secondary sources (MHA, 2023; MoT, 2023), primary data plays a crucial role in supplementing and validating findings. This careful combination of sources ensures a robust evidence base for analysis. ***Data Collection and Structure:*** To effectively examine the relationships between insurgency, its ripple effects, and tourism trends, data collection followed a structured format:

Insurgency Incidents: The total number of recorded insurgency incidents serves as a baseline indicator of the level of disruption within the region. ***Social Impact:*** This multifaceted category includes the following aspects, providing a nuanced view of the consequences of insurgency on daily life and community well-being:

Civilians killed, Persons kidnapped, Security forces killed, Number of extremists killed, arrested, or surrendered

Budgetary Expenditure*:** Tracking actual budget expenditures over the 27-year period reveals shifts in government priorities and potential resource constraints that may be influenced by insurgency-related challenges. ***Tourist Arrival: Recording the total number of domestic and international tourists visiting the North-Eastern states allows for the identification of potential correlations between insurgency levels, social disruption, and tourism activity.

Data Collection Methods

Insurgency Incidents and Social Impact: Recognizing the sensitive nature of this data, both primary and secondary sources were carefully used. **Primary:** Information was meticulously obtained from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, through the Right to Information (RTI) Act. This ensures the highest level of reliability and accuracy. **Secondary:** Reputable sources such as the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP, 2024), publications of the Press Information Bureau (PIB, 2022), and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA, 2023) provided supplementary data points and context for analysis.

Budgetary Expenditure: To understand resource allocation patterns, data was gathered from official portals, offering transparency and accountability:

Websites of the North East Council(NEC, 2024), North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi, 2023), Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER, 2023), Directorate of Economics & Statistics (DES, 2022)websites of North Eastern states

Tourist Arrivals: The following ensured comprehensive and accurate tourist data;

- India Tourism Statistics reports, published by the Ministry of Tourism, provided a national-level view of visitor trends(MoT, 2023).
- Statistical Handbooks of individual North-Eastern states were essential in capturing granular, state-level tourist data over the study period (Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, 2021; Govt. of Assam, 2023; Govt. of Manipur, 2021; Govt. of Meghalaya, 2019; Govt. of Mizoram, 2022; Govt. of Nagaland, 2023; Govt. of Tripura, 2022).

Finally, **Table 1** would significantly enhance this section by providing a clear summary of data types, sources, and collection methods.

Table 1: Type, Source & methods of Data collection

Sl. No.	Data related to	Type of Data	Source of Data	References
1	**Number of insurgency incidents**	Primary	Ministry of Home Affairs Govt. of Indiathrough Right to Information Act	--
2	**Social Impact** (a) Number of civilians killed (b) Persons kidnapped (c) Security forces killed (d) Extremist killed/ arrested/ surrendered	Secondary	South Asia Terrorism Portal Press Information Bureau, GOI Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI	(SATP, 2024) (PIB, 2022) (MHA, 2023)
3	**Budgetary impact** (a) Budget allocated (b) Actual expenditures	Secondary	North East Council-NEC N.E. Dev. Finance Corp. Ltd Ministry of Development of N.E. Region (MDoNER) Directorate of Economics & Statistics (DES)	(NEC, 2024) (NEDFi, 2023) (MDoNER, 2023) (DES, 2022)
4	**Tourist Arrival** (a) Domestic Tourist Arrival (b) Foreign Tourist Arrival	Secondary	India Tourism Statistics reports, MoT- Govt of India. Statistical Handbooks of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura & Arunachal Pradesh	(MoT, 2023) (Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, 2021; Govt. of Assam, 2023; Govt. of Manipur, 2021; Govt. of Meghalaya, 2019; Govt. of Mizoram, 2022; Govt. of Nagaland, 2023; Govt. of Tripura, 2022; MoT, 2023)

Proposed Model & Formation of Hypotheses

A thorough review of relevant literature establishes a well-documented correlation between insurgency incidents and their wide-ranging impacts on the physical, social, and economic spheres of affected regions. Of particular significance is the demonstrated adverse effect of insurgency on regional tourism sectors. This research endeavour focuses on a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon within the context of the North-Eastern Region (NER) of India. It will assess the influence of insurgency, and its associated social and economic consequences, on the NER's tourism potential. Additionally, the study will examine the complex interrelationships between these variables.

Informed by the literature review, a hypothetical model was developed **(Figure-1)** as a guiding framework for the research. This model underpins the formulation of six specific hypotheses. These hypotheses are designed to test the following:

Hypotheses:

***H_1*: Insurgency incidents in the NER have a significant negative impact on the society.**

***H_2*: Insurgency has a significant impact on the budgetary expenditures of the region.**

***H_3*: Social impacts of insurgency significantly affect budgetary expenditure of NER.**

***H_4*: Insurgency has a significant negative influence on the tourist arrivals in the NER.**

***H_5*: Social impacts of insurgency significantly influence the tourist arrivals in the NER.**

***H_6*:** The Budgetary expenditure significantly influences the tourist arrival in the NER.

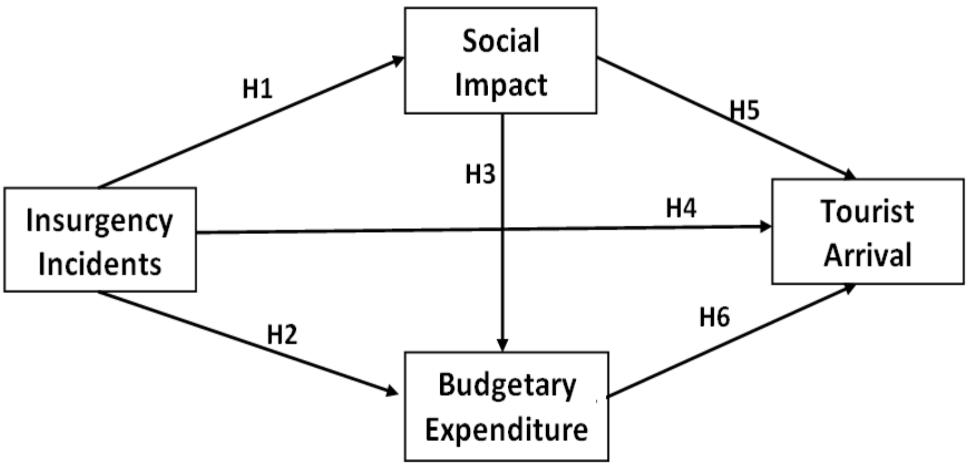

Figure 1: Proposed model for testing the impact of insurgency.

Data Analysis Techniques & Tools: ***Data Preparation and Validation:*** Collected data adhered to essential parametric assumptions and underwent meticulous preparation. Confirmation of normality established suitability for regression analysis. A correlation matrix (Table-2) verified critical assumptions: **Linearity:** Assessment validated the modeling of relationships between dependent and independent variables using linear functions. **Multicollinearity:** Analysis ensured minimal redundancy among independent variables, safeguarding against statistical bias. Acceptable thresholds guided the assessment, as defined by(Graham, 2003; Pedhazur Schmelkin, 1982).

In conclusion, to empirically assess the hypothesized relationships, three regression analyses were employed (utilizing the least squares method). These analyses investigated the influence of insurgency on the societal, budgetary, and tourist arrivals in NER of India, along with the interrelationships among these variables (Tables 3 & 4).

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Analysis (Matrix)

	Insurgency incidents	**Social impact**	**Budgetary Impact**	**Tourist Arrival**
Insurgency Incidents	1.000			
Social Impact	.790	1.000		
Budgetary Expenditure	-.767	-.604	1.000	
Tourist Arrival	-.677	-.634	.423	1.000

RESULTS

The first regression equation analyzed the influence of 'insurgency incidents' (IV) on 'social impact' (DV) in NER of India. Results indicate that 62.4% of the variation in social impact can be explained by 'insurgency incidents' in the NER. This demonstrates that insurgency incidents have a substantial impact on society. The regression model is statistically significant, as indicated by a high F-value ($F=39.823$, $p<0.001$) (see Table 3). Additionally, the simple regression coefficient reveals that a one-unit increase in insurgency incidents leads to a 0.790 unit increase in 'social impact' ($\beta=0.790$, $p<0.001$) (see Table 4). This positive relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

Table 3: Model summary for different regression analysis

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
Insurgency incidents	Social impact	.790	.624	.608	174.839	39.823	.000
Insurgency incidents & Social impact	Budgetary Expenditure	.767	.588	.552	347.258	16.432	.000
Insurgency incidents, Social impact & Budgetary expenditure	Tourist Arrival	.712	.507	.440	2195776.945	7.555	.001

The second regression equation examined the influence of independent variables (insurgency incidents and its social impact) on the dependent variable i.e. budgetary expenditure of the region. The R-squared value (adjusted R-squared = 0.552) indicates that the model explains 55.2% of the variation in budgetary expenditure. Additionally, the F-value ($F = 16.432$, $p < 0.001$) confirms the statistical significance of the overall regression model (Table 3). The regression coefficient for insurgency incidents ($\beta = -0.770$, $p < 0.05$) suggests a negative and statistically significant influence on the region's budgetary expenditure. This implies that higher insurgency incidents lead to lower budgetary expenditure. Conversely, the social impact variable's coefficient was not statistically significant (Table 4), indicating no significant influence on budgetary expenditure. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (H2) regarding insurgency incidents is accepted, while the alternative hypothesis (H3) regarding social impact is rejected.

Table 4: Regression coefficients

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Un-standardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	*t*	Sig.	Hypothesis Accepted
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
Constant	Social impact	408.804	69.848		5.853	.000	
Insurgency incidents		.390	.062	.790	6.311	.000	***Yes***
Constant	Budgetary expenditure	1493.506	216.137		6.910	.000	
Insurgency incidents		-.706	.200	-.770	-3.530	.002	***Yes***
Social impact		.007	.405	.004	.018	.986	No
Constant	Tourist Arrival	11201276.6	2396945.9		4.673	.000	

Insurgency incidents		-3362.083	1570.551	-.649	-2.141	.044	***Yes***
Social impact		-2768.881	2563.580	-.264	-1.080	.292	No
Budgetary expenditure		-1323.393	1318.475	-.234	-1.004	.326	No

This final regression analysis investigated the combined effects of insurgency incidents, its social impacts, and budgetary expenditure on tourist arrivals. The model explained a significant portion of the variation in tourist arrivals (adjusted $R^2 = 0.440$). The F-statistic ($F = 7.555$) was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating a good fit between the model and the data (see Table 3). The coefficient for insurgency incidents ($\beta = -0.649$, $p < 0.05$) revealed a negative and statistically significant relationship with tourist arrivals. This suggests that a one-unit increase in insurgency incidents is associated with a 0.649-unit decrease in tourist arrivals. In other words, higher levels of insurgency significantly deter tourism in the North East Region of India. The remaining independent variables, social impact and budgetary expenditure, did not exert statistically significant effects on tourist arrivals ($p > 0.05$) (see Table 4). Consequently, the alternative hypothesis (H4) regarding insurgency incidents is supported, whereas hypotheses H5 and H6 concerning social impact and budgetary expenditure, respectively, are rejected.

DISCUSSIONS

This study demonstrates that loss aversion significantly influences tourist decision-making regarding insurgency-affected destinations. Findings conclusively establish the adverse impact of insurgency incidents on societal casualties, budgetary expenditure within the NER, and tourist arrivals (H_1, H_2, and H_4). While this study offers a valuable integrated analysis for tourism crisis management theory, it builds upon prior research that independently examined the effects of insurgency on budget allocation (Khalid et al., 2020), societal impact (Ikpe, 2017), and tourism(Dhariwal, 2005).

Furthermore, the substantial negative social impact of insurgency incidents is also evident. The increased frequency or severity of insurgency events exacerbates consequences such as fatalities among civilians, security forces, and insurgents (Pedersen, 2002), widespread displacement, disruption of essential services, psychological trauma, and the erosion of social cohesion. The above fact is in line with the results of the study as three of the hypotheses (H_1, H_2, and H_4) were found to be true, confirming that insurgency increases societal casualties

(Murdoch and Sandler, 2002; Nair et al., 2023), strains budgetary expenditure(Ikpe, 2017), and undermines tourist arrivals (Sönmez, 1998).

The paramount importance of safety and security for tourists is well-documented(Correia et al., 2013; Prayag and Ryan, 2011). This study's findings regarding the negative influence of insurgency on tourist arrivals in the NER underscore the economic consequences of instability. Decreased tourism activity results in lost revenue, reduced employment opportunities, and a broader decline in regional economic development. Consequently, addressing the root causes of insurgency is a critical prerequisite for creating a stable environment conducive to sustainable economic growth.

CONCLUSION

Theoretical Contributions:

This study underscores the detrimental impact of insurgency incidents on fostering a safe and socio-economically viable tourism ecosystem. The findings reinforce the well-established notion that tourists prioritize safety and security when choosing destinations, leading them to avoid conflict zones. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this research offers a novel contribution by examining the combined effects of insurgency on tourism, budgetary expenditure, and societal casualties. The ramifications of conflict extend far beyond the immediate repercussions on the tourism industry. Increased conflicts create significant burdens on government budgets, while social issues such as displacement and fatalities lead to an erosion of a region's overall quality of life (Murdoch and Sandler, 2002; Pedersen, 2002; Sinha and Nair, 2023). These findings illuminate the far-reaching costs associated with violence and underscore the critical importance of pursuing peaceful resolutions. It further outlines the specific ways in which insurgency undermines social well-being of the people, which would ultimately guide the strategist aimed at fostering resilience and supporting affected communities. Ultimately, the study confirms that a region cannot cultivate a thriving tourism sector or a robust economy in general, while entrenched in ongoing conflict. Peace and stability serve as fundamental prerequisites for attracting tourists and investors. Troublingly, a vicious cycle often emerges in violence-stricken regions and the conflict deters the tourism industry as well, thereby inflicting harm on the economy. The resulting situation further impedes efforts to address the root causes of insurgency and mitigate its devastating social consequences essential for lasting change.

Practical Contributions:

This study suggests several practical implications for regions recovering from insurgency. First, prioritizing safety and shifting negative perceptions are critical. Governments should invest in visible security measures (lighting, signage, communication) and partner with media to promote improved conditions. Second, strategic resource allocation is vital. This includes a Tourism Development Fund (TDF) for unsafe areas and collaborations with NGOs for post-conflict expertise. Third, addressing insurgency's root causes through community-based tourism and supporting peace initiatives that will create long-term stability. Finally, recovery requires "soft rebranding" that highlights the region's broader attractions alongside targeted outreach to niche tourist groups, gradually restoring the region's tourism sector.

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RECREATION POST COVID -19 OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH STANDARD AND ALTERNATIVE TYPES OF TOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Abstract: *Recreational activity is one of the most important manifestations of people's activity, necessary for their normal life. Recreation takes place in a variety of conditions, at home, outside, during tourist trips and is associated with mental and physical recovery. As we are all different individuals, we also have different ways of restoring our strength and spiritual energy. Therefore, it can be of two types – active (with management of various logy is an interdisciplinary science aimed at improving the quality of human life and health. It covers various scientific directions and methods of health restoration and prevention. Her initial position is that human health is the highest good. The subject of the present work is to expose the recreation opportunities through mass and/or alternative types of tourism. The object on which the scientific research is based is the mass and alternative type of tourism. The aim is to prove that a person's first and foremost responsibility is to take care of his own health. Unfortunately, in today's rapidly developing technological world, due to the intensifying processes of globalization, human health is at constant risk. All this poses the challenge to man to find a way to cope with these processes and at the same time to preserve his health through appropriate recreation. The results show that the most preferred type of recreation among the standard types is sea tourism, and among the alternative types - health tourism. Good health means physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual "balance". Violation of this balance leads to deterioration of the health condition. And since modern society is characterized by an extremely intense and stressful lifestyle, it concludes by emphasizing the leading role of recreation in the context of human health.*

Keywords: *recreation, standard, alternative type of tourism, human health.*

INTRODUCTION

The concentration of the population in large cities and megacities is a fact that is the result of the growing processes of urbanization and industrialization of society. We can specify the consequences in air pollution, destruction of nature, increasing levels of anxiety and restlessness among people and ultimately deteriorating mental, physical and emotional health.

The most preferred means of recreation among the economically active population is the travel. (mass or alternative type of tourism). What has been striking in recent years (especially after the Covid 19 pandemic) is that the group of tourists looking for the different and unique, i.e. they direct it to the so-called an alternative type of tourism that enters later than the mainstream, but offers a wide variety of types and forms.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Despite the advantages of urban life, this environment for humans is artificial and disconnected from the natural one in which they have lived for millennia. An artificial urban environment adversely affects the health of the population due to air pollution, lack of sunlight, water, as well as stressful situations caused by the stressful rhythm of life, "burn out" syndrome, population overcrowding, insufficient green areas, etc.

In the conditions of urban life, all aspects of maintaining people's lives are deteriorating: the supply of sufficient quantities of high-quality food and drinking water, control and prevention of air pollution, water resources, soil, disposal of accumulated hazardous substances, industrial and domestic waste, as well as social problems associated with a sharp decrease in free "living" space, an increase in diseases caused by environmental pollution.

Recreation can be active and passive. Active recreation, as a form of individual freedom for style and lifestyle and choice of motor activity, contributes to maintaining a good health status, aesthetic appearance combined with pleasant experiences. Passive recreation is associated with activities such as reading a book, listening to music, watching a good movie or simply contemplating nature.

The most preferred way of active recreation is travel, as part of recreational tourism.

Recreational tourism is "tourism and recreation to restore the physical and mental strength of people" (Tonchev and Mihailov, 2010), which can be carried out both through standard and alternative types of tourism. Mass tourism is associated with the travel and stay of a large number of organized tourists in large sea and mountain resorts. In theory and practice, there are no established quantitative limits for mass tourism, neither in terms of the number of tourists nor in terms of the size of the resorts. Mass tourism is defined by qualitative characteristics such as (Marinov and Koprinarov, 2010):

* Tourist offer of standard tours. packages or services offered by major companies in the tourist market;

* Tourist search for standard tours. products and services at the best possible price;

* Weak, often missing, relationships of tourists with the local community;

* Frequent manifestations of negative impacts in ecological, socio-cultural and economic aspects.

The opposite of the concept of "mass tourism" in tourism theory and practice is the term "alternative tourism", which includes:

* Tourist offer of a specialized tour. products and services from small medium-sized,

mostly family-run tourism companies;

* Tourist demand for personalized, experiential services;

* Types and forms of tourism, providing opportunities for intensive contact of the tourist with the local community;

* Forms of tourism without negative eco or socio-cultural and economic impacts on the local community.

The two mass and most popular recreational types of tourism are sea and mountain. Sea tourism has a dominant role in the structure of Bulgarian tourism. As a rule, it is associated with activities carried out on the basis of marine resources and their adjacent infrastructure (beaches). However, unlike the sea, which can be practiced as a priority during the summer season, the mountain does not have such time limits.

On the other hand, in the theoretical-practical development of S. Atanasova, emphasis is placed on the statement that cruise tourism is considered one of the most luxurious ways to make a trip (Atanasova, 2020). According to the cited development, this type of tourism provides rest and relaxation for tourists, combined with a luxurious environment and quality service.

Alternative tourism is different from mainstream tourism as it emphasizes the relationship between the guest and the host. This type of tourism offers much more than the passive viewing of a given landmark, it is addressed to each tourist individually - to the one who wants to learn something new during his vacation (BAAT).

The most popular types of alternative tourism, through which a person's mental and physical health can be restored, without pretensions to comprehensiveness and given the limited volume, are:

-Ecotourism – sustainable and nature-oriented tourism for recreation (Stefanova, 2011). As a type of tourism, it includes four main elements: Moving or traveling from one place to another. It should be next to undisturbed or protected natural areas, with eco-tourism focusing mainly on the experience in them; Ecotourism is nature-friendly; Ecotourism is driven by the idea of conservation. The aim is to have a minimal impact on the environment in the protected areas. Eco-tourists tend to think more about the impact on their surroundings than mass tourists and as a more specific type of tourism, eco-tourism proclaims "greater understanding and respect for culture, heritage and the natural environment, and people tend to protect what they are respected"; Ecotourism fulfills an educational role. An ecotourist usually has a great desire to learn more about nature and the local population during their visits. This makes eco-tourism a valuable source of knowledge for environmental protection and sustainable development of local communities (Narleva).

-Adventure tourism - a type of specialized tourism, in which the needs of tourists for sports, recreation and active recreation are met through their participation in various sporting events and activities (Stamov and Aleksieva, 2003).

-Cultural tourism - a combination of two concepts - culture and tourism. To be quite precise, we must consider the concept of "culture" in its narrow and broad sense. In a narrow sense, "culture" refers to the historical-artistic aspects of a given region, for example, architectural monuments, museums, etc., as presented in classic tourist catalogs. In a broader sense, culture covers customs, traditions, craftsmanship, historical and modern technical monuments, national cuisine, language, etc. It is behind everything we do, it is evident in our public and private life, in our everyday life, in our holidays, in our beliefs (Kasarova, 2010; Ilieva, 2011).

-Health tourism - Recreational services and medical tourism are developing at an intense pace even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main reasons are due to the growth of socially significant diseases, the stress in society's daily life, the need for recovery and relaxation, the aging of population, which respectively leads to an increased demand for health care and services. In Bulgaria, the risk factors leading to chronic, mass pathology are above all the socio-economic conditions, the feeling of insecurity, nervous exhaustion, neglected health culture and lack of early prevention. After the pandemic, the need for medical tourism trips related to advanced medical indications for recovery from a past covid infection increased.

These facts predetermined the potential in the development and demand of health tourism, the specifics of which shape the main lines of development: a complex medical-tourism product aimed at the physical, mental and spiritual health of a person. This specialized type of tourism has taken an almost central place in people's tourist trips, as it combines rest with various health procedures that have a beneficial effect on the general condition of the body (Yanakieva, 2022). The characteristic subtypes of health tourism are distinguished on a motivational basis and are as follows:

I. health treatment (medical) tourism - travel and stay for inpatient treatment or rehabilitation after treatment;

II. preventive health tourism - travel and stay to protect against specific diseases; health wellness or spa tourism - travel and residence to improve well-being by unloading and recharging the intellectual, physical and spiritual forces (Karadjova and Yanakieva, 2019).

III. rural tourism has a two-sided nature. On the one hand, it includes the stay of tourists in a rural environment and their passive or active interaction with it through the exercise of various activities and the consumption of various goods and services. On the other hand, it is a set of material amenities, activities, processes and products provided by farmers or rural residents in order to attract and retain tourists in their area and generate additional income for their business (Marinov and Koprinarov, 2010).

ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH OF RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH STANDARD AND ALTERNATIVE TYPES OF TOURISM

Research methodology

The period of the present study is 25.04.-01.05.2023.

The research scope is 161 respondents.

The scientific and practical research was carried out on the basis of a survey. "As an empirical research method, surveying presents a way of obtaining primary data, opinions and perceptions, through a set of questions written on a survey card" (Dechev, 2022) The questionnaire / survey / contains 5 questions - summarized in two directions - with a demographic focus and parameters of user opinions regarding: preferred standard / alternative type of tourism for recreation and recovery (Yangyozov, 2016).

The following research objectives were set:

To establish the respondents' preference for recreation and recovery - through standard or alternative types of tourism;

To specify which of the standard and which of the alternative types of tourism is the most desirable;

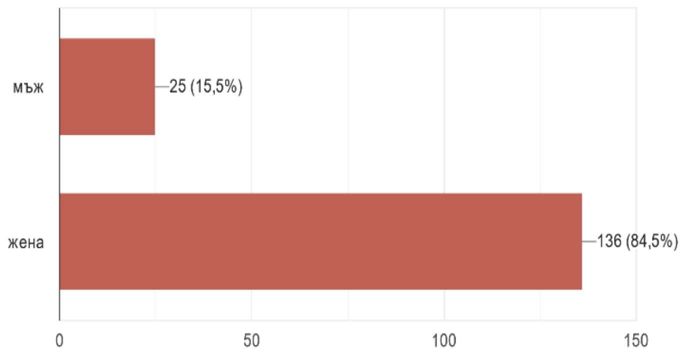
The data was collected by sending the questionnaire in electronic form to the respondents. Survey cards are entered, processed and presented graphically on the Google forms platform.

RESULTS

The analysis of the study is focused on summarizing the information from each answer from the anchor card and, accordingly, presenting it in an overview and understandable form. Unbiased analysis is the basis of reaching correct and guaranteeing results (Mihaleva et al., 2016; Karadjova and Yanakieva, 2019).

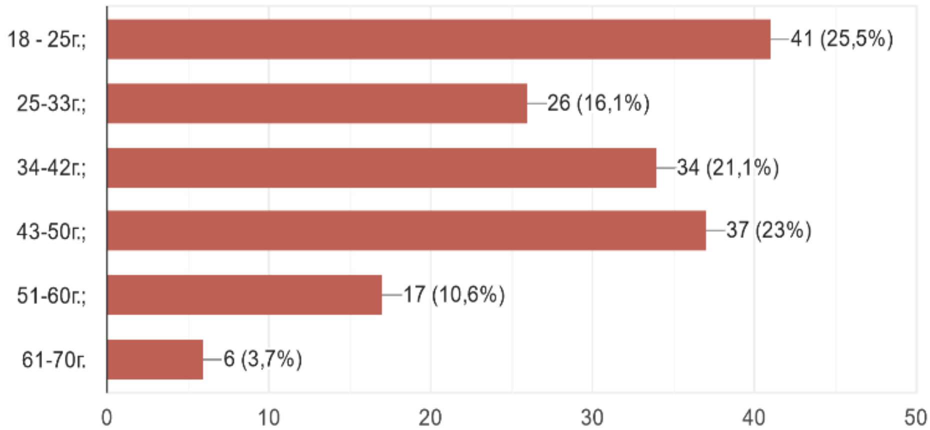
I. DEMOGRAPHIC BLOCK

Your gender is: MAN / WOMAN



In the Demographic Block, on question No. 1, the larger percentage - 84.5% includes female respondents, the rest - 15.5% are male! Obviously, women are more willing to devote time and attention to this type of activity.

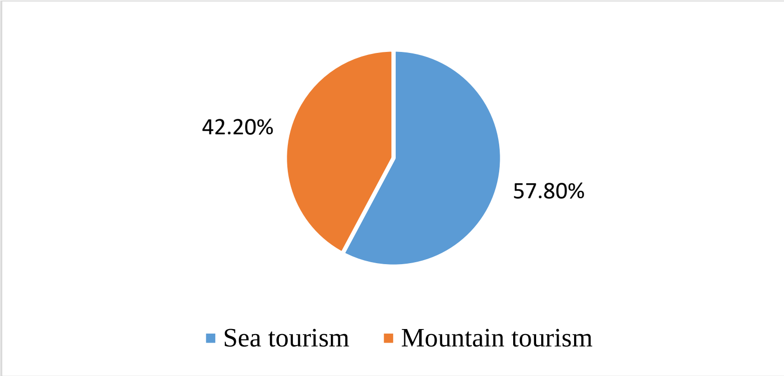
Your age is:



Regarding the second question, related to specifying the age level of the respondents, it can be said that representatives from all age groups took part in the survey. Naturally, the largest is the group of young people between 18 and 25 years of age – 25.5%, as they are a mobile and entertainment-loving generation. The second group is represented by respondents between 43 and 50 years old - 23%, and this is due to the fact that we are still talking about people with professions, actively working and with grown-up children, who in turn exercise labor activity (even if only seasonally) and receive income. The third group is the respondents between the ages of 34 and 42 - 21.1%, people who have already created families and children, who work and have a vital need for rest and recovery - physically and mentally.

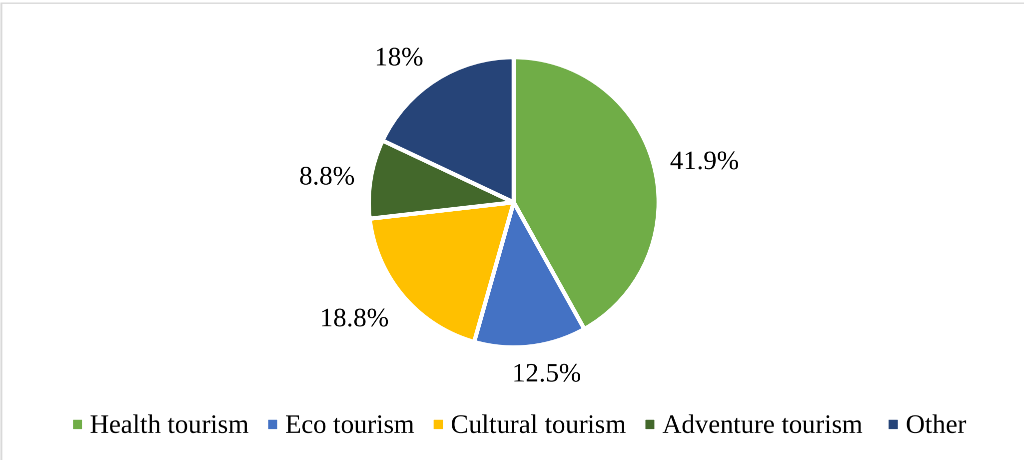
II. PARAMETERS OF USER OPINIONS:

3. "Which of the standard types of tourism offers the greatest opportunities for recreation?"



To the third question, logically the larger part of the respondents - 57.8% answered that they prefer recreation through sea tourism, since, as a rule, summer is the season that is associated with rest, travel, entertainment and recreation. We should not ignore the fact that mountain tourism is more expensive, in winter people are financially burdened - bigger bills for heating, money for medicine and prevention, due to the increased number of colds) and growing inflation in our country.

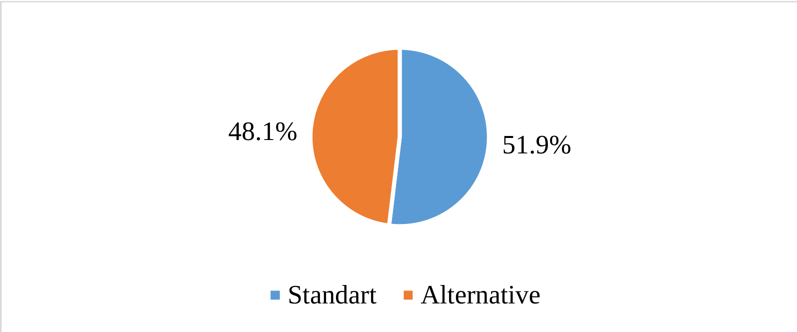
4.Which of the alternative types of tourism offers the greatest opportunities for year-round recreation?



To the forth question I posed in this questinnary the largest number of respondents (41.9%) answered that for them it is health tourism, which in most cases is associated with balneological and spa procedures. And it can't be prioritized, since with over 700 mineral springs, Bulgaria is one of the leading spa and wellness destinations in Europe.

5. Personally you, which type of tourism you prefer for recreation?

The difference in respondents' preferences between standard and alternative types of tourism is only 3%, as can be seen from the graph showing the results of the answers to the fifth question, in favor of sea and mountain tourism. But it is a well-known fact that alternative types of tourism are rapidly gaining momentum and in the coming years the probability of being prioritized is very high.



DISCUSSIONS

From the research conducted in this way, the general conclusion is that people are more and more aware of the importance of recreation for human health and increasingly rely on active recreation, through standard and alternative types of tourism.

Sea tourism is the leading type of tourism in Bulgaria and this is because our country has always positioned itself as a destination for sea holiday tourism. As a rule, the number of tourists in the months of June, July and August exceeds several times that of the tourist flow in the other months.

Mountain tourism is the second most popular in Bulgaria, thanks to our world-famous winter resorts such as Pamporovo, Borovets and Bansko, as well as large-scale investments in ski facilities.

In recent years, specialized tourism, which includes all forms of tourism other than mass tourism - health, cultural-historical, ethnographic, rural, adventure, etc., has been developing more and more successfully. Alternative tourism is extremely important for the development of most mountainous and rural areas that have no other option. This business is mostly small and medium and needs serious support in terms of building infrastructure, family hotels, attractions, preservation of cultural monuments, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

The multi-structural development of Bulgarian alternative tourism still strongly dominates, with a marked seasonal and territorial concentration. These disproportions in the development of tourism will be reduced and compensated with the ever more complete and effective use of the rich tourist resource and diversification of the offered tourist services, especially with the creation and development (or further development) of types of tourism other than the traditional ones. Grounds for such expectations are at least the following two circumstances:

Bulgaria has a significant resource for alternative tourism - natural resources, cultural and historical heritage, national traditions, holidays, customs, folklore. In this regard, we cannot but agree with S. Atanasova's statement that in certain areas of tourism Bulgaria applies a traditional marketing approach, and in other areas - a holistic one (Atanasova, 2023).

On the other hand, the following trends are observed in the developed tourist-generating countries: significant increase in the standard of living of an increasingly large part of the population; increase in free time; growing demand for increasingly non-traditional forms of tourism; increasing the responsibility towards the protection of the natural environment and the cultural-historical heritage; desire to visit regions increasingly preserved by human activity; looking for more direct contact with the local community, getting to know the local way of life, folklore, holidays, customs. Many of the tourist resources and most of the nature-knowledge routes are located in areas with good natural features and almost no conditions for industrial development. In these areas, the development of cognitive, mountain, rural, religious and balneotherapy tourism is without an alternative. The rich biodiversity enables ecological tourism; game wealth – for hunting tourism; the rich cultural and historical heritage - for cultural and cognitive; monasteries, churches and other places of worship - for religious.

In Bulgaria, there are conditions for the creation and development of many other specialized (alternative) types of tourism. Their development should be a main goal in the future of the recreational industry in our country, as it is already happening in a number of advanced countries.

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RESPONSIBLE TOURISM: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT: *The term responsible tourism has experienced significant growth in the academic and practical fields over the last 20 years. This scenario has been driven by discussions on sustainability, greater community involvement and an agenda based on ethical and moral principles. Based on this, several scholars have investigated the meaning of the term and its particularities, providing a solid theoretical basis on the subject. In this context, this research aimed to map the main directions of international scientific production on responsible tourism, based on a bibliometric study. To achieve this objective, this study adopted a bibliometric and descriptive approach, established as a means of identifying patterns, relationships and trends on the central theme and how it has developed over time. The research universe included 234 articles in the Web of Science database. The results show that there has been a vertiginous increase in academic production on the subject since 2005, with the journals Sustainability and Journal of Sustainable Tourism as the main means of dissemination. The themes of "management", "sustainable tourism", "attitudes", "behavior", "community" and "quality of life" are directly linked to the topic. Responsible tourism has therefore taken on exponential relevance in publications and has consolidated itself as a fundamental field of study for the tourism phenomenon.*

KEYWORDS: *Responsible tourism, Sustainable tourism, Bibliometric study, Web of Science.*

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INTRODUCTION

Responsible tourism is a theoretical approach that can be understood as a business strategy (Karimi, Astane, 2021). This practice aims to minimize the negative impacts of tourism and enhance the economic, social and environmental benefits of tourist destinations (Lee;Bonn; Reid et al, 2016; Karimi, Astane, 2021). As a business opportunity, responsible tourism is driven by both altruistic motivations and economic benefits (Raviv, Becken, Hughey, 2013), thus balancing ethics and profit.

Proposed in 1989 by the World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] as a paradigm shift, responsible tourism seeks a convergence of interests between the various stakeholders involved in the practice of tourism (Choi; Doh; Park et al, 2017). It arises as a response to the harmful practices caused by tourism in developing countries (Lee; Bonn; Reid et al, 2016), with an ethical concern that goes back to both the sociology of development and environmental ethics (Lea, 1993).

It implies respect for both the environment and local culture (Choi; Doh; Park et al, 2017), as well as the involvement of different individuals aligned with tourism, who take responsibility for their actions, be they tourists (Zhuowei (Joy) Huang, Chaozhi Zhang, 2016), companies (Mathew, Sreejesh, 2016), local communities and residents (Lea, 1993), governments (Eyisi, Lee, Trees, 2020), NGOs (Bertella, Romanelli, 2017).

This multistakeholder practice aims to promote more meaningful experiences and more sustainable behaviors by aligning tourists and local populations (Karimi, Astane, 2021). In addition, it aims to adopt practical actions that educate tourists, relying on the efforts of business operators and local residents (Choi; Doh; Park et al, 2017).

Studies on responsible tourism sometimes focus on tourists and their ethical values, and sometimes on tourism services as a product. They also examine the relationships between tourism stakeholders, including tourists themselves, and their moral conduct. Some studies consider responsible tourism to be public policy, and some authors propose the creation of indicators to measure this practice (State; Bulin, 2016).

As a theoretical approach in constant evolution, the aim of this study is to map the main directions of international scientific production on responsible tourism, based on a bibliometric study, in order to provide an overview of research on the subject, given the role of research in improving this developing field.

This study contributes to the conceptual understanding of the theory of responsible tourism, as well as providing visibility for the subject. It offers necessary contributions to understanding who the authors are, what themes have been studied and how the content is dispersed over time.

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the problem of this article and at the same time contribute to scientific development, a priori, this research necessarily sought to highlight the current scenario of literature on Responsible Tourism, in the classic precepts of bibliometrics.

Thus, based on the assumptions of Donthu et al. (2021), four basic stages were estimated for the study to be applied, namely methodically: the first corresponding to the definition of the objectives and purpose of the study, the second correlated to the interpretation techniques, the third with respect to the quality of the research, related to data collection, and the fourth and final stage, in response to the main objective of the study, is the systemic analysis of the results achieved.

Thus, given the interest in observing scientific productions that portray the concepts of Responsible Tourism, this study adopted a bibliometric and descriptive approach (Stage 1), established as a means of identifying patterns, relationships and trends about the central theme and how it has developed over time. According to Aria and Cuccurrullo (2017), the mapping of studies is fundamental, since the contributions of researchers are reproducing voluminous flows of research, which are often fragmented and controversial; in this context, bibliometrics plays an essential role, whose functionality contributes directly to the academic progress of any subject, helping to spread knowledge.

With regard to the analysis techniques (Stage 2), this article was based on the data found on annual scientific production, the most influential researchers, the journals that do the most work on the subject, the articles with the greatest impact, as well as the interpretation of the keywords to visualize the trends in studies on the subject and their evolution over the period studied. In addition, the interpretation of the data followed the precepts of Singh et al. (2021) when addressing analytical optimization in relation to the textual, paratextual and contextual results found.

In order to define the sample, which precedes the quality and reliability of the study, data collection (Stage 3) initially involved a search on the topic addressed using a pre-defined string, the sample of which used the keyword "Responsible Tourism", collected from the Web of Science database, selected for its scientific notoriety and quantified expressiveness of articles.

At first, 381 scientific articles were found that addressed the search term. They were then selected not only on the basis of the title of the documents, but also their abstracts and keywords. As a result, the sample was reduced by 8.4% compared to the initial number of articles. However, this work also used a time frame, delimited to 2023, whose impact returned 322 articles. For the last refinement in this stage, documents that were not published scientific articles were excluded, as well as duplicate documents; subsequently, the sample shrank by 38.6%, represented by 234 articles within the String searched, represented by Figure 1.

Finally, the results were analyzed and systematized (Step 4) using the R Language, an open-source software environment with dynamic and applied operation, according to R Core Team (2021). To analyze the data collected, using RStudio version 4.3.3, the bibliometrix package was downloaded, whose infinity of interactions increases the effectiveness of the methodology applied.

Nevertheless, the use of bibliometrix was justified due to its automation of the bibliometric data workflow, being a significant interface when related to scientometrics, returning graphs and tables that facilitate the interpretation of information (Bibliometrix, 2024).

As for the systematization of the results, the main journals will be referenced descriptively, addressing the objectives and considerations achieved. In addition, to understand the core of the spread of scientific knowledge on Responsible Tourism, classic bibliometric techniques were used (Aria; Cuccurullo, 2017), in order to show the evolution of research over time (Bradford's Law). This was followed by an understanding of the productivity of the authors, indicating the possible continuity and development of studies on the subject (Lotka's Law). The most cited articles, affiliation and productivity over time were also examined. Finally, to understand the central concepts that delimit the field, the frequency of keywords and co-occurrence were analyzed (Zipf's Law).

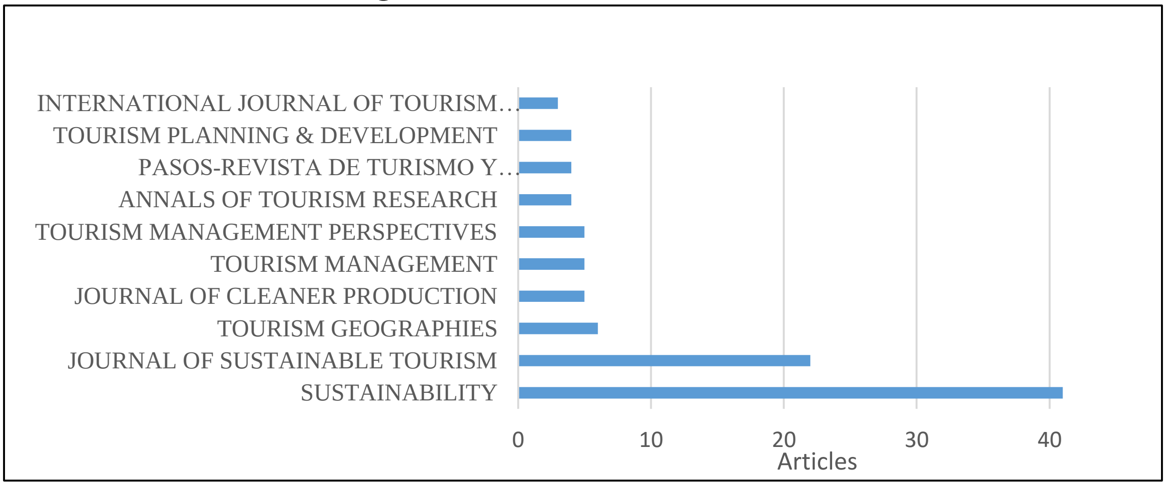
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was analyzed using the three basic laws of bibliometrics, i.e. Bradford's Law, Lotka's Law and Zipf's Law. Bradford's Law made it possible to identify the most relevant journals with the greatest publication activity, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that five journals stand out in discussions on responsible tourism, namely: Sustainability, Journal of sustainable tourism, Tourism Geographies, Journal of cleaner production and Tourism Management. However, Sustanablity and the Journal of Sustainable tourism are the most significant in the context studied.

Sustainability has the most publications in the period under review, with 41 articles. It is an open-access journal for its users and works on issues related to the cultural, environmental, economic and social sustainability of human beings (Sustainability, 2024).

Figure 01: Most Relevant Source



Source: Survey data, 2024.

Figure 1 also shows that the Journal of Sustainable Tourism, with 22 publications, ranks second in terms of number of publications. The Journal of Sustainable Tourism seeks to discuss the relationship between tourism and sustainable development, focusing on research that delves into these aspects (Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 2024).

It can therefore be seen that the journals in question have similar themes. Both are natural science journals with a strong focus on sustainable development. This is directly related to the very context of responsible tourism, since it was born and is understood as a mechanism available to achieve the sustainability of tourist destinations, based on the idea of responsible practices based on local contexts, based on the principles of sustainable development.

It can be seen that academic production on responsible tourism originated in 1993, but evolved gradually until it gained greater prominence in 2005 (Figure 2).

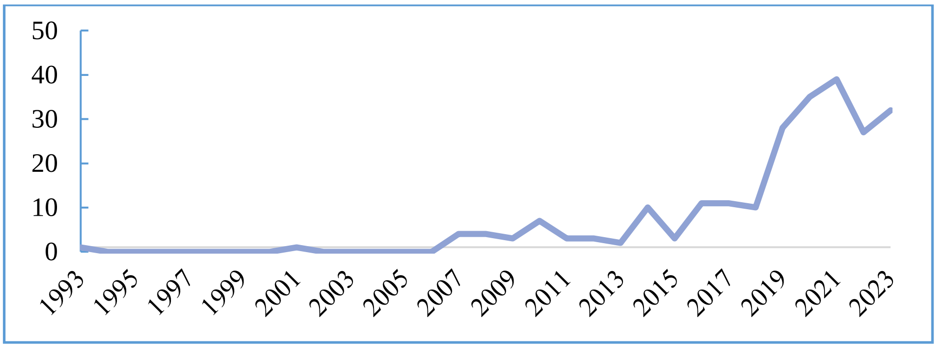


Figure 02: Annual Scientific Production
Source: Survey data, 2024.

The International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, held in Cape Town in 2002, was a crucial milestone for the dissemination of the term and the intensification of debates on the subject (Goodwin, 2014; Nascimento and Lanzarini, 2023). This event contributed significantly to the popularisation of the term and boosted research in the area, as shown in Figure 2.

The period from 2019 to 2020, marked by the consequences of Covid-19, represented a turning point for the tourism sector. Faced with the challenges posed by the crisis, the discussion about more responsible tourism became even more relevant, as the aim of public and private bodies was to minimise the negative impacts and maximise the benefits of the activity.

As the results show, the term in question has gained increasing prominence in tourism literature over the years. This growing attention highlights its relevance to the theoretical field of the area and points to future growth.

Following the analysis, the results are explored according to Lotka's Law. Figure 3 shows the authors who have contributed most to the theme of 'Responsible Tourism', as well as the main institutions linked to these studies.

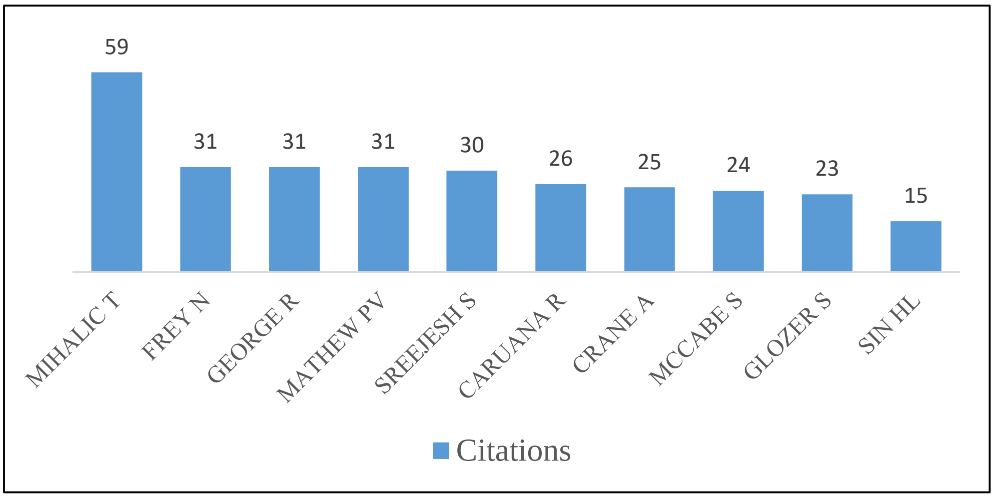


Figure 03: Most Influential Researchers
Source: Survey data, 2024.

The main author, Tanja Mihalic, from the University of Ljubljana, is well-known on the subject. Over the years, she has developed conceptual and practical studies on RT. In addition, the author presents the unification of the term responsible and sustainable tourism as a possible perspective for the theoretical field, since she argues the inseparability of the two terms (Mihalic, 2021).

Figure 4 shows that the University of Johannesburg is the most prolific institution in the field of "Responsible Tourism", with around 11 contributions, followed by Murdoch University with 9. Leeds Beckett University and the University of Ljubljana also stand out, with 8 contributions each. Other institutions, such as Akdeniz University, Korea University and the State University System of Florida, have less impact but are still influential. The University of Johannesburg and Murdoch University lead the way, being important research centers and potential partners for future studies in the area.

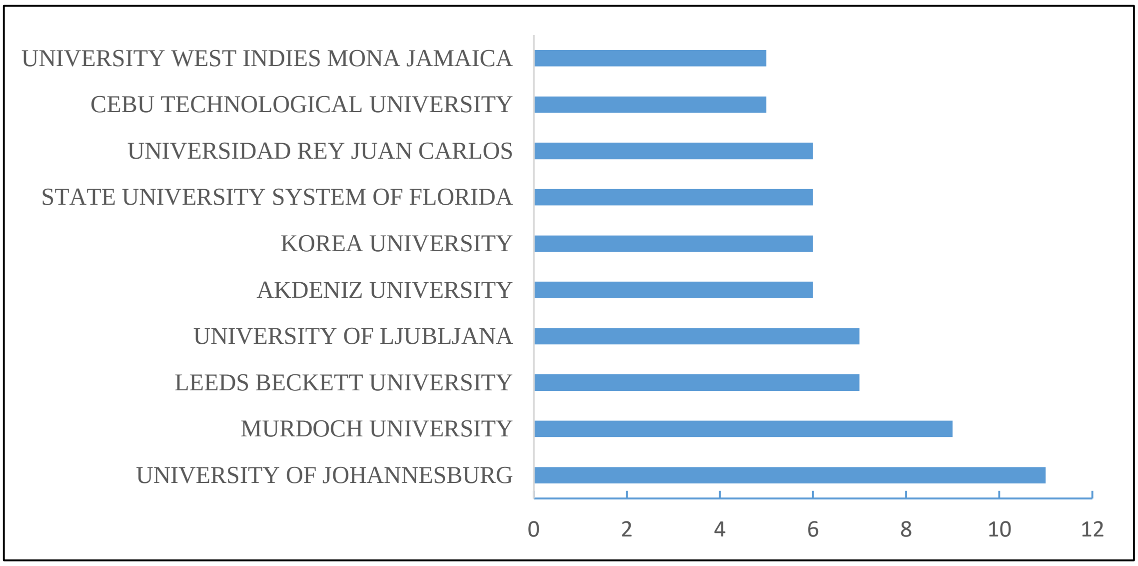


Figure 04: Researchers with the greatest impact on the subject
Source: Survey data, 2024.

Finally, the third and last basic law of bibliometric analysis, Zipf's Law, (relationship and frequency between words in the text), Figure 5.

Figure 05: Word cloud
Source: Survey data, 2024.

Responsible Tourism appears prominently, followed by keywords such as "management", "sustainable tourism", "attitudes", "behavior", "community" and "quality of life".

The link between the term and the expression "management" reinforces the idea that Responsible Tourism transcends a tourism segment, becoming a philosophy in the planning and management process across the board, being applicable to any type of tourism (Hu and Sung, 2022; Lima, 2017).

Another point worth highlighting is the link between "sustainable tourism" and responsible tourism highlighted in the analysis. Although the two terms have a strong connection, it should be noted that responsible and sustainable tourism are not synonymous. For Koch, Junqueira and Anjos (2017), sustainable tourism is more holistic, with a long-term perspective and little community interaction. Responsible tourism, on the other hand, takes a more systematic view, focusing on the short term with a greater emphasis on social aspects, highlighting the needs of the community. This is justified by the emphasis on the word community.

The words attitudes and behavior denote the core of discussions about Responsible Tourism which, according to Souza & Duarte (2014) and Goodwin (2014), is about promoting more responsible actions, based on moral and ethical principles, capable of promoting substantial changes in the way human beings interact with social, economic and environmental aspects. This change must be a premise for all the actors involved, such as tourists, public and private authorities, shareholders and educational institutions (Dias et al, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

Responsible tourism is extremely important in contemporary society, as it helps to preserve nature and its biomes, stimulates the economic development of the local population and respects their ways of life and traditions. Responsible tourism thus makes it possible to adopt ecologically correct ways of guaranteeing its activities for future generations, based on sustainable and conscious practices that encourage responsible consumption.

The analytical perspective of this academic production related to responsible tourism shows that the term has experienced an expansion, with a significant evolution of scientific productions in the last twenty years. The predominance of journals such as Sustainability and Journal of Tourism are the ones that have developed the most studies in this field, with the theme related to the concept of sustainable development. In addition, it was noticeable that the author Tanja Mihalic, from the University of Ljubljana, has been the researcher with the largest number of studies in this area.

It should be noted that the bibliometric review, based on the R language, shows that researchers and their publications contribute to the recognition of responsible tourism as a relevant field of study, and its multiplicity of links with concepts such as "management", "sustainable tourism", "attitudes", "behavior", "community" and "quality of life".

Finally, given this panorama, this study highlights the importance of conducting future research to ensure that responsible tourism evolves pleasantly in synergy between the community and the environment, in areas such as the evaluation of public policies and the implementation of indicators. In addition to strengthening the dialog between academia and society.

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WAYS OF EATING: A REFLECTION ON MANAUS' TABLE HABITS

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this study was to describe the eating habits of fish eaters in the city of Manaus, using spoons as utensils. The methodology used was qualitative. In terms of research methods, a bibliographical survey, simple observation and a semi-structured interview were carried out. The results show that the use of the spoon as the main eating utensil in Amazonas, especially in the city of Manaus, reveals a profound intersection between eating practices and the region's cultural identity. In addition, there is a gap in the academic literature, highlighting the lack of studies exploring this theme.*

KEYWORDS: *Food culture, cultural identity, eating habits, Amazonas, Manaus.*

INTRODUCTION

A region's food culture is an intrinsic reflection of its history, customs and social practices (Jiménez, Torre & Rojas, 2019). In Manaus, the capital of Amazonas, table habits are marked by a rich diversity of cultural influences that make up the region's food heritage. Among these practices, the peculiar habit of eating fish with a spoon stands out, a behavior observed among the population of Manaus that arouses curiosity and interest among residents and visitors. This article proposes a reflection on this cultural practice, seeking to understand its origins, meanings and its relationship with local cultural identity.

The habit of eating fish with a spoon, rather than using other utensils such as a fork and knife, seems to be a deliberate choice that carries with it more than just a personal preference. It may be associated with historical, social and cultural factors that have shaped the way the inhabitants of the city of Manaus relate to their food. Therefore, this study aims to explore these issues, shedding light on the symbolic and practical aspects of this custom.

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The general aim of this article is to describe the eating habits of the city of Manaus, using the spoon as a utensil. It will investigate the historical and cultural reasons behind this practice and analyze its meaning in the context of local food culture.

The relevance of this research lies in its ability to reveal how eating habits are forms of cultural expression that transcend mere nutrition and become part of a community's intangible heritage. By investigating the historical and cultural reasons that led to the practice of eating fish with a spoon, this research contributes to a greater appreciation of local customs and provides a deeper insight into how Manauaras relate to their food, reflecting their identities and ways of life.

EATING HABITS IN THE CITY OF MANAUS

The continuity and preservation of traditional food practices in the Amazon region, even in the face of external cultural influences such as Portuguese, French and Syrian-Lebanese, despite these influences, the inhabitants of Amazonas, especially in rural areas, maintain a strong tradition of consuming solid foods and typical drinks, inherited from the indigenous people of the region. This dietary tradition is sustained by the availability of local natural resources, which are easily accessible (Monteiro, 2014).

Even in Manaus, the state capital, it is possible to observe these traditional eating habits on a daily basis, which attract the attention of visitors. Some of these food traditions are rooted in centuries-old experiences that persist, either as a form of reaction against external influences or as reformulations of these influences (Lira, Coutinho & Ferst, 2019).

There is also a contrast between the eating habits of rural and urban areas: eating practices that are rejected by urban culture are still accepted in rural culture, without this implying a break with the cultural code of the region. For example, the custom of eating with the hands, similar to the Arabic style, is still present in rural areas and is not seen as a question of lack of social education (Monteiro, 2014).

Manauara cuisine is a true culinary treasure that has gained increasing recognition both in Brazil and abroad. This recognition is due to several factors, mainly the wealth of local ingredients and the cultural diversity present in the region (Quinzani, Capovilla & Corrêa, 2016).

This cultural diversity, in turn, favors the preservation of traditional food practices that are passed down from generation to generation in the city of Manaus (Jiménez, Torre & Rojas, 2019). A striking example is the custom of eating fish with a spoon, a practice rooted in the

Amazonian food culture. This habit is still widely observed in Manaus and is valued by the locals, who make a point of sharing it with visitors. Eating fish with a spoon provides a unique experience that differs significantly from eating with a fork and knife, thus preserving an authentic aspect of local culture (Monteiro, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive and qualitative study. In order to achieve the proposed objective, which is to describe the eating habits of fish eaters in the city of Manaus, using the spoon as a utensil, a bibliographic survey was adopted as the method. This procedure contributed to the theoretical and contextual background needed to analyze the data. Scientific papers, books and articles on food in the Amazon were consulted.

In addition, simple on-site observation was used at various eating places in Manaus, including restaurants, street markets and homes, where fish consumption is common. To complement this, a semi-structured interview was carried out in order to gain a deeper understanding of the field of study.

The interview was conducted virtually, via the WhatsApp platform, on September 9, 2024, with a doctor in the field of anthropology and studies related to the Amazon. The observations were made between September 9 and 12, focusing on the ways in which Manauaras consume fish.

The data was analyzed descriptively, using tables to better illustrate and interpret the results.

RESULTS

The researchers described the data collected during the semi-structured interview. The identity of the interviewee has been preserved and replaced by the code: E - interviewee.

DISCUSSION

Difference in spoon use in Manaus compared to other regions

Eating habits can reflect both regional and cultural identities, differentiating Amazonian communities from both a practical and symbolic point of view. The following statement about the cultural practices of eating fish with a spoon was made during the interview, when the interviewee was asked how the practice of using a spoon to eat fish in Manaus differs from other ways of eating fish in other regions of Brazil:

> *E: As I see it, people who live in the Amazon, who aren't in urban areas, have the practice of eating with a spoon, rather than using other cutlery, because the basis of their diet is fish. Fish can be eaten in two ways: the first is cooked, called caldeirada, and the other is baked. In caldeirada, it's not possible to eat with cutlery other than a spoon; in baked fish, it is possible, but there is still a difference: sometimes they don't even use a spoon, but their hands to eat the fish. I believe that these two characteristics, that of the caldeirada and that of the roast fish, differentiate the peoples here in the Amazon and, in the Amazon, this peculiarity of eating, instead of using the fork and knife, is the exclusive use of the spoon.*

This answer reflects an important cultural perception of eating habits in Amazonas, especially outside the major urban centers. By analyzing the choice of spoon as the main utensil for consuming food, she directly connects this custom to the basis of the local diet, which mainly includes fish, prepared in ways that require the use of specific cutlery, such as caldeirada.

This behavior departs from Western norms of using a knife and fork, pointing to a food identity that is unique to the Amazon, where the utensils chosen reflect both the relationship with the food and the environment and resources available.

This peculiarity may stand out not only as a different way of eating, but also a different way of being in the world, where the act of eating is closely linked to respecting and valuing the natural and cultural resources of the Amazon territory.

With regard to the cultural factors for the use of the spoon, as well as its symbolism, the following questions were asked:

Table 1: Questions about cultural and symbolic factors.

Questions	Answers
What do you think are the cultural factors that have contributed to the consolidation of the use of the spoon when eating fish in the food culture of Manaus/Amazonas?	E- Yes, I think this cultural issue is ancestral. The peoples of the Amazon, including the Upper Rio Negro, use spoons to feed themselves. There is an archaeological collection in a town called Urucurituba (AM), where spoons produced by ancient peoples have been found, associated with the ceramic material culture. This pottery is more than a thousand years old, so these peoples were already using ceramic spoons a thousand years ago. I believe that this cultural practice is intrinsically linked to the use of the spoon in meals, both by contemporary social groups and those of the past. This archaeological find of the ceramic spoon highlights this skill, and the interesting thing is that the spoon is decorated with symbolism.

Do you see any symbolism associated with the use of the spoon to eat fish in the local culture of Manaus? If so, what is it?	E- I think so. When you go to a fair or market, you can clearly see the issue of eating habits, which are very formalized in these environments. When you see someone who is not from Manaus, coming from other states in Brazil, it is common to notice the difference in the way they eat their fish, using a fork and knife. However, if you see someone who works in these environments, they are likely to use a spoon. I believe that one of the reasons for this is the more efficient use of all the food available. People who use a fork and knife often leave behind bits that can't be removed with these utensils, whereas with a spoon it's much quicker and easier to remove these bits. This skill differentiates the habit of eating with a spoon, especially when eating fish.

Source: *Prepared by the research, 2024.*

The answers highlight the historical depth of the use of the spoon in the Amazon, showing that it is an ancestral cultural practice. The mention of pottery over a thousand years old, found in Urucurituba, reinforces the link between past and present, showing how contemporary Amazonian peoples preserve the traditions of their ancestors.

The idea that the practice of using the spoon continues today reflects a cultural continuity that defies time. The preservation of artisanal techniques and eating practices is a reminder of the cultural resilience of Amazonian peoples, who, even in the face of social and economic changes, manage to keep ancestral traditions alive.

Generational transmission of habit

During the interview, the following question was asked: How do you think the habit of eating fish with a spoon has been passed down through the generations in Manaus? The answer was as follows:

> *E: This is very characteristic of communities that are still outside urban areas. If you go to a school in a rural area, you'll see children using spoons to eat. I think that this is a characteristic of a cultural habit of the people here in Amazonas, transmitted orally. I don't think there's anything written about it; Professor Mário Ypiranga Monteiro wrote a little about the habit of eating, but not specifically about the use of the spoon. Therefore, I believe that the spoon is a tool used culturally by the people of Amazonas and, in Manaus, families still practice this custom normally.*

The interviewee's speech highlights the importance of using spoons as a cultural element in the communities of Amazonas, especially in rural areas. The comment reveals that this habit, although it may seem commonplace, transcends a mere practical choice, reflecting an orally transmitted tradition that is deeply rooted in local identity. The use of the spoon as the main eating utensil in rural schools suggests a cultural continuity that persists despite urban changes and modernization.

In this context, the use of the spoon can be seen as a symbol of cultural belonging and a form of resistance to the homogenization of eating habits, often promoted by urbanization. The interviewee's speech reinforces the idea that many customs are preserved and perpetuated in an unwritten form, being passed down orally from generation to generation.

The following questions were asked about fish preparations eaten with a spoon, whether the practical aspects or the taste is a reflection of cultural identity:

Table 2: Questions and answers on aspects of identity.

Questions	Answers
What types of fish preparations do you think are most often eaten with spoons in Manaus and why?	I think the difference lies in the two ways of producing food with fish. Caldeirada, for example, is impossible to eat with a knife and fork; you have to use a spoon. This is a characteristic that differentiates these eating habits in Amazonas. In Manaus, it's common to find this practice: if you go to a restaurant and order caldeirada, you'll be given both a spoon and a fork and knife. The person can choose how to eat, but the native Amazonian doesn't even look at the fork and knife and goes straight for the spoon. This symbolic question of how to use this tool for eating in Manaus applies not only to fish, but to other types of food as well.
In your opinion, is the use of spoons to eat fish in Manaus more related to practical aspects or to taste and texture preferences?	I think both practicality and taste are involved. If you eat, for example, duck in tucupi, it is prepared with a series of ingredients added to the dish, such as jambu and the tucupi itself. If you taste it with cutlery other than a spoon, the experience can be a little different. Fish, meat and other ingredients are usually eaten with a spoon for better enjoyment. If you watch a cook, he uses the spoon to taste and check that

	everything is as expected. First of all, if it's a stew, it needs to cool down a bit, otherwise it could burn your mouth. So I think that this practice does have a preference, both for the taste and for the way of testing the taste of these foods.
How would you say that eating fish with a spoon in Manaus reflects the cultural identity of the region?	I think so. The material and immaterial culture of these peoples who lived in the Amazon, and their ancestry, are very present in the cultural identity related to eating fish with a spoon. I believe that this represents a cultural identity of the ancestral peoples that is still present today. Thus, the ability to use a spoon to eat is a continuation of this cultural identity of the peoples of the ancient Amazon, which persists to this day.

Source: *Prepared by the research, 2024.*

The interviewee's speech reminds us that, in Manaus, the use of the spoon transcends the mere functionality of the utensil. This choice not only makes eating easier, but also symbolizes a different way of connecting with food. The spoon, therefore, is more than just a functional utensil; it is a symbol of cultural identity and food practice.

As well as addressing the issue of practicality and taste associated with the use of the spoon, the interviewee explains that it provides an enhanced tasting experience. This leads to reflection on how the choice of utensil can impact sensory perception and the culinary experience. The use of spoons is also deeply linked to the historical cultural identity of Amazonian peoples. Thus, this practice is not just a matter of preference, but a way of preserving the cultural heritage and food traditions of the region's ancient inhabitants.

The interviewee's speech helps us to better understand the cultural context and identity of the peoples of the Amazon, elucidating eating habits that are still evident in the city of Manaus.

With regard to the observation carried out in this study, it was possible to contemplate the eating habit of eating fish with a spoon from Figures 1 and 2:

Figure 1: Pirarucu fish dish, accompanied by vinagrete, banana farofa and Murupi pepper sauce.

Figure 2: Dish with Pacu fish, accompanied by refried beans, flour and lemon slices.

Figures 1 and 2 show the food culture of the Amazon, especially in the city of Manaus. The use of utensils in food transcends practical and sensory preferences, and also reflects deep aspects of cultural identity and historical continuity. In the context of Amazonian cuisine, the spoon is not limited to being a mere utensil; it assumes a significant role as a cultural and historical symbol. This element, when used in the tasting and consumption of food, carries with it a rich load of meaning, highlighting the intersection between eating practices and the preservation of cultural traditions over time.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was achieved because, based on the interviews, the theoretical framework and the observations made, it was possible to obtain answers that contributed significantly to the discussion of the subject. There is a gap in the academic literature, with a lack of studies that discuss the consumption of fish using the spoon as a utensil and the cultural representativeness and identity of the peoples of the Amazon.

In this way, it is understood that the use of the spoon as the main utensil for eating in the Amazon reveals a profound intersection between eating practices and cultural identity. The choice of the spoon, especially for the consumption of traditional dishes such as caldeirada, reflects not only a practical adaptation to the characteristics of the local diet, predominantly based on fish, but also an expression of a distinct food identity that departs from the Western norms of fork and knife.

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"THE GREAT RESIGNATION" IN HOSPITALITY ENTERPRISES OF CRETE. MILLENNIALS' AND GEN Z' PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT: *The main objective of the present study is to explore and to identify the dimensions of "Great Resignation" trend in the hospitality sector of Crete. The research focuses mainly on the employees of Gen Z and of Millennials too. Since hospitality is considered as one of the fundamental sectors for the national economy, it is important to investigate the rates of employment or resignation in the specific domain. A survey research was conducted for collecting data by distributing questionnaires to current as well as to former employees of hospitality sector in Crete. A surprising number of 829 employees responded to the questionnaires comprising thus the sample of the research.*

The results from the data analysis led to the following conclusions: A) COVID-19 pandemic had insignificant impact on employees' intention to quit from their jobs in hospitality industry of Crete, B) Even though the percentage of resignations is significant, a notable number of employees have preserved their job to the same hospitality enterprises for more than three years, C) Job security and stability, Corporate Social Responsibility, responsibilities towards the family or force majeure consist of the most influential reasons for quitting from a job in hospitality, even if their correlation is not very strong, D) Employees of Gen Z and employees of Millennials are prone to quitting in comparison with Gen X and Baby Boomers employees in Hospitality sector. It worth mentioning that both generations share common perceptions in regards with the reasons which lead them to resignation.

KEYWORDS: *Gen Z, Millennials, Hospitality sector, Great Resignation, Big Quit, Crete*

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays a global conversion has been noticed in workforce' attitudes towards the values that until recently were advocated by Western society concerning the nature of work and employees' commitment. The spread of this conversion has provoked the phenomenon of the "Great Resignation", as Anthony Klotz characterized in May 2021 the mass voluntary resignation of workers from their jobs (Shukla et al., 2022). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the trigger for this phenomenon, with the hospitality and food sector taking the lead in terms of resignations of workers aged 40 and under. The escalation of the phenomenon raises concerns about the future development of the hospitality sector and the employability of younger workers in hotel enterprises.

The aforementioned considerations formed the objective of the study, which consists in examining if and in what extend the manifestation of "The Great Resignation" has been observed in the hospitality industry of Crete and if it is correlated with specific age groups of the workforce, namely Gen Z and Millennials, who are, or were employed in the hospitality sector. Since the contribution of the particular sector is considered as vital for the national economy, studying the hospitality staff' age group attributes is important seeing that, if the hospitality industry does not attract and retain employees of younger generations, many hospitality enterprises are bound to face problems of severe understaffing in the near future. Therefore, it is important for the sustainability and development of hospitality businesses as well as for the continuous improvement of the provided tourist services, to establish whether the number of resignations is sufficient enough to cause a rapid decline in the quality of hotel services.

The study of the "Great Resignation" in the island of Crete is indicative in terms of the manifestation and the evolution of the particular phenomenon in the hospitality industry of Greece, as Crete is the second region with the highest number of hotel units in Greece (approximately 1,650) (Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, 2022).

To achieve the objective of the study, the particular paper is organized in the following units: In the first unit, the theoretical framework of "The Great Resignation" phenomenon is presented along with its effects and its consequences in the labor force and in the hospitality industry. Research hypotheses are also presented in the same unit. The second unit refers to the methodology and the sample of the study, whereas the third unit displays the results. The forth contains a discussion upon those results while the main conclusions are presented in the fifth unit.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The "Great Resignation" as international phenomenon at - Causes and consequences

The "Great Resignation" is defined as the phenomenon of the mass quitting of employees from jobs positions and from professional sectors with the aim of finding new jobs with better prospects. The expansion of the particular tendency has expanded after the end of the mandatory quarantine imposed by the outbreak of COVID-19, i.e. in 2021 (Civic Lab 2022; Serenko 2022). In Jeff Schwartz' survey (December 2021), which carried out in the USA, it was found that 48.1% in a sample of 1000 workers were thinking of resigning and looking for a new job while 43.3% of them stated that they were in a state of work burnout. The above results are in accordance with the data provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics regarding the total number of resignations that occurred from January 2021 to January 2022. According to this data, in January 2021 the recorded number of resignations was 3,311,000 whereas 4,510,000 employees had resigned from their jobs in November 2021 and 4,252,000 in January 2022.

The workers of Gen Z are presented as the main exponents of the "Great Resignation" since, in the majority of relevant studies, 50% of them have declared that in the coming years they plan to make changes in their professional careers (Gerber, 2021 in Liu-Lesters et al. 2022, p.236). Gen Z is followed by the Millennials employees, who have already recorded a resignation rate higher than 20% (Cook 2021, in Liu-Lesters et al. 2022, p.236).

Tessema et al. (2022) classified the factors of the "Great Resignation" into two broad categories, the 'push factors' and the 'pull factors'. The first category includes the factors within a company that push an employee to resign from it, while the second includes external factors which are more appealing for an employee compared to his current job position (e.g. a proposal from another company with better financial conditions). According to Formica & Sfodera (2022), the low wages, which do not correspond to the intensity of the work, is one of the main reasons which has led many former workers to the decision of quitting. Another reason is the limited prospects for professional development as well as the lack of recognition and encouragement from managers or supervisors (Shukla et al., 2022; Formica and Sfodera, 2022). This view is supported by Kuzior et al. (2022), since the outcomes of their research revealed that the absence of appreciation is the most important reason that leads the employees of generations Z and Y to quitting. Managers' and employers' indifference towards the employees' needs, ideas and expectations is another factor of job dissatisfaction, along with the lack of meaning from the performance of work duties (Liu, 2022; Formica and Sfodera, 2022).

Excessive demands from employers or supervisors are cited as an additional reason that creates employees' dissatisfaction and increases their intention to quit, whereas the toxic work environment is also considered as a very factor for quitting intention. (Formica and Sfodera, 2022).

Yet, while the causes of the "Great Resignation" can be summarized in the aforementioned, their effect does not explain the extent of the phenomenon. Relevant studies claimed that the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic gave impetus to the spread of "The Great Resignation" (Shukla et al., 2022; Tessema et al., 2022). Many workers, who had to return to their job duties after the expiry of quarantine and to consort with other colleagues, customers or citizens, experienced increased levels of stress and insecurity which strengthened their decision to quit (Tessema et al. 2022). Furthermore, the mandatory vaccination and the adherence to strict protocols for several groups of workers, as well as the sanctions which were imposed on employees who did not comply with the specific protocols, caused internal conflicts in organizations that gave rise to mass voluntary departures (Tessema et al., 2022). Another factor that influenced some employees' decision to quit was the substitution of telecommute with the physical presence on the workplace. Telecommuting, which adopted from many companies and organizations during the quarantine, has become a favorable way of working for many employees since they were enabled to handle more flexibly their working duties with the family care. These workers did not embrace with much enthusiasm their return to the physical work environment (Serenko, 2022; Sull, 2022; Tessema, 2022).

Despite the fact that the Great Resignation is considered a major issue for the US and has attracted the interest of the scientific community, some countries in the Western world do not share the same concerns about the extent and impact of the "Great Resignation". For example, in a relevant study, Abigail Marks (2022) compared the unemployment and employability indicators in the United Kingdom, and stated that, after the pandemic period, the increase in inflation in conjunction with strong indications for an upcoming economic recession have intensified the feeling of insecurity in workers' groups. As a consequence of the above conditions, most of the employees expressed their reluctance to seek resignation or to change their work environment. She also referred that: a) the percentage of employees who were looking for another work environment (5%) was lower compared to the corresponding percentage that had been recorded before the outbreak of the pandemic, b) the percentage of resignations has scored slight increase c) based on data provided by the Office of National Statistics, after the recovery from the pandemic, the age groups that appeared most willing to leave from working environments were the employees between 50 and 70 years old, with several of them to aim for early retirement.

The "Great Resignation" in tourism and hospitality industry

The escalation of the "Great Resignation" has reached alarming proportions in the tourism industry, which has the highest rates of mass departures compared to other industries, according to data published by the US Bureau of Labor for 2022 (Diagram 1).

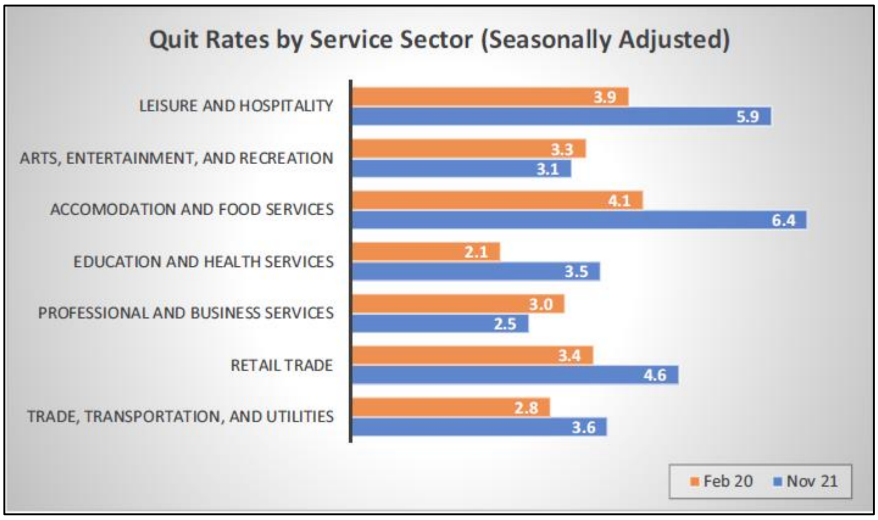

Diagram 1: Comparison of resignation rate by service sector for 2020 and 2021 – USA
Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022

Many assumptions have been expressed about the reasons that have provoked the rapid spread of the Great Resignation in the sections of hospitality and tourism. Overwork, problematic relations between employers and employees, seasonality, high rates of precarious types of work, intense mobility, intensive working rates, emotional stress, time pressure, the inability to balance personal/family life with work and the discrepancy between amount of work and rewards, monetary or non-monetary, are cited as the main causes for the strengthening of the "Great Resignation" phenomenon (Liu-Lesters et al. 2022, p.237).

The role of COVID-19 pandemic was decisive, as it resulted in the compulsory suspension of tourism businesses function, intensifying thus the feeling of job insecurity among tourism workers, which in turn, accelerated the expansion of the "Great Resignation" in tourism sector (Ng and Stanton, 2023). It was observed that, after the expiry of mandatory lockdowns, many employees who used to work in the tourism industry before the outbreak of pandemic, preferred to not return to their previous jobs but to seek for new job opportunities in other industries and business sectors (Liu- Lastres et al. 2022, p. 238; Ng and Stanton 2023, p.404-

405).

Regarding the prevalence of the "Great Resignation" in the different generation groups, it is found that the tendency of resigning is much more widespread to Gen Z compared to the generation of Millennials in the tourism industry. One possible explanation for the propensity of Generation Z to quitting is that, as their entry into the labor market coincided with the outbreak of the pandemic, the employees who belong to this generation group did not manage to join the social networks and establish the relationships that characterize the micro-level of work environments due to the imposition of social distancing along with the impersonal and asynchronous relationships that were introduced into the work process through telecommuting (Ng and Stanton 2023, p. 403). These conditions oppose the very nature of work in tourism which requires the physical presence of the employee in the place where the service is provided.

As for Millennials, the mandatory suspension of their occupation in tourism businesses due to the pandemic was a great opportunity for many of them to improve and enrich their academic or professional knowledge, investing thus their free time in education and learning (Liu-Lesters et al. 2022, p.239; Ng and Stanton 2023, p. 401). The enrichment and cultivation of their educational capital created new prospects for professional rehabilitation in other sectors to which they moved toward as these sectors offer greater flexibility and adaptability to employees' needs and living conditions (Liu, 2022).

The imposition of mandatory quarantine and remote- work contributed to the rapid development of the "gig economy", an alternative form of work that involves the digital provision of services through online platforms (Oyer, 2020). This type of economic activity has becoming increasingly popular among Gen Z and Millennials, who are taking on freelance jobs from online platforms either to earn an extra income or as a full-time job (Oyer, 2020). The attribute of flexibility, which characterizes the particular form of work and offers the convenience for the employees to adjust their working time to their own priorities and needs, acts as a disincentive to the employment in tourism since it is completely opposite to the nature of work in the tourism industry, which is characterized by irregular working hours, often requires manual work by front-line staff and necessities the physical presence of the workers at the place where the service is provided (Liu-Lesters et al. 2022, p.242).

Regarding the phenomenon of the "Great Resignation" in Greece, apart from journalistic articles, no studies have been conducted in respect of the appearance and the dimensions of the phenomenon in the country neither in general nor in hospitality sector specifically. So, it was deemed necessary to examine firstly the employment indicators in general and in the hospitality sector in particular during the period 2021 - 2022 in order to capture the trends that shape the landscape in the hospitality sector of Greece. According to the data provided by the Institute of the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (INSETE) as well as by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, the following have been observed:

- Employment in the hospitality and catering sector showed signs of recovery in 2022, after two years of decline (2020 and 2021).
- During the period 2019-2021, the participation of the younger age groups showed a significant decrease in the Greek Regions where the highest contribution of the hospitality and catering sector to the total employment rate is displayed (South Aegean, Ionian Islands, Crete). However, the participation rates of young employees in accommodation services showed an increase in the Regions of Attica and Central Macedonia at the same period.
- The age group of 15-24 years has marked the most positive variation in employment in hospitality and catering for the third quarters of the period 2018-2022 (+31.2%), while the age group of 25-29 years the most negative (-6.9%).
- Manpower shortages in hotel enterprises increased in 2022, compared to 2021, mainly in F&B and housekeeping departments.

Thus, after studying the international literature on the subject of the "Great Resignation" and the published information of official bodies in the labor and tourism sectors in Greece, it has been observed that, even though young – aged workers' resignations are increased in some cases, their percentages are not increasing steadily; on the contrary they are fluctuated. Especially in the hospitality sector, the reduction on young- aged employees' participation, namely those of generations Z and Millennials too, is not uniform in all Regions of the country as in some cases the employment of younger workers in tourism activities have shown a significant growth. Yet, even when low participation of the specific generations is occurred in hospitality business activities, no official evidence exists so as to support that this reduction is resulted from mass resignations. Additionally, insufficient information is provided regarding the causes of the shortages of human resources that have been observed in the accommodation, while the relevant data before 2021 and 2022 is scattered. Therefore, it is impossible to determine whether these shortages consist of a perennial phenomenon or a sign of the times due to mass resignations.

The above findings give rise to the following questions:

1st) Has there been a significant number of mass resignations from employees in the hotel industry in Crete in the post-COVID-19 era (from 2021 onwards)? Through this question, it is sought to establish whether the pandemic crisis really strengthened the phenomenon of the "Great Resignation" in the hospitality industry in Crete, as it happened in other regions of Europe and America. Thus, the proposed hypotheses are proposed

H1: The COVID-19 pandemic affected the employees' decision to resign from their jobs in the hospitality section in Crete.

H2: The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the effect of the other reasons which are related to the employees' decision to resign from their jobs in the hospitality section in Crete.

2nd) What are the reasons that have influenced the decision to resign of those employed in the hospitality businesses of Crete in the post-COVID-19 era (from 2021 onwards)? As it has been mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic was identified as a key driver for the rapid escalation of the "Great Resignation" phenomenon since it strengthened the effect of the causes that lead employees to resign from their jobs. These causes can be summarized in the following categories: financial reasons, job security and stability, career, organizational relations, corporate culture and social responsibility, family responsibilities and force majeure issues, personal development and management of spare time. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: The financial reasons are related to the decision of the employees in hospitality businesses in Crete to resign or to remain in their jobs.

H4: Job security and stability are related to the decision of the employees in hospitality businesses in Crete to resign or to remain in their jobs.

H5: The professional career is related to the decision of the employees in hospitality businesses in Crete to resign or remain in their jobs.

H6: Organizational relations are related to the decision of the employees in hospitality businesses in Crete to resign or remain in their jobs.

H7: Corporate culture and social responsibility are related to the decision of the employees in hospitality businesses in Crete to resign or remain in their jobs.

H8: Family responsibilities or force majeure issues are related to the decision of the employees in hospitality businesses in Crete to resign or remain in their jobs.

H9: Personal development and spare time management are related to the decision of the employees in hospitality businesses in Crete to resign or remain in their jobs.

3rd) Do the employees of the Millennials and Z generational groups manifest a significantly higher tendency to quit compared to the other generational groups in the hospitality industry in Crete? The following hypothesis derives from this question:

H10: The generational group of employees in the hospitality industry in Crete is related to the tendency to quit or remain in their jobs.

4th) which of the reasons that are associated with the "Great Resignation" is related to the decisions of the different generational groups to quit or to remain in their job positions in the hotel industry in Crete? This question leads to the following research hypotheses:

H11: Financial reasons are related to the decision of Gen Z employees to resign or remain in their job in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H12: Job security and stability is related to the decision of Gen Z employees to quit or stay in their jobs in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H13: Professional career is related to the decision of Gen Z employees to resign or remain in their job position in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H14: Organizational relations are related to the decision of Gen Z employees to resign or remain in their job position in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H15: Corporate culture and social responsibility are related to the decision of Gen Z employees to quit or stay in their job in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H16: Family-personal reasons or issues of force majeure are related to the decision of Gen Z employees to resign or remain in their jobs in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H17: Personal development and the quality management of free time are related to the decision of Gen Z employees to resign or remain in their job position in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H18: The COVID-19 pandemic is related to the decision of Gen Z employees to resign or remain in their jobs in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H19: Economic reasons are related to the decision of Millennials employees to resign or remain in their job in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H20: Occupational security and stability are related to the decision of Millennials employees to resign or remain in their job in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H21: Professional career is related to the decision of Millennials employees to resign or remain in their job position in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H22: Organizational relations are linked to the decision of Millennials employees to resign or remain in their job in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H23: Corporate culture and corporate responsibility are related to the decision of Millennials employees to resign or remain in their job position in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H24: Family reasons or issues of force majeure are related to the decision of Millennials employees to resign or remain in their job position in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H25: Personal development and spare time management are related to the decision of Millennials employees to resign or remain in their job position in the hospitality industry in Crete.

H26: The COVID-19 pandemic is related to the decision of Millennials employees to resign or remain in their jobs in the hospitality industry in Crete.

METHODOLOGY

Online self-administered survey method was chosen for the conduct of this study. The questionnaire of the study is divided in four parts, with multiple- choice and close-ended questions. The research sample consists of former and current employees who were or are employed in hotel units and other hospitality businesses in Crete from April 2021 onwards. Although the paper focuses on Millennials and Gen Z, other age groups were not excluded from the research with the aim of comparing the effect of the "Great Resignation" among them. Google Form questionnaires were sent a) to organizations and units which represent hospitality business workers in Crete, b) to hospitality businesses in Crete and c) to social media groups involving hospitality employees who work or had worked in Cretan hotel units.

The procedure of sending and receiving the questionnaires lasted 12 days since it started on 04/12/2023 and ended on 15/12/2023. It is noteworthy that within that relatively short period of time, a total of 987 completed questionnaires were received and 829 of them were fully completed. SPSS 26 was used for the analysis of the collective data.

RESULTS

Respondents' profile and frequency distribution

From a sample of 829 respondents, 146 belong to Gen Z (17.6%), 333 are Millennials (40.2%), 309 represent generation X (37.3%) and 41 (4.9%) are Baby Boomers. Female respondents represent the 58.9% of the sample (488). The numbers of single (358) and married are nearly the same (360) whereas the divorced and single parents were 107 (12.9%). Most of the respondents are highly educated, while 250 (30.2%) of them have completed post-secondary education, 163 (19.7%) have completed secondary education and 25 (3%) have completed basic education. Concerning their annual personal income, the majority of the participants have 8.001 to 12.000 € per year, that is to say 288 of the respondents.

According to their answers, 675 of the participants (81.4%) work or had worked in seasonal hotels and 523 of them (63.1%) are employed or had been employed in high-capacity hotels (101 rooms or more). The departments in which most respondents have been employed are the front office (213), the F&B (169), the kitchen (140), the administrative service (140) and the housekeeping (94). From the sample, 334 persons have been working or were working for more than 4 years in the same hospitality enterprises (40.3%) and 222 persons have already completed one to three years of working in the same hospitality businesses (26.8%), while 187 persons have completed five to seven months of employment without changing hotel enterprises (22.6%), 77 have completed two to four months (9.3%) and 9 people from all the respondents have worked for a period of one month in the same hotels. It was also found that, from April 2021 onwards, 309 (37.3%) of the 829 participants had resigned from their job in the hotel/accommodation business they were working, and 163 of them (19.7% of the sample) are working in another industry or profession.

Additionally, 196 of the participants (23.7%) are thinking of quitting whereas 95 of them (11.5% of the sample) want to seek for jobs in other sectors excluding hospitality industry. Also, the 324 respondents of the sample do not or did not want to resign from their work in the hospitality businesses where they work or used to work (39%). Regarding the effect of Covid-19 on the respondents' decision to resign or remain in their jobs in the hospitality industry, 418 of them answered that they were not affected at all, 89 were slightly affected, 112 answered that the pandemic had moderate influence on their decision, 125 answered that they were influenced quite enough and 85 that they were strongly influenced.

The third part of the questionnaire was answered exclusively by those respondents who have already resigned or they intend to resign, i.e. 505 persons. The answers depicted the following results with regard to the importance of each category of reasons that lead to quitting:

a) Financial – economic reasons: 44 respondents consider this category as no important, 41 consider it as slightly important, 63 believed that it is rather important whereas 101 find it very important and 243 consider it as extremely important.

b) Job security and stability: 107 of the respondents believe that the reasons of this category are not important, 68 consider them as slightly important and 68 believe that this category is rather significant, 89 consider it very important and finally, 152 consider these reasons as extremely significant.

c) Professional career: This category is thought to be of no significance by 25 respondents whereas it considered as slightly important by 37, as rather important by 60, as very significant by 123 and as extremely significant by 248 respondents.

d) Organizational relations: The specific category of factors is not important for 46 respondents and it is slightly important for 45. Though, 75 participants find it rather important, 100 believe that it is very important and 227 believe that it is an extremely important factor in their decision to resign.

e) Corporate culture and social responsibility: The particular factors are considered as not significant by 129 persons and 81 consider them as slightly significant. 92 respondents believe that this category is rather important, 69 that it is very important and 111 consider it as extremely important.

f) Family responsibilities – force majeure issues: Factors of this category are not considered significant by 164 persons of the sample, while 66 consider them as slightly significant, 88 believe that this category is rather significant and 65 believe that is very significant for their decision to resign. Finally, 101 respondents believe that this category is extremely significant for them concerning their intention to quit.

g) Personal development and spare time management: This category is not important for 43 of the respondents while it is slightly important for 47, rather important for 62, very significant for 102 and extremely important for 236 respondents.

The respondents, who intent to remain in their jobs, have completed the forth part of the questionnaire. Their answers are distributed as below:

a) Financial – economic reasons: 17 respondents consider this category as no important, 17 consider it as slightly important, 46 believed that it is rather important whereas 75 find it very important and 146 consider it as extremely important.

b) Job security and stability: 16 of the respondents believe that the reasons of this category are not important, 12 consider them as slightly important and 27 believe that this category is rather significant, 70 consider it very important and finally, 175 consider these reasons as extremely significant.

c) Professional career: This category is thought to be of no significance by 25 respondents whereas it considered as slightly important by 11, as rather important by 52, as very significant by 76 and as extremely significant by 136 respondents.

d) Organizational relations: The specific category of factors is not important for 16 respondents and it is slightly important for 24. Though, 45 participants find it rather important, 80 believe that it is very important and 133 believe that it is an extremely important factor in their decision to preserve their job positions.

e) Corporate culture and social responsibility: The particular factors are considered as not significant by 18 persons and 25 consider them as slightly significant. 45 respondents believe that this category is rather important, 71 that it is very important and 138 consider it as extremely important.

f) Family responsibilities – force majeure issues: Factors of this category are not considered significant by 34 persons of the sample, while 28 consider them as slightly significant, 61 believe that this category is rather significant and 64 believe that is very significant for their decision to remain in their work positions in hospitality enterprises. Finally, 110 respondents believe that this category is extremely significant for them concerning their intention to not resign.

g) Personal development and spare time management: This category is not important for 28 of the respondents while it is slightly important for 29, rather important for 43, very significant for 79 and extremely important for 123 respondents.

Hypotheses testing.

The variables of the study are either nominal or ordinal. Thus, the X^2 correlation test along with the 'γ' (Gamma), Kendall's tau-b and c and Spearman's 'ρ' correlation coefficient were chosen for testing the symmetrical association of the variables, while λ (Lambda), Goodman & Kruskal's tau measures, and Somers' d were chosen for the test of asymmetric association of the variables (Norris et al., 2012). Additionally, independent t-test for two samples was applied in order to the means of different groups of the sample.

The results from the testing of hypotheses are presented below:

According to Kendall's tau-b ($p>0.05$), Gamma (0.001 and $p>0.05$) and Spearman rho ($p>0.05$), there is no significant association between the Covid-19 pandemic and the resignation tendency in the examination of H1. Also, Somers' d ($p=0.991>0.05$) reveals that the pandemic does not affect the tendency or intention to quit, so the null hypothesis is not rejected. The COVID – 19 pandemics is considered as a mediator variable in the H2. Therefore, the partial correlation is used for testing the association of COVID-19 with factors that resulted in the Great Resignation. From the results of the partial correlation test, it follows that either there are no statistically significant results or, in the cases they occur, their correlations range at low levels. So the null hypothesis is not rejected.

The results obtained by the examination of H3 are the following: a) $x^2= 6.97$ (df=4, p= 0.138>0.05), b) r_s =0.021 (p= 0.55), c) Kendall's tau-b= 0.020 και Kendall's tau-c= 0.022 (p=0.54), d) Somers'd= 0.19 (p=0.4) which showed that null hypothesis is not rejected.

Regarding the H4, the results of x^2 (= 89.875, df=4, p= 0.00), r_s (=0329, p= 0.00), Kendall's tau-b (=0.299), Kendall's tau-c (= 0.353, p=0.000) and Somers' d (= 0.292, p=0.00) are statistically significant and the association of variables is moderately positive. As for H5, with the exception of x^2 (12.171, df=4, p= 0.016), the other measures do not confirm the symmetric and asymmetric association between the variables, so the null hypothesis is not rejected. The results from the measures of association do not support the H6, i.e. the correlation between organizational relations and the intention of resignation. However, the results from the test of H7 are statistically significant and reveal a moderate symmetric relationship between the intention of quitting and the corporate culture (x^2= 93.839, df=4, p= 0.000, r_s =0.339, p= 0.000, Kendall's tau-b= 0.305 and Kendall's tau-c= 0.370, p=0,000) as well as a moderate asymmetric relationship with a positive direction between the two variables (Somers' d= 0.296, p=0.000). H8 is supported too, since the results that derived from the tests of x^2 (= 4.47, df=4, p= 0.000), Spearman rho (=0.279, p= 0.000), Kendall's tau-b (=0.251), Kendall's tau-c (= 0.305, p=0.000) and Somers' d (=0.243 p=0.000) for the association of the variables "Family responsibilities / issues of force majeure" and "Intention to resign" are statistically significant while both the symmetric and the asymmetric relationship of the variables appear as moderately strong, with positive direction. On the contrary, the results obtained by the examination of H9 about the association of "Personal development and spare management" and "Intention of resigning" are statistically insignificant, so the null hypothesis is not rejected.

The results of the statistical tests indicated that H10 is supported, which means that there is association between the generational group of employees in the hospitality industry in Crete and their tendency to quit or remain in their jobs. Furthermore, independent samples t-test indicated that the difference between the means of Gen Z (M=1.32, SD=0.469) and Millennials (M= 1.31, SD=0.463) is not statistically significant as t (477) = 0.273, p=0.785. Thought, the difference between the means of Gen Z (M=1.32, SD=0.469) and Gen X (M=1.46, SD= 0.499) is statistically significant since t (301.39) = 2.929, p= 0.004 as well as between the means of Gen Z (M=1.32, SD=0.469) and Baby Boomers (M=1.73 SD= 0.449) with t (185) = 4.991, p=0.000. The difference in means of Millennials (M=1.31, SD=0.463) and Generation X (M=1.46, SD=0.499) is statistically significant as t (625.8) = 4.029, p =0.000. The difference between the means of Millennials (M=1.31, SD=0.463) and Baby Boomers (M=1.73, SD=0.449) is also statistically significant as t (372) = 5.531, p =0.000.

Regarding the relationship between the factors that lead to the Great Resignation and Generation Z, the following results emerged from the hypothesis testing:

The financial reasons (H11), the professional career (H13), the organizational relations (H14), the personal development and spare time management (H17) do not present statistically significant results regarding their association with the intention of Gen Z employees to quit or remain in their jobs in hospitality. Thus, the null hypotheses cannot be rejected. The job security and stability (H12), the corporate culture and corporate social responsibility (H15) the family responsibilities or personal reasons and issues of force majeure are proved to be significant with respect to their association with the intention of Gen Z employees of hospitality businesses to resign or not from their jobs. Therefore, the alternative hypotheses are supported. The results from the test of H18 about the correlation of COVID- 19 pandemic with the decision of Gen Z employees to resign or remain in their jobs in the hospitality industry are not significant and the null hypothesis is not rejected.

The test of H19 about the association of financial reasons with the Millennials employees' decision to resign or not from their working positions in hospitality yielded these results: x^2= 3.560 (df=4, p= 0.469), r_s = -0,026, p= 0.640, Kendall's tau-b= 0.024 and Kendall's tau-c= 0.026, p=0.631 and Somers'd= -0.024, p=0.631. The particular results are statistically insignificant and the null hypothesis is not rejected. The examination of the hypotheses concerning the association of Millennials intention to resignation with the professional career (H21), the organizational relations (H22) and the personal development and the quality management of spare time (H25) as well as with the impact of COVID-19 has given statistically insignificant results. Though, the examination of job security and stability (H20), corporate culture and corporate social responsibility (H23) and family/personal reasons and issues of force majeure gave statistically significant results regarding their association with Millennials employees' intention to resign or not from their job positions in the hospitality industry in Crete.

DISCUSSION

Through the examination of the results, it was found that the COVID-19 pandemic did not affect the employees of the hospitality industry in Crete in terms of their decision to resign or remain at work. The fact that more than half of the survey respondents stated that the pandemic had no influence on their decision to resign or stay in the business where they worked/are working, is indicative of the negligible impact that COVID-19 has had on hospitality workers' career orientation. Therefore, one of the main features of this phenomenon, namely the catalytic role of the pandemic in strengthening the causes that led to resignation, is not confirmed in the case of the workers of the hospitality industry in Crete.

Also, although a significant number of resignations has been observed, it does not exceed the number of employees who retain their jobs in the same hospitality companies for a long period of time. This conclusion is in contrast to the outcomes of other studies, according to which many workers employed in tourism businesses either they turned to other professional sectors after the expiry of lockdowns (Liu Lastres et al., 2022; Ng & Stanton, 2023) or they just resigned from their job positions in tourism sector (Formica & Sfodera 2022, p. 900).

The professional career has gathered the largest number of responses with regard to the intention of quitting while job security has gathered the largest number of responses as the most important for retaining the job positions in hospitality enterprises. Also, it is not confirmed by the statistical control that the categories of economic reasons, professional development and career, organizational relations, personal development and spare time management are related to the tendency of resignation in the hospitality industry of Crete, although these categories have gathered a large number of responses in terms of their importance in resignation decision. However, the intention of hospitality employees in Crete to resign or not is associated with the other factors that constitute the causes of the "Great Resignation" phenomenon, i.e. professional security and stability, corporate culture and social responsibility, family reasons/reasons of force majeure. However, although a positive correlation is observed between these factors and the decision/intention of regning, their relationships are generally characterized as moderately strong since their correlation coefficients are greater than 0.25 and less than 0.50.

From the descriptive data and from the control of the research hypotheses, it appears that employees of generation Z and Millennials have a greater tendency to quit compared to employees of the other generational groups in the hospitality industry in Crete. As regards the factors that are related with the decision of employees who belong to different generational groups to retain or not their jobs in hospitality, it derives from the descriptive data that for both Gen Z and Millennials, the most important reason for quitting or staying at work is career while the least important are the family responsibilities and force majeure issues. However, from the control of the research hypotheses, for both groups the association of the decision to quit or stay at work with financial reasons, professional career, organizational relations and personal development and time management issues was not confirmed. Specifically, in respect of Gen Z employees, the factors of job security and stability depict a medium-intensity correlation with the decision to resign, while the corporate culture and the category of family and force majeure issues show a low-intensity correlation with the tendency to quit. Regarding the Millennials, job security, corporate culture and social responsibility, as well as family and force majeure reasons have a moderately strong correlation with the decision/propensity to quit.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account the aforementioned, it can be said that the "Great Resignation" in Crete has not reached the levels it has recorded in other regions abroad, at least in the sector of hospitality. The respondents' answers revealed pathologies that characterize the hospitality sector over time, while the dissatisfaction of many of the employees is obvious, augmenting thus their intention to resign. However, despite the high rate of resignations recorded by the research sample, it is not explicitly confirmed that the particular resignations have the features of the "Big Quit" phenomenon. The minimal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have left no room for the "Great Resignation" phenomenon to evolve and overwhelm the hospitality industry.

It was also found that Gen Z and Millennials share commonalities in terms of their perceptions and their attitudes toward the value and the meaning of work in the hospitality sector. These two generational groups have proportionally higher resignation rates than Generation X and Baby Boomers. Moreover, both generational groups of employees consider the same categories of factors as important in their choice to remain or quit from their jobs in hospitality. The only difference between the two generational groups is that for Millennials, these factors are most strongly associated with their decision of staying or leaving a job.

In conclusion, it was established in this research that, contrary to what has been observed in other countries and regions abroad, the "Great Resignation" did not expanded in the hospitality industry in Crete since resignation rates have not been so high as to enhance the appearance of the particular phenomenon. Yet, the attitude and mindset of the two generational groups should not be ignored, since in a few years the employees of these generations will completely succeed the Baby Boomers and Generation X in the hospitality industry. In fact, Millennials and Gen Z employees are more likely to seek other career opportunities when their hospitality jobs do not keep pace with their expectations and their responsibilities.

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ENDURANCE SPORTING EVENTS AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this study is to explore endurance sporting events and the role they play in destination development in South Africa. It elaborates on how high-profile endurance sporting events have contributed to placing the country on the world map as a destination. In some instances, these events have led to specific local destinations being promoted across the world. A qualitative research approach using secondary data was employed, existing literature was reviewed on sport tourism and the benefits of hosting endurance sporting events. The findings indicate the growth and significance of sport tourism in improving destination image, fostering community pride and driving economic growth.*

KEYWORDS: *community pride, destination development, endurance sport, Ironman, triathlon.*

INTRODUCTION

Dating back to the Roman and Greek eras, tourism is a phenomenon that exists for various purposes or reasons (Sithole, 2017). However, there is no universal definition for the phenomenon as scholars define it based on its purpose or impact. Walton (2024) defines tourism as the practice of travelling for leisure, pleasure and relaxation while utilising services provided by businesses, while Dilek and Dilek (2018) as well as Kilatu (2020) are of the view that tourism is linked to one's travel out of their normal environment for economic activities, visiting family and friends as well as business and leisure. Based on the definitions, it is evident that tourism incorporates and impacts the economic, social and environmental facets of destinations.

Knowing the history and definition of tourism, it is important to note that the sector is multifaceted, with different types of tourism or niches to cater to different tourist needs. Gopalakrishnan, Peters and Vanzetti (2020); Goliath-Ludic and Yekela (2020); Huseynli (2022); Oberholzer (2023) as well as Deb, Das, Voumik, Nafi, Rashid and Esquivias (2023) point out that travelers benefit from the different types of tourism, which also enhance the economic, social and environmental facets of destinations. For this reason, different types of tourism are studied to comprehend the motives behind people's travels and the effect of tourism on host destinations. From this, the focus is on sport tourism. This paper aims to explore the impact of sport tourism through a review of literature on endurance sporting events.

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METHODOLOGY

The paper utilised a qualitative research approach with desktop research. Desktop research enlisted the use of secondary data that has been collected, produced by other researchers, and utilised for different purposes (Amoah, Ferreira & Potgieter, 2020; Ajayi, 2023). The inclusion criteria for this study consisted of the following key terms: tourism, sport tourism, endurance sport, Ironman, triathlon, and sporting events, while events not falling within the context of sport tourism were excluded. Journal articles, books, newspapers, industry reports, theses and dissertations were consulted and analysed as they served as the secondary data sources. The secondary data sources were assessed to identify and select the pertinent information relating to sport tourism and the Ironman event. This method enabled the researcher to collect data to establish an understanding of the research topic. Additionally, excluding events not relating to sport tourism, the study kept focus on the subject matter and maintained relevance to the Ironman African Championship.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussions on sport tourism, the development of endurance sporting events, and the contribution of these events to specific destinations. The subsequent sections will elaborate on why such studies are critical for destinations and hosts.

SPORT TOURISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to Gibson (1988), referenced in Parker (2019), Su (2021) and Łuć (2023), sport tourism is leisure travel where participants and spectators partake in physical and sport activities which may involve competition. Endurance sport refers to activities such as running, cycling, swimming and mountain biking that demand participants to endure medium-to-long distances and extended durations of intense physical training (Peng, Liu, Scelles & Inoue, 2023). Being one of tourism's growing segments, sport tourism has drawn attention from both academics and society (Magangqaza, Bama and Venske, 2022; Raso & Cherubini, 2023). Hence, there has been an increasing number of people travelling to new destinations to observe and partake in sporting activities and events, and because of this, the economic and socio-economic impact of the tourism sectors has grown (González-García, Mártínez-Rico, Bañuls-Lapuerta & Calabuig, 2022). Mxunyelwa and Kilani (2020) and Raso and Cherubini (2023), point out that since sport events fall under sport tourism, they are distinguished by their potential to have a considerable economic impact on destinations, their capacity to provide income and infrastructure investments, as well their worldwide appeal. In contrast, these events can be risky and require a lot of resources. As such, it is imperative to understand how hosting communities and destinations view the significance and influence of sporting events. In light of this, Raso and Cherubini (2023) offer an argument that calls for assessing locals' points of view in order to promote involvement, inclusivity, and success in sport tourism and events.

According to Nyikana and Tichaawa (2018), sport tourism expands the definition of sport to encompass leisure activities that promote the development and growth of additional tourism services and goods. Furthermore, sport tourism has enhanced the experience of travelling through the development of interconnected cultural features. Nyikana (2016) also contends with the view that these cultural features or characteristics have significantly increased the benefits associated with travelling. When hosted successfully, sport tourism events can result in a notable increase in the number of tourist spending and community pride among the locals in the host destination (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Tichaawa & Swart, 2010). Additionally, Nyikana, Tichaawa, and Swart (2014), as well as Knott and Hemmonsbey (2015), assert that sport tourism enhances a city's reputation and its importance. Furthermore, due to their significant growth, sport and tourism are now considered essential economic sectors in developed and developing nations (Bob & Swart, 2010; Gaffney, 2010; Tichaawa & Swart, 2010; Smith, 2012). Nyikana (2016) also posits that sport tourism events have received much attention and interest in the scholarly and political spheres.

Bob and Swart (2010), Gaffney (2010), Tichaawa and Swart (2010) as well as Bama and Tichaawa (2015) contend that developing countries have expressed interest in hosting sport events under the belief that these events would positively impact their communities. Tichaawa, Moyo, Swart and Mhlanga (2015) further note that developing nations have long argued for the inclusion of mega-events and sport events in their national and urban planning initiatives. Various observers assert that developing countries acknowledge sport tourism as a way of achieving a high level of worldwide status (Humphreys & Prokopowicz, 2007; Nyikana et al., 2014). Knott and Hemmonsbey (2015) claim that the increasing level of competition globally is the motivation behind developing nations desiring to host sporting events. Such motivation allows them to gain international recognition, enhance their reputation as destinations and set themselves apart from other destinations. From the South African perspective, the country has recently hosted a number of endurance sporting events, positioning the country as a leading sport tourist destination. These events include the annual Cape Town Cycle Tour, Two Oceans Marathon and Comrades Marathon, which have been highlighted by

Achu, Nyathi, Bama and Tichaawa (2015:220), Bama and Tichaawa (2015:205), Knott and Hemmonsbey (2015:192) and Nyikana et al. (2014:548).

COMRADES MARATHON

First hosted in 1921 as a tribute to the deceased soldiers of World War I, the Comrades Marathon is an annual 89 km racing event taking place between Pietermaritzburg and Durban in the KwaZulu-Natal province (Dana, 2018; Havenga, Coetzee, Burger & Piketh, 2022). Recognised as an ultra-marathon, the racing event has been hosted on over 94 occasions and Seme (2024) reports that over 20 600 athletes participated in the current year's race, including those from South Africa, the United Kingdom, India, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Russia, Japan, the United States, Eswatini, Australia and Botswana. Such numbers and diversity in participants positively impact on Durban and Pietermaritzburg as tourist destinations. From a social perspective, the racing event served as a platform for political dissent, reconciliation and nation-building (Dana, 2018). Ndlovu (2024) also asserts that the event is beyond racing as it celebrates community and belonging. For the local communities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, the event promotes visibility, health and fitness, advocates for charitable initiatives for development and fosters cultural exchange (Ndlovu, 2024). From an economic standpoint, the marathon benefits the local economy as athletes and spectators spend on tourism products and services such as accommodation, dining and experiences (Maharajh, 2009; Nlovu, 2024). As a result of this, tourism establishments in KwaZulu-Natal, such as hotels, restaurants and attraction sites observe a rise in patronage during the Comrades Marathon season, and Durban and Pietermaritzburg become the prime destinations for tourism and sport.

CAPE TOWN CYCLE TOUR

The Cape Town Cycle Tour (CTCT) hosted by the City of Cape Town along a 109 km route is another of South Africa's annual sporting events (Giddy, 2019). Additionally, Kruger, Myburgh & Saayman (2015) posit that this sporting event can be categorised as one of the most intense endurance activities since it involves risk, requires physical exertion and dedication and occurs in variable weather conditions. According to CTCT (2018), Bill Mylrea and John Stegmann founded the event in 1978 to build a network of secure and effective cycling routes throughout the Cape Peninsula, and each year, the event attracts up to 35 000 cyclists from across the globe. With the ability to attract such numbers, the event benefits the city of Cape Town as a destination. The 109 km route of the CTCT offers cyclists with scenic views and the opportunity to explore the city, making the city of Cape Town a must-see and visit destination (News24, 2024). Furthermore, the event benefits the city of Cape Town by bringing together local communities and tourists, promoting social cohesion and the growth of sport tourism. The event also promotes the Western Cape province as a sport destination of choice, which leads to employment opportunities and economic growth through tourist spending (News24, 2024).

IRONMAN TRIATHLON EVENT

A triathlon is a sporting event consisting of three endurance disciplines, namely, cycling, swimming and running. The Ironman event is an example of such triathlons hosted across the globe, and its development and history can be traced back to 1978 in Hawaii where the Collins family (founders) aimed to challenge athletes to compete in endurance activities (Barbosa, Sousa, Sales, Olher, Aguiar, Santos, Tiozzo, Simões, Nikolaidis & Knechtle, 2019; Wassner-Flynn, 2022). As the most well-known long-distance triathlon, Ironman Hawaii consists of a 3.8 km swim, 180 km cycle ride, and 42.2 km run (Barbosa et al., 2019). Considered to be the world's highest-ranking Ironman triathlon, the Ironman Hawaii is one of the toughest endurance races out of the top 12 globally. On an annual basis, athletes compete in Ironman qualification races worldwide to earn a spot in the Ironman World Championship.

Due to its success over the years, the Ironman Hawaii event gave rise to other Ironman events across the globe. The Ironman triathlon series now takes place across different countries and cities such as Spain, Italy, South Africa, Germany, France, Switzerland to mention a few (Ironman Group, 2024). As a result, several studies on the event have been conducted on various aspects of the event, such as the following: first-time versus repeat triathlon participants at Ironman South Africa (Myburgh, Kruger & Saayman, 2014), trends in triathlon performance: effects of sex and age (Lepers, Knechtle, Stapley, 2013), variables that influence Ironman triathlon performance (Knechtle, Knechtle, Stiefel, Zingg, Rosemann & Rüst, 2015).

NELSON MANDELA BAY IRONMAN

Ironman in Nelson Mandela Bay developed from the success of its predecessors, the need to move the event to more challenging and scenic courses that attract more participants and spectators and the metro's history, cultural pride, and landscape (Algoa Bay Marine, 2024). Attracting triathletes and participants from across the globe, this event also appeals to an international television audience. Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism (2014) mentions that investments on media coverage for the event came close to R12 million, and the coverage showcases the event itself as well as Nelson Mandela Bay as a tourist destination. Such media coverage grows the event's international television audience and promotes the metro's capability to host events of this magnitude. Additionally, the Ironman in Nelson Mandela Bay has contributed significantly to the local economy, with direct income from competitors and spectators totalling R400 million from 2005 to 2013 (Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism, 2014).

Additionally, News24 (2018) reported that an Ironman event like this helped the economy of Nelson Mandela Bay and had a positive effect on the metro's tourism and hospitality sub-sectors as competitors and spectators travel to experience the Bay's culture, way of life and tourist attractions. The event has also encouraged numerous organisations and the public to engage in deeds of kindness. For instance, the Ironman 4 the Kids Charity Trust and the Siyaphambili Triathlon Participation Development Program raise money for children from less fortunate backgrounds and help underprivileged athletes train for triathlons, respectively (News24, 2018). Such acts and impacts from the event foster community and cultural pride.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, high-profile endurance sporting events have become an important contribution to the global tourism industry, as they impact host destinations' socio-economic development and status. These events draw the attraction of international athletes and cyclists and boost the local economies through tourism spending and media exposure. The media exposure of these sporting events is of immense value, as viewers not only see the athletes and cyclists participating but also the routes that are followed. Interwoven into the television and video footage are the scenery and often some of the key tourist attractions. In Cape Town for instance, images of the world-famous Robben Island where many South African political activists were imprisoned, including the global icon Nelson Mandela, Table Mountain, and many other tourists features often feature as part of the footage. In Durban, the Zulu heritage and scenery will be top of mind in the video footage. In Nelson Mandela Bay, renowned for its bottlenose dolphins, the Southern right whales calving in the bay area, Addo Elephant National Park, and the close proximity of the world-famous private game reserve remain key attractions that feature. Sporting events, particularly endurance sporting events, draw the local community to the streets to support endurance athletes and cyclists.

The local media has often reported of how vibrant the spectators are. These events foster community pride and contribute to nation-building, which is sorely needed in a country where the levels of inequality are quite notable and a history of oppression has left indelible scars in the underprivileged communities. These endurance sporting events also contribute to cultural exchange where spectators from diverse communities stand side-by-side to cheer on the athletes and cyclists. Ultimately, it also contributes to social cohesion. South Africa has been positioned as a leading sport tourism destination because of sport, contributing to the country's global recognition and development. It is recommended that future studies need to evaluate the non-monetary value of such endurance sporting events in terms of contributing to nation-building. Given the fact that video footage is beamed across the world into the homes of numerous prospective inbound tourists, such sporting events need to be supported by the South African government and its respective agencies. Such sporting events indirectly act as a catalyst to convert some of the viewers into potential inbound tourists and should spur politicians and bureaucrats to further drive destination development and promotion.

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ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL: TOURISM DESTINATION INITIATIVES DURING THE PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT: *Travel restrictions had an immediate impact on economy something which deeply affected tourism systems. For example, there was a decline in international travel and domestic tourism and also, in a wide range of sectors in the tourism industry. The COVID-19 pandemic has generated a highly dynamic and unpredictable environment, making it challenging for destinations to operate. It is crucial to determine what measures must be implemented so as to effectively handle the pandemic and its consequences. In this context, this paper aims to highlight the initiatives taken by a state agency in an emerging tourism destination to ensure that the destination and tourism-related businesses could continue their operations and preparations for future tourism and economic recovery. The paper provides a detailed overview of the initiatives, including their purpose, timeline, budget, implementation process, actions taken, and the level of local involvement. The findings and discussion of this case are valuable for academics and organizations such as DMOs, tourism authorities, and community stakeholders interested in COVID-19 recovery initiatives. The results ca be rather useful for other destinations with similar characteristics to the city of Veria, which followed similar initiatives in order to overcome the impacts of the pandemic. While these examples may not be relevant to every tourism destination, they underscore important factors that Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) could consider.*

KEYWORDS: *DMO, Covid-19, Recovery Initiatives, Pandemic Impacts*

INTRODUCTION

The world experienced an unparalleled global health crisis due to the outbreak of COVID-19, which started on the 11th of March 2020, when the World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 a pandemic. As a consequence, that led to numerous social and economic repercussions (Trihas *et al*., 2023). As said by Fotiadis and Huan (2014), a crisis is an event that can lead to an unstable or hazardous situation, greatly impacting a community or an individual. The pandemic outbreak has led to a worldwide crisis, causing the tourism industry to suffer more than ever, surpassing the impact of other epidemics as well as the financial crisis of 2008 (Del Chiappa, Bregoli and Fotiadis, 2021). Consequently, it is essential

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that we assess tourists' preferences, perceptions, and holiday intentions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Brough *et al.* (2021) confirmed that there are changes in travel preferences among various societal groups, while Sinha and Nair (2021) came into an agreement that socio-demographic factors significantly influence destination choices in the post-COVID-19 period. In this paper, we will present the efforts of a state body to overcome the difficulties of the pandemic and to prepare and reinforce the destination and its entrepreneurs for the next day of the lock-down.

LITERATURE REVIEW

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND TOURISM

It is obvious that the COVID-19 lockdowns and travel difficulties have caused to a number of tourism destinations to witness a decrease in visitors, leading to booking cancellations, increased unemployment, and a general decline in travel confidence. The World Tourism Organization (2021) mentioned a 20-30% decrease in international arrivals in 2020, leading to a loss of $300-450 billion in tourism revenue. It is estimated that 100.8 million people, who have been working in the tourism industry, have lost their jobs during the past years. In a matter of months, the focus of the global tourism system shifted from issues of overtourism to a state of no tourism (Dodds and Butler, 2019; Seraphin et *al.*, 2018). As tourism is a vital component of the Greek economy and accounts for approximately 70% of its GDP, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was massive (Ntakakos *et al.*, 2022). Specifically, the Institute of Greek Tourism Confederation announced that the country's travel receipts in 2020 decreased by 76.5% compared to 2019 (Ntakakos *et al.*, 2022). Indicatively, according to INSETE, compared to 2019:

- International arrivals at Greek airports declined by 72.5%, international road arrivals were reduced by 78.7%, domestic arrivals at Greek airports were reduced by 61.4%,
- Hotel revenues fell by 78.1%, and the number of guests arriving at Greek hotels decreased by 69.3%. and finally,
- The number of employees in the hotel sector was reduced by 8%.

According to Burkle (2006), analyzing the connection between pandemics and traveling is necessary in order to comprehend health and security matters. In this context, tourist destinations are working to adjust to the "new normal" while striving to restore the travelers' confidence (Trihas *et al*., 2023). Therefore, tourism recovery strategies should be developed along with the ongoing pandemic situations (Woyo, 2021).

VERIA AS A TOURISM DESTINATION

Veria and its 62,064 inhabitants, is the capital of the Regional Unit of Imathia in the northern Greece at the Region of Central Macedonia. Veria possesses rich history. Aiges (UNESCO), the first capital of the Macedonian Kingdom is located in Veria. Furthermore, the city has been an important religious crossroad from ancient times until today. Despite the rich historical tradition and its countless attractions, Veria is an emerging tourist destination that its economy is mainly based on fruit and vegetable cultivation, remaking and livestock farming and to a smaller extent on tourism. The city has a total capacity of 687 beds and several sharing economy accommodations. Moreover, there are 90 restaurants and cafes, five wineries and several distilleries, and five conference venues with a total capacity of 1,200 people. Lastly, there are several sports and outdoor facilities, including Seli Ski Resort at 1,900m and 3 climbing fields with more than 23 routes.

THE 'DISCOVER VERIA' PROJECT

"Discover Veria" is the official tourism promotion and branding initiative of the Municipality of Veria, designed to establish and highlight Veria as a tourist destination. The new Tourism Department designed and executed the campaign with the goal of raising awareness and fostering positive perceptions in target markets. The strategic axe set by the Department was to establish Veria as a primary tourism destination and to boost tourist arrivals, to extend the average length of stay, and to steadily increase the per capita consumption of tourism products and services. Furthermore, fostering tourism awareness within the local community is a key strategic goal of the program to achieve long-term sustainability (Saufi *et al*., 2014; Farsari, 2023).

COVID-19 EFFECTS ON TOURISM IN VERIA

Having as a strategic goal the consolidation of Veria as a primary tourism destination and the increase in visitor numbers and overnight stays, four strategic axes were set. Firstly, to organize the destination, secondly, to promote it, thirdly, to develop synergies with other tourism bodies and finally to maximize the community's tourist awareness. Before the pandemic, Veria had already succeeded in being integrated to the national and international "tourism map". Veria promoted its cultural, natural, and gastronomic wealth in the media and at the same time it hosted a significant number of fam, press trips and B2B meetings. More importantly, there was a recorded increase in overnight stays and arrivals in Veria (Tables

1,2,3,4,5). After March 2020, all the cultural and sports events that attracted people to the city have been cancelled, as well as all the social events (weddings, etc.) and visiting of the ski centers was prohibited. Additionally, the museums were closed, or they were open for limited number of visitors. In a few worlds, all economic and social activity was enormously affected (Tables 1,2,3,4,5) making it a completely "dead" tourist period (Conde Nast Traveller, 2020). The pandemic significantly contracted the tourism economy, and the region struggled to recover in 2021.

Table 1. Arrivals in the **Regional Unit of Imathia** 2007-2021 **(Hellenic Statistical Authority)**

	2015	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**
Greeks	45.352	48.336	46.981	44.342	37.646	11.185	11.089
Foreigners	6.798	7.607	8.419	8.187	9.521	2.488	2.351
Total	**51.150**	**55.943**	**55.400**	**52.529**	**47.167**	**13.673**	**13.440**

Table 2. Annual occupancy of hotels in Veria 2015-2021 **(Hellenic Statistical Authority)**

	2015	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**
Veria	24,0%	24,6%	27,2%	23,4%	23,1%	11,4%	12,4%

The pandemic afflicted Veria in its best period, during the spring, where the city hosts thousands of visitors, school trips, cultural and sports events (Gössling, Scott and Hall, 2021), particularly, after the city's strong presence in tourism exhibitions, fam and press trips, B2B meetings and a recorded increase in tourism flows. However difficult the situation was, the Tourism Department tried to return to the previous status.

Table 3. Overnight stays in short-term rental accommodation 2017-2020 (AirDNA)

	2017	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**
Veria	196	971	2.803	2.261	1.791	2.894

Table 4. Total overnight stays of visitors in **Imathia** 2007-2021 **(Hellenic Statistical Authority)**

	2017	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**
Greeks	108.519	110.440	73.568	20.409	19.268
Foreigners	24.578	20.621	27.805	4.871	6.046
Total	**133.097**	**131.061**	**101.463**	**25.280**	**25.314**

Table 5. Annual visits to the Royal Tombs of Aigai 2019-2023 (**Hellenic Statistical Authority)**

	2019	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**
Vergina Royal Tombs	223.151	37.586	56.790	168.444

INITIATIVES FOR THE TOURISM RESTART

Closed borders, thorough traveling control and lockdown measures have caused significant decline in tourist flows (Trihas, *et al*., 2023). The recovery phase presents a valuable opportunity to enhance the capacity of local organizations to support long-term sector development after a disaster (Berke *et al.*, 1993). According to Berke *et al*. (1993), recovery can provide numerous benefits to organizations, including cost reduction, improved effectiveness, policy updates, and decreased future hazard vulnerability. This can be achieved by modifying physical development patterns and strengthening hazard mitigation efforts immediately after a disaster.

The Tourism Department tried to keep in touch with travel agents and operators by taking part in online discussions for the next day, assessing the situation and accelerating bureaucratic procedures. The quarantine and lockdown measures during the pandemic presented an ideal opportunity to conduct webinars for residents and entrepreneurs. With the anticipated restart of tourism activities, each thematic session was targeted around strategies on how the tourism industry could effectively adapt to changing conditions and prepare for the emerging post-Covid-19 economic environment. Notably, participation in these webinars was impressively strong.

From a business point of view, focusing on enhancing health and safety by implementing risk-reduction strategies was crucial (Kaushal and Srivastava, 2021). Health and safety have been a primary priority for tourists (Li *et al*., 2022), and digital technologies are progressing to minimize human contact, leading the tourism industry to transform digitally. Cost reductions, increased service speed and consistency are fundamental challenges for the tourism industry in the post-pandemic era (Li *et al*., 2019). Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the implementation of contactless technology within tourism and hospitality (Gudkov, 2021). The need to avoid physical contact, together with rapid technological advancements, led to the development of contactless technologies, what is now known as 'contactless travel' (Trihas, Zozonakis and Kourgiantakis, 2024). The emphasis was given on minimizing the danger of virus spread while at the same time to maintain the quality of service and tourists' experience in high levels (Rahimizhian and Irani, 2021).

It is a fact that in times of crisis, the immediate solution is to shift destinations and businesses to the domestic market of the country rather than the international ones. It is very crucial for destinations to understand and appreciate the role of domestic tourism when facing ongoing crises and to build resilience. For instance, in Greece, Poulaki and Nikas (2021) found that domestic tourism quickly rebounded, with a growing preference for personalized services, as travelers are now more mindful of both travel costs and health safety during their trips (Woyo, 2021). From an engineering standpoint, resilience is measured by how quickly a system can return to its normality. Adaptive resilience, on the other hand, refers to a system's capacity to endure the effects of modifications and manage resources effectively. In the context of a destination, resilience or reflation focuses on how swiftly the destination can recover to its prior normal conditions after experiencing a disruption, such as COVID-19 (Hall, Prayag and Amore, 2018). Reddy *et al.* (2020) argue that if a destination or business adopts and adapted resilience philosophy during crises, this will offer considerable benefits, which will allow them to respond to external **sensibilities** and adapt behavior consequently. Those destinations that adapt to crises immediately are considered as more resilient and can reflate from disasters or crises easier and faster (Brown *et al.*, 2017).

INITIATIVE: WEBINARS DURING THE PERIOD OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

WEBINAR: "IMPROVING COMPETITIVENESS IN THE COVID-19"

In this context, the hospitality sector has been remarkably affected, with many hotels and other accommodation business either shutting down or significantly reducing their operations (Hung *et al*., 2018). The situation is even more critical for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the core of the hospitality sector in several European countries, including Greece (Del Chiappa, Bregoli and Fotiadis, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary for the hospitality sector to redefine its operations, especially in offering novel and value for money lodging experiences (Wen *et al*., 2021). A new model of hospitality known as "touchless hospitality" has emerged in the hotel industry. This model aims to deliver high-quality services throughout guests' stays and during catering, while minimizing the threat of physical contamination and alleviating psychological fears related to the pandemic (Hao, 2021). The challenge for the hospitality sector in the post-pandemic period is to maintain the established and expected level of service delivery (Saanchi and Kumar, 2021).

The webinar was organized in collaboration with the Hoteliers' Association of Imathia and concerned hospitality businesses and the trainees were members and employees of the Association. The conductor of the event was Ioannis Valachis from the Tourism Department of

Veria with academic and professional involvement in the industry. The topics that were covered in the webinar had to do with the theoretical approaches of Tourism; the Efficient Hotels Management; the HRM; the Service Quality; the Customer Satisfaction/Complaints Handling; the Pricing; the Reservations; the Contracts; the Cancellations; the Digital Marketing; the Distribution Channels; the Contactless or Touchless Tourism; the Hospitality Hygiene and Health Protocols and Safety for Covid 19; and the Analysis of internal and external business environment focusing on Imathia. The purpose and objective of the webinar was to increase sales and profitability through the best acquaintance and knowledge by improving the quality of services (Greasidou, and Valachis, 2022; Michael and Fotiadis, 2022) in a new but familiar environment of the covid 19 and post-covid-19 era.

Period	**Cost**	**Target Group**	**Organized by**
Lock-down period. May13	0€	30 Local Hotel Owners and Employees	Tourism Dpt. & Hoteliers Association

WEBINAR: "COSTING AND PROMOTION OF CATERING BUSINESSES"

The webinar aimed to provide advice to catering businesses on the basic tools of Food Costing and Catering Marketing by providing useful tools and easy practices but also to introduce them to contactless or touchless technology and practices emphasizing local gastronomy and products. The conductor of the event was Mrs Magda Peistikou, founder of FoodEnius with many years of educational and professional experience in the hospitality and tourism industry. The event, with participants and representatives of professional bodies was broadcasted online on Saturday March 6 through the official channel of the Municipality of Veria on the YouTube platform.

Period	**Cost**	**Target Group**	**Organized by**
Lock-down period. March 6	0€	40 Entrepreneurs and Employees	Tourism Dpt. & Dpt. of Electronic Government, Digital Policy and Innovation

"DIGITAL MARKETING FOR TOURISM BUSINESSES"

The event aimed to provide advice to businesses operating in the tourism industry on key Digital Marketing tools and how a business can use them properly to communicate their business online and gain more bookings or sales. The conductor of the event was Mr Vassilis Polyzos, Founder of THE VSCOPE who is active in the fields of advertising and tourism as a brand strategist and digital marketing expert. Destinations and businesses must speed up their digital transformations to meet the increasing demands of their customers and new hygiene protocols. They should conduct frequent surveys to continuously monitor potential shifts in consumer behavior, provide additional data about the health and safety practices taken, and develop long-term relationships with their guests through true and interactive communication. The event was broadcast online through the official Youtube channel of the Municipality of Veria.

Period	**Cost**	**Target Group**	**Organized by**
Lock-down period. December 19	0€	45 Entrepreneurs and Employees	Tourism Dpt. & Department of Electronic Government, Digital Policy, and Innovation

In the above webinars the entrepreneurs had the opportunity to watch it live and ask their questions. The video of the events posted on the Municipality's YouTube channel.

INITIATIVE: "TILL THEN, KEEP SAFE"

Very important was the effort to keep people's interest warm through social networks, giving a tone of optimism for the next day. A series of photo posts on social networks with an optimistic color emphasizing the need to stay healthy but also to show due patience until the end of the pandemic so that we can enjoy the beauties of our country. At the same time, this encouraged many of our followers to go out and take pictures of the beautiful scenery or to cook a local recipe and send them to us either in post or in our networks in a very interesting interaction. The above actions were conducted under the slogan and hashtag "#Till then, keep safe".

INITIATIVE: ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT EVENTS

Due to the pandemic, Greeks were instructed to "stay at home" leading to the rescheduling or cancellation of all live cultural events (Tsalpara *et al.*, 2021). The primary alternative was "online concerts" along with the effective use of the "Live Broadcast" feature on social media platforms. These options are growing in popularity, with many users tuning in to watch videos. This approach allows the artist-audience connection to reach a much wider audience compared to traditional in-person attendance (Tsalpara *et al.*, 2021). Thus, this alternative form of entertainment was a great opportunity for the Tourism Department to maintain optimism between residents and potential guests for the next day of the pandemic.

Consequently, the Cultural Department of the Municipality of Veria in addition with the Culture Center of the Central Macedonia Region, frequently organized online viewings of various artistic events. The Tourism Department's social media showed and promoted these free screenings to make the best use of the quarantine time while showing the messages to keep people safe until the end of the quarantine. Thus, a very large number of online events were presented during the pandemic.

INITIATIVE: PROJECTS FOR THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION

During the Pandemic, a very important project called "Innovative Digital Services for Tourist Promotion of the City of Veria" was auctioned, which involved innovative digital services such as creating videos, photos, website modernization, etc., but also strategic planning. The conditions are ripe for the start of discussions with the Regions of Imathia stakeholders to create a destination management organization, a DMO for Imathia (Blackman and Ritchie, 2008; Nikolaou and Valachis, 2022). The tourism department drew the attention of a significant number of proposals to the state to support tourist businesses in matters of reducing operating costs, wage subsidies to assist employers in retaining their employees (Foo *et al*., 2020), and also to finance the promotion and resumption of tourism. The tourism department also encouraged innovation within the sector (Loi *et al*., 2020, Valachis and Tachmatzidis, 2023). Also, during the pandemic, a photographic album was published that would showcase the beauties of every part of the Municipality of Veria. Finally, the Tourism Department was in close cooperation with the Regional of Central Macedonia and "Marketing Greece" for the forthcoming campaigns and the restart of tourism in the region.

CONCLUSION

This paper presented the initiatives of an emerging tourism destination aimed at keeping tourism activities active during the pandemic and preparing them for the restart of tourism. These initiatives included training local businesses, managing public relations, streamlining bureaucratic and state procedures, and using social media to maintain interest in travel among tourists and locals. For a destination, resilience emphasizes the speed at which it can return to its previous normal state after a disruption, like COVID-19. The destination that is employing adaptive reflation philosophy of Covid 19 or other crises is seen as more resilient and can recover from disasters and crises more rapidly.

However, it is essential to evaluate and quantitatively measure the outcomes of these initiatives. This could involve examining participants' and residents' perceptions, educational results, visitor and accommodation statistics, and various assessment indexes. The findings and discussions from this case study are valuable to academic researchers and organizations focused on sustainable tourism development. The results can be especially beneficial for other destinations with similar characteristics to the city of Veria, which may be struggling to survive due to the pandemic.

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EVALUATING AIRBNB AS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE AND COMPETITOR TO BOOKING.COM IN SOUTHWESTERN BULGARIA

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ABSTRACT: *The sharing economy has significantly expanded over the past decade, now rivaling major international corporations such as Booking Holdings and Expedia. Prominent entities within this sector include Airbnb and Uber, which are among the most highly valued companies. This study aims to assess Airbnb's offerings as a competitive alternative to Booking.com within the hotel industry in select towns of Southwestern Bulgaria. A detailed analysis was conducted on hotel listings from the online platforms in the towns of Blagoevgrad, Bansko, Sandanski, Kyustendil, and Dupnitsa. Key factors such as reservation policies, customer reviews, and double room accommodation pricing were systematically compared. The findings reveal that hotels in Southwestern Bulgaria underutilize the potential benefits offered by the Airbnb platform, highlighting opportunities for greater market integration.*

KEYWORDS: *Airbnb, Booking.com, price, customer reviews*

INTRODUCTION

Airbnb and Booking.com are two of the most prominent online platforms for booking accommodations globally and their influence on hotel sector is still growing. These two platforms are being used by millions of people worldwide (Diogo, 2018). The core difference of their business models is that Airbnb tend to be a representative of the so called sharing economy, while Booking.com is one of the most popular travel platforms in the world (Borges-Tiago et al., 2021), and by far the most influential OTA in Europe (Ivanov and Atanasova, 2019; Schegg, 2024). According to Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers (2017), a new type of online platform has emerged as the tourism industry has inevitably been influenced by diffusion of the sharing economy, and Airbnb is proving it in the last years. In the period 2017 – 2023 Airbnb tripled its revenue starting from 2,561 billion USD and reaching 9,917 billion USD in 2023 (www.macrotrends.net, 2024). Still their revenue is half of the revenue of Booking Holdings and their EBIDTA stays at about 1,5 billion USD compared to Booking`s 6,5 billion USD (www.macrotrends.net, 2024).

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Contemporary hotels have adjusted their business operations in accordance with the presence of online travel agencies (Atanasova and Ivanov, 2021). Although reluctant to adopt new technologies (Buhalis, 2003), hotel managers have to acknowledge and embrace the industry shift towards technology-driven management and promotion of their facilities (Inversini and Masiero, 2014). Hoteliers in Bulgaria are using extensively the opportunities that Booking.com is offering them to increase their visibility and sales (Ivanov, 2022). On the other hand Airbnb is reviewed as a threat to hoteliers by impacting hotel revenues and occupancy rates (Zervas et al., 2015), by reducing hospitality employment (Fang et al., 2016; Guttentag, 2015) and by avoidance of tax (Guttentag, 2015). According to Haywood (2016) in 2015 the lost revenue due to Airbnb competition, of hotels in New York accounts for more than 500 million USD. In the recent years, platforms such as Airbnb and HomeAway have become increasingly popular alternatives to classic hotels, especially preferred by the "millennials" generation, thus posing a threat to hotel companies (Kazandzieva et al., 2017).

Being a sharing economy disruptive innovation (Gutentag, 2015), Airbnb let hotels also publish their room offers in the online platform. Not many hotel owners are aware of the opportunities of the sharing economy tools.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to explore to what extent the hoteliers in Southwestern Bulgaria tend to exploit the opportunities of Airbnb platform. Southwestern Bulgaria is a region of significant geographical and cultural diversity, encompassing prominent destinations such as Bansko, a major ski resort; Sandanski, Banya, Sapareva Banya, and Ognyanovo, known for their spa facilities; and the Rila Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Additionally, the region includes Blagoevgrad, the area's central urban hub, home to two major universities. This diverse range of attractions draws various types of travelers, including ski enthusiasts, business and conference attendees, hikers, cultural tourists, and wellness seekers. Consequently, the region presents a competitive marketplace in which accommodation platforms like Airbnb and Booking.com have the potential to flourish.

For the purpose of this study, data were collected from the websites of Booking.com and Airbnb. The focus was on hotel-type accommodations in the regions of Blagoevgrad, Kyustendil, Dupnitsa, Sapareva Banya, and the Bansko region, which includes Razlog, Banya, Dobrinishte, and surrounding villages, as well as Goce Delchev, Ognyanovo, Sandanski, and Petrich. A total of 187 hotel listings were identified and reviewed on the Booking.com platform across these destinations. A similar search was conducted on the Airbnb platform to identify all hotel listings available within the same regions. Comparative analysis was then performed on the hotels listed on both platforms, with a focus on key variables such as double room accommodation pricing, customer satisfaction scores, and cancellation policies.

RESULTS

In the recent years, the form of C2C communication has also become necessary, an example of which is the shared economy platform Airbnb (Benckendorff et al., 2014). Actually the business model of Airbnb can be presented as a C2B2C or even B2B2C when taking into account that in the middle of every transaction is the company itself. The company of Airbnb is an intermediary between two costumers or sometimes between business and costumer. Every user of the platform has two profiles online: one as a host and one as a traveler, and can switch between them in seconds. This fact turns the users of the platform into both providers and users of the service.

In the case of the current study only 23 of 187 hotels reviewed have an active profile in the Airbnb platform. These account for 12.30% of the hotels that offer rooms online in Booking.com website in the region of Southwestern Bulgaria. Two of the properties reviewed possess only an Airbnb profile. These two properties are not taken into account for the purpose of the study. The results of the survey are clearly stated in the following Table.1.

Hotel businesses that utilize the Airbnb platform are situated in only 5 destinations: Blagoevgrad, Bansko, Sandanski, Kyustendil and Sapareva Banya. Regarding the price of the accommodation is visible that their offers in Booking.com are 11 % more expensive than the matching offers in Airbnb. On the other hand the reviews in Booking.com are slightly better than these in Airbnb when taking into account all the properties – 8.46 to 8.28 (4.14 – the star rating in Airbnb is calculated on a scale from 1 to 5). When removing from the list two properties that have only one review in the Airbnb platform the results show advantage of the Airbnb star ratings – 9.32 (4.66 – Airbnb 1 to 5 scale) to 8.50 for Booking.com. The last reviewed component of the study "Cancelation policy" also gives advantage to the offers in Airbnb platform compared to their matching ones in Booking.com. Almost all Airbnb offers of accommodation let the guests cancel free of charge up to 24 hours before arrival. A few of the hotels reviewed let the guests cancel free of charge a day in advance in Booking.com platform.

Table 1. Price, Review score and Cancelation policy of hotels matching Airbnb and Booking.com listings

Hotel name	Double accommodation price in BGN		Booking/ Airbnb price ratio %	Review score (1-5 scale and 1-10 scale)		Cancelation policy	
	Airbnb	Booking		Airbnb	Booking	Airbnb	Booking
Blagoevgrad							
Kremen	82	65	79	-	8.9	24 h	24 h
Fenix	70	78	111	4.71	8.7	24 h	24 h
Zora	67	70	104	-	8.6	24 h	24 h
Apart hotel	81	non avail	-	-		24 h	-
Bansko area							
Iceberg hotel	88	96	109.09	-	8.4	24 h	non ref
Emerald SpA	111	190	171.17	-	9.5	non ref	non ref
Belvedere Vip Apartment	166	170	102.41	5	9.5	24 h	3 days
Mountain view resort	208	240	115.38	4.69	8	24 h	3 days
Balkan Jewel	292	332	113.7	4.21	8	24 h	24 h
Snow Pearl Residence	259	non avail	-	4.67	8.2	24 h	-
Famili hotel Durchova Kushta	94	120	127.66	-	8.8	24h	24 h
Panorama Resort	116	128	110.34	5	8.1	72 h	50% ref
Casa Karina Hotel	188	149	79.26	4	8.3	24 h	50% ref
Rahoff hotel	187	156	83.42	-	9.7	24 h	14 days
St. George Ski& holiday	398	294	73.87	1	8.7	24 h	5 days
Family hotel Elica	64	68	106.25	1	7.8	24 h	5 days
Cornelia Residence	175	148	84.57	4.77	8.1	24 h	non ref
Rusaliite hotel Bachevo	122	134	109.84	4.5	8.9	24 h	24 h
Family hotel Mineral 56	164	185	112.8	-	9	24 h	3 days
Sandanski							
Astra	70	65	92.86	4.78	7.7	24 h	5 days
Apart-hotel Victoria	105	103	98.10	4.67	8.8	24 h	48 h
Sapareva bania							
Family hotel St. Nikola	93	159	170.97	4.72	8.3	24 h	3 days
Kiustendil							
The Cohen's Guest House	47	75	159.57	-	8.9	24 h	24 h
Spa hotel & restaurant "Sagittarius"	129	159	123.26	4.89	9.6	24 h	24 h
average	**138 bgn**	**145 bgn**	**111%**	**4.14**	**8.46**		

DISCUSSION

The last decade is an era of sharing economy companies and many scientists focused their attention on the Airbnb business model. In an attempt to summarize publications Ding, Niu, Y. and Wei (2023) reveal Airbnb research topics and trends analyzing 1021 articles published in 416 journals spanning the period from 2015 to 2022. They summarize the topics into 5 clusters according their correlation and the current study classifies into the largest cluster that centers on 'Airbnb pricing,' which highly correlates with 'comparisons of Airbnb and hotels' and 'Airbnb website content analysis.' (Ding, Niu, Y. and Wei, 2023). By examining the potential for collaboration between hotels and Airbnb, the current study seeks to circumvent the conflict and competition traditionally associated with the hotel industry and the sharing economy.

Once utilizing in full scale the opportunities of OTA marketplaces, the hotel managers will be more prone to the engagement with the travel sharing economy leader Airbnb. Only a few of these hotels in Southwestern Bulgaria try to take advantage of the Airbnb platform. Many avoid it without even trying to implement it into their daily business routine. This could be a consequence of limited time, knowledge, reluctance or trust in the Airbnb business model.

What could be the advantages of Airbnb listing for hotels compared to Booking.com platform? The first and maybe most important advantage is the opportunity to share the commission payments with guests. Actually hotels don`t share with guests but Airbnb itself charges an amount of about 14 % to the guest and additional 3% for the host. Booking.com does not charge guests additional taxes, but it does charge property owners a commission rate of 15% to 20%, depending on the specific agreement between the hotel and Booking Holdings. Often hotels who participate in "Preferred partner" and "Genius program" spend another 3% to 15% of their double room price for commission payments.

Another advantage of Airbnb is the option to confirm bookings only after request from the guest, and they do not need to keep track of their online availability. That is especially helpful for hotels that don`t utilize channel manager technology and hardly manage their availability in different online channels.

An interesting aspect of Airbnb is that both the host and guest must submit their reviews of each other before they can see the rating that the other person has given them. This results in comments and review scores that are considered more favorable than those on Booking.com. This peculiarity is sometimes disadvantage especially for guests, because the reviews of the property can be quite misleading. On Booking.com, guests provide reviews to which hosts can respond; however, the review scores tend to be slightly more reflective of the actual experience.

Still being not very popular among hotels in Southwestern Bulgaria, Airbnb provides competitive advantage for the hotels that utilize it due to the lack of many other hotel properties listed. Lastly, Airbnb's ability to secure payments by managing the entire payment process helps to eliminate potential disputes and misunderstandings between hosts and guests.

CONCLUSIONS

Most of the hotels in Southwestern Bulgaria do not exploit the opportunities of Airbnb platform. A great number of hotel managers are engaged only with the Booking.com platform as a vast online marketplace for travel services. The minority of hotels that use Airbnb on the other side gain advantage through lower commission costs, better review scores, less time in controlling availability online, fully organized and secure payment procedures, and less competition in the online platform. Conversely, the perception of Airbnb as a social platform can deter both hotels and, at times, guests from choosing traditional hotel accommodations in favor of private homes.

It can be concluded that small hotels and properties that do not utilize channel manager technology in their operations may benefit from participating in Airbnb. However, the widespread popularity of Booking.com in Bulgaria constrains the overall impact of Airbnb on hotel bookings.

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POST COVID-19 TOURISM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: SAFETY CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT: *The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically impacted global tourism, causing unprecedented challenges for countries, businesses, and travelers. In the Czech Republic, international tourism suffered a severe decline due to travel restrictions, reduced mobility, and health concerns. This paper explores the multifaceted effects of the pandemic on the Czech tourism industry, focusing on the implementation and effectiveness of health and safety protocols. Using secondary data from government reports, tourism board statistics, and industry publications, the study examines how safety measures have influenced traveler confidence, highlights the challenges smaller businesses face, and discusses opportunities such as the rise of wellness tourism and the digital transformation of the sector. The analysis provides insights into the ongoing recovery and offers recommendations for enhancing safety, mitigating overcrowding, and promoting lesser-known destinations. The findings suggest that a coordinated approach to safety, supported by digital innovations and government policies, will be essential in restoring the Czech Republic's position as a leading tourist destination in the post-COVID era.*

KEYWORDS: *Post-COVID tourism, Czech Republic, health protocols, safety measures, tourism recovery*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally transformed global tourism, creating unprecedented challenges for countries, businesses, and travellers. As international borders closed, flights were cancelled, and lockdowns were enforced, tourism became one of the most affected industries. The sudden halt in travel disrupted economies, especially in countries where tourism contributes significantly to the GDP. Safety, once a secondary consideration for many tourists, became a central issue as people sought to protect themselves from the spread of the virus. Travelers began to prioritize destinations with clear and effective safety measures, changing the dynamics of the global tourism market.

In the Czech Republic, tourism—particularly international tourism—suffered a severe downturn due to these measures. Before the pandemic, the country was a popular destination, especially known for its historic cities like Prague, Český Krumlov, and Karlovy Vary, drawing millions of international visitors each year. In 2019, over 8 million international tourists visited Prague alone (PCT, 2024). However, the arrival of COVID-19 drastically reduced these

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numbers. In 2020, international arrivals plummeted by nearly 75% (Tourdata, 2021), while domestic tourism, though somewhat more resilient, also saw significant declines due to regional lockdowns and general public fear of the virus. The tourism sector, which is vital to many regions and businesses, was suddenly facing an existential crisis, leading to significant sacrifices by the industry.

As the country moves into the post-COVID era, the tourism industry's recovery is crucial, but it hinges on the successful implementation of health and safety protocols. The pandemic has shifted consumer expectations, with tourists now seeking assurances that their destinations will provide safe environments that minimize the risk of contagion. Travelers are increasingly selective, choosing destinations based not only on attractions but also on the perceived safety and reliability of health measures in place.

This shift has presented new challenges for the Czech tourism industry, requiring businesses and destinations to adapt quickly to evolving safety standards. The Czech government, local authorities, and private operators have had to work together to introduce new hygiene measures, adjust capacities at tourist sites, and embrace technological innovations like contactless services to meet the demands of safety-conscious travellers. Additionally, the uneven recovery of domestic versus international tourism has further complicated the sector's return to normalcy, with a clear divide between the confidence levels of local and foreign visitors.

This paper aims to explore the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on safety practices within the Czech tourism industry. Specifically, it will examine the evolution of health and safety measures, how these protocols have been received by both domestic and international tourists, and the effectiveness of such measures in restoring confidence in travel. The study also looks at the challenges businesses face in implementing safety protocols, particularly smaller operators, and the broader implications of these changes on the future of tourism in the Czech Republic. Finally, the paper will analyse the significant role of government policies and industry-wide efforts to rebuild the sector, with a focus on how safety and risk management can help restore the Czech Republic's position as a premier tourist destination in the post-pandemic world, providing reassurance to the audience.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a secondary data analysis approach, examining existing data sources to comprehensively understand safety concerns in post-COVID-19 tourism in the Czech Republic. The methodology is based on qualitative and quantitative data from credible secondary sources rather than primary research methods such as surveys or interviews. This approach allows for a broad and thorough investigation of safety issues within the tourism sector while leveraging data that relevant authorities and organizations have already collected.

Data Collection

The data used in this study was obtained from various secondary sources to ensure a well-rounded analysis. The key data sources include:

1. Government Reports: Official reports from the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic, which oversees the tourism sector, as well as public health authorities like the Ministry of Health, were used to analyze safety regulations, policies, and the implementation of COVID-19-related protocols in tourism-related businesses. Data from these sources provided insight into government strategies, financial support measures, and health guidelines that were put in place to promote tourism recovery and traveler safety.

2. Tourism Board Statistics: Statistics from the CzechTourism agency and the Czech Statistical Office were collected to examine changes in tourist arrivals, both domestic and international, and to identify trends in post-COVID tourism patterns. These statistics were crucial for understanding the impact of the pandemic on tourism volumes and the subsequent recovery of the sector, especially in relation to the implementation of safety protocols.

3. Industry Publications and Reports: Reports from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), European Travel Commission (ETC), and private sector research firms were used to gather insights into broader global and European tourism safety trends. These sources provided valuable benchmarks for understanding how the Czech Republic's safety measures compare with other countries in the region and beyond.

4. Academic Research and Journals: Studies published in academic journals focusing on tourism, public health, and crisis management were reviewed to provide theoretical insights into how the pandemic has shaped travelers' perceptions of safety. These academic sources helped contextualize the challenges and opportunities faced by the Czech tourism sector within the larger framework of global tourism safety post-COVID-19.

Data Analysis

The secondary data was subjected to both qualitative and quantitative analysis to extract meaningful insights about the state of safety in Czech tourism post-pandemic.

1. Quantitative Analysis: Numerical data, such as tourism arrival statistics, hotel occupancy rates, and economic impact figures, were analyzed using descriptive statistics. This provided a clear picture of the scale of the decline in tourism due to the pandemic and the rate of recovery as safety measures were implemented. Key indicators such as the number of international versus domestic tourists, the utilization of accommodation facilities, and revenue generated from tourism activities were examined to track recovery trends and identify safety-related concerns that might deter tourists from returning.

2. Qualitative Analysis: Qualitative data from government reports, tourism board publications, and industry studies were subjected to thematic analysis. The thematic analysis involved identifying recurring themes related to safety and health protocols, such as the effectiveness of hygiene measures, the impact of social distancing regulations, and the challenges faced by businesses in implementing safety standards. This method helped to contextualize the numerical data by providing insights into the experiences of businesses and tourists concerning safety and health measures in post-COVID tourism.

3. Comparative Analysis: Comparative analysis was used to benchmark the Czech Republic's approach to tourism safety against neighboring European countries. By analyzing reports from other European destinations, the study assessed the relative effectiveness of the Czech Republic's safety protocols and identified best practices that could inform future strategies.

RESULTS

The secondary data analysis reveals several key findings that reflect the current state of safety in post-COVID-19 tourism in the Czech Republic. These findings highlight how the pandemic has reshaped tourist behavior and the operational strategies of businesses within the sector. The study provides insights into the perceived effectiveness of safety measures, the challenges companies face, and the evolving preferences of domestic and international tourists.

Perceived Safety Measures and Their Effectiveness

A significant portion of the data indicates that tourists view enhanced hygiene protocols and health checks as crucial to their sense of safety while traveling. Surveys and studies conducted by tourism boards and industry reports reveal that 73% of tourists feel safer when accommodation sites and tourist facilities implement visible health and hygiene measures (Knezevic, Antonucci, Cutrufo, Marongiu et al (2021; WTTC, 2020). These measures include frequent cleaning, mandatory mask-wearing in enclosed spaces, and temperature checks upon entry to certain establishments, particularly hotels and restaurants.

Furthermore, contactless services have emerged as a preferred safety enhancement among travelers. The adoption of online check-ins, digital payment methods, and touchless room keys has been well-received, with 68% of tourists expressing a preference for these services as they reduce the need for physical interaction (WTTC, 2020). This shift towards digital and contactless services addresses health concerns and aligns with broader trends in the digital transformation of the tourism sector.

Despite the positive reception of these safety protocols, certain areas were identified where tourists felt improvements were needed. Reports suggest that while urban centers such as Prague and larger hotels have been able to adopt advanced safety measures, smaller accommodations and businesses in rural areas often struggle to meet the same standards due to financial or logistical constraints. This disparity has created inconsistent levels of perceived safety across different regions of the country, potentially deterring some tourists from visiting certain areas.

Key Safety Concerns: Overcrowding and Inconsistent Protocols

While hygiene and contactless measures are generally viewed positively, concerns about overcrowding remain a significant barrier to tourism recovery, particularly in popular tourist destinations like Prague. Approximately 60% of international tourists cited overcrowding as one of their primary concerns when considering a trip to the Czech Republic. Historical landmarks and popular areas such as Prague Castle, Charles Bridge, and Old Town Square are known for attracting large crowds, which complicates the enforcement of social distancing protocols.

The uneven recovery of tourism further exacerbates the issue of overcrowding. While rural regions and lesser-known destinations have seen increased domestic tourism, Prague and other iconic locations are experiencing a resurgence of international visitors, which could lead to a return of pre-pandemic crowding levels. This challenges public health safety and may discourage cautious travelers who prioritize social distancing.

Another key concern for tourists, particularly international visitors, is the perceived inconsistency in safety protocols across different regions of the country. Data shows that tourists from abroad are more likely to be cautious about traveling to the Czech Republic if they perceive that safety measures are not uniformly enforced. This inconsistency may stem from the varying capacities of local authorities and businesses to implement national guidelines, particularly in rural or less touristic areas. International tourists expressed frustration with changing entry requirements, regional variations in COVID-19 restrictions, and differences in the enforcement of mask mandates and social distancing measures, all of which impacted their confidence in traveling to the country.

Domestic vs. International Tourist Perceptions

The study highlights a clear divide in the perceptions of domestic and international tourists. Domestic tourists have generally shown higher levels of confidence in traveling within the Czech Republic. This can be attributed to their familiarity with local health regulations, their ability to monitor changes in restrictions more easily, and the relative ease of traveling to less crowded, rural areas.

In contrast, international tourists exhibit more hesitancy when visiting the Czech Republic. One key factor contributing to this hesitancy is the uncertainty surrounding entry requirements and quarantine measures, which have fluctuated throughout the pandemic. Moreover, many international tourists are cautious about traveling to crowded urban centers like Prague, where they fear that the health risks associated with COVID-19 may be higher.

International visitors also showed concern over potential disruptions caused by changes in government regulations while traveling, such as sudden lockdowns, additional testing requirements, or cancellations of flights and accommodations. These uncertainties have made the Czech Republic, like many other destinations, less attractive to international tourists seeking destinations with clear and consistent safety guidelines.

Business Challenges in Implementing Safety Measures

One of the most significant challenges identified in the secondary data is the financial strain on tourism businesses, particularly smaller operators, when implementing advanced safety protocols. While larger hotels and tourist attractions in urban centers have the resources to invest in regular disinfection, air purification systems, and staff training in health and safety protocols, smaller businesses, especially in rural areas, often need more capital to do so. This discrepancy has led to an uneven distribution of safety standards, where some businesses are fully equipped to handle post-COVID health concerns. In contrast, others struggle to meet even the minimum requirements.

Moreover, businesses in rural regions, which have seen a boost in domestic tourism, need help maintaining safety standards due to limited access to the necessary infrastructure and supplies. For example, frequent disinfection and air filtration systems may not be readily available in remote areas, putting tourists and employees at greater risk.

The cost of implementing these safety measures has been exacerbated by the reduced revenue many businesses experienced during the pandemic. As a result, government assistance programs and financial support from local authorities have played a crucial role in helping businesses meet the new safety requirements. However, many smaller operators have expressed concerns about the long-term sustainability of these measures without continued financial aid, particularly if international tourism does not return to pre-pandemic levels soon.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the growing importance of safety and health measures in the decision-making processes of post-COVID tourists. The pandemic has shifted travelers' priorities, with safety becoming a primary factor in choosing a destination. Price, location, and traditional tourist attractions now share the spotlight with hygiene protocols, social distancing, and contactless services. This shift presents both challenges and opportunities for the Czech tourism industry as it works to regain the trust of domestic and international travelers.

Challenges

- **Consistency Across the Industry**

One of the most significant challenges highlighted by the results is the need for more consistency in implementing safety measures across the Czech tourism sector. While significant tourist hubs like Prague have successfully introduced comprehensive health and safety protocols, smaller operators need help to meet these standards, particularly in rural areas, due to financial and logistical constraints. This inconsistency creates an uneven perception of safety across the country. For tourists, particularly international visitors, such disparities can diminish confidence in the destination, even if certain regions are well-prepared.

This challenge points to the need for more standardized, government-supported safety protocols that can be adopted by all businesses, regardless of size or location. The tourism sector may benefit from targeted financial assistance programs or subsidies to help smaller operators meet the required health standards. Additionally, providing clear and accessible information to travelers about the safety protocols at different destinations could help alleviate concerns about inconsistent measures.

- **Balancing Safety and Visitor Experience**

Overcrowding in popular tourist destinations, such as Prague, remains a significant safety and visitor experience issue. The results indicate that international tourists are mainly wary of returning to places previously known for high visitor density. The fear of crowded spaces not only heightens health concerns but also detracts from the overall enjoyment of the experience.

Mitigating these risks requires balancing safety and maintaining the destination's appeal. Strategies such as staggered ticketing, timed entries to museums and attractions, and promoting off-peak visits could help reduce crowding at peak times. Expanding the focus to include lesser-known attractions outside the main tourist hubs could disperse visitor numbers more evenly. By highlighting alternative destinations, the Czech Republic could alleviate pressure on overcrowded areas while promoting more sustainable tourism practices.

- **Economic Constraints**

The financial impact of the pandemic on tourism businesses has been severe, limiting the ability of many operators to invest in the necessary safety upgrades. Smaller hotels, guesthouses, and rural businesses, which often operate on tighter margins, are particularly vulnerable. Although larger establishments in urban areas have been able to adopt advanced measures such as air filtration systems and comprehensive staff training, smaller businesses often need more resources to implement such changes.

Government assistance programs, including financial aid, loans, and grants, have been essential in helping businesses meet the new safety standards. However, the study suggests that further assistance will be necessary to sustain these measures in the long term. If businesses are expected to continue investing in health and safety protocols, ongoing support from both the public and private sectors will be crucial. In addition, the tourism industry will need to innovate to find cost-effective ways of ensuring safety without compromising on quality or the visitor experience.

Opportunities

- **Focus on Spa Tourism**

The demand for **health and wellness tourism** has surged after the pandemic. Travelers increasingly seek destinations promoting physical and mental well-being, making this an opportune time for the Czech Republic to leverage its natural assets. Spa towns such as **Karlovy Vary**, **Mariánské Lázně**, and **Františkovy Lázně** are already well-known for their therapeutic mineral waters and wellness services. By emphasizing their focus on health, safety, and wellness, these towns could attract a new wave of post-pandemic tourists seeking relaxation and rejuvenation in a safe environment.

Wellness tourism offers a unique opportunity to position the Czech Republic as a leader in health-oriented travel. This niche market aligns well with the growing global interest in health, and by integrating stringent safety protocols into the wellness experience, these destinations can cater to the heightened demand for safe, therapeutic travel options.

- **Tech-Enhanced Safety**

The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in the tourism industry, creating opportunities for long-term improvements in safety and customer experience. Contactless services, such as online check-ins, digital payments, and touchless room keys, have proven effective in reducing physical interactions and minimizing the spread of illness. Moving forward, these technologies are likely to remain popular with safety-conscious travelers.

In addition to contactless services, real-time information systems, such as mobile apps that provide updates on crowd levels at popular attractions or notify visitors of health protocol changes, could enhance tourists' sense of safety. Health apps that track vaccination status, testing results, or entry requirements for international visitors could also streamline travel processes and reduce the stress associated with fluctuating regulations. Embracing these digital tools can improve safety and convenience, providing a more seamless travel experience.

- **Rebranding of Lesser-Known Destinations**

One key opportunity presented by the pandemic is the potential to promote lesser-known regions and attractions within the Czech Republic. The shift towards domestic tourism during the pandemic has highlighted the appeal of rural areas and smaller towns that offer nature, outdoor activities, and cultural experiences. By rebranding these areas as safe, uncrowded alternatives to major tourist hotspots, the Czech tourism sector can reduce the pressure on popular destinations like Prague while encouraging a more sustainable tourism model.

Promoting these lesser-known destinations also aligns with the trend towards eco-tourism and responsible travel, where visitors seek to minimize their environmental impact and engage with local communities more meaningfully. For example, regions such as South Moravia, with its vineyards and hiking trails, or the Bohemian Switzerland National Park, with its dramatic landscapes, offer unique experiences that can be marketed to domestic and international tourists looking for safe, off-the-beaten-path options.

CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the tourism industry in the Czech Republic, placing an unprecedented emphasis on safety and health. As this study has demonstrated, travelers' priorities have shifted, with hygiene protocols, contactless services, and adequate safety measures now crucial factors in destination choice. The Czech tourism sector faces several challenges, particularly in consistently implementing safety protocols, managing overcrowding in key destinations like Prague, and addressing the financial constraints that hinder smaller businesses from upgrading their safety measures.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the post-pandemic era also brings with it significant opportunities. One such opportunity lies in the country's renowned spa towns, which are poised to lead the way in the burgeoning niche market of spa tourism. This market aligns perfectly with the growing demand for health-oriented travel. The integration of digital technologies, such as contactless services and real-time crowd monitoring, offers long-term solutions to enhance safety and improve the overall visitor experience. Furthermore, the promotion of lesser-known regions and rural destinations can help distribute tourist traffic more evenly across the country, thereby reducing the risk of overcrowding and supporting sustainable tourism growth.

For the Czech Republic to regain its standing as a premier tourist destination, it must continue to adapt to the evolving expectations of safety-conscious travelers. This will require coordinated efforts between the government, local businesses, and tourism operators to standardize safety measures, provide financial support where needed, and leverage digital innovations to enhance both safety and convenience. By seizing these opportunities and addressing the current challenges, the Czech tourism sector has the potential to recover and emerge more robust and more resilient in the post-COVID world.

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COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS AND THE APPROACH TO COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN THE CARIRI REGION OF PARAÍBA

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ABSTRACT: *The Caatinga biome and rocky outcrops that define the Cariri Paraibano region have drawn more tourists in recent years due to their geomorphological and archaeological aspects, as well as movies, handicrafts, and gastronomy. Tourism is often presented as a key factor for local development and improving community quality of life. However, tourism development requires an inclusive approach, involving the active participation of local communities in decision-making. In this context, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) emphasizes participatory management and the empowerment of local people as key agents in the tourism development process. This research aimed to analyze how the rural communities of Marinho and Bravo, located in Cariri Paraibano and integrated into the tourism value chain, demonstrate different forms of community organization and alignment with CBT development. The study is exploratory, using a qualitative approach. Data was collected through fieldwork in these communities using participant observation and semi-structured interviews with residents, community leaders, and external agents involved in local tourism. The results show that tourism self-management is driven by collectivity, shared responsibility, and transparency. This strategy promotes tourism practices and contributes to establishing more resilient, empowered communities related to their development, aligning them with CBT principles. Consequently, internal and external actions aimed at local tourism development have had more positive and successful outcomes in communities with pre-existing community organizations around productive activities.*
KEYWORDS: *Community Organization. Community-Based Tourism. Marinho Community. Bravo Community. Cariri Paraibano*

INTRODUCTION

For over 20 years, the Lajedos of Cariri Paraibano have distinguished themselves as one of the state's most popular inland tourism destinations in the state. It's not hard to understand why. This unique region, imbued with rustic beauty, offers an immersive experience in the richness of the Caatinga, a characteristic biome of the Northeastern region of Brazil. The geological features are what attract the most interest in this region and represent great symbolic value.

In the state of Paraíba, some Community-Based Tourism initiatives have emerged as alternatives for economic empowerment, preservation of cultural and natural heritage, local

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development, and the promotion of responsible tourism. These initiatives aim to preserve the environment and culture, while also providing experiences that bring visitors closer to residents, allowing them to experience their cultural traditions, as well as their methods of production and commercialization of goods.

Located respectively in the municipalities of Cabaceiras and Boqueirão, the communities of Bravo and Marinho, despite being quite similar in terms of natural and cultural attractions, have shown different levels of engagement, according to reports from a consultant at Sebrae-PB. Therefore, the choice of these communities is based on the following factors:

a) They are situated on the main axis of the tourist attractions of the lajedos;

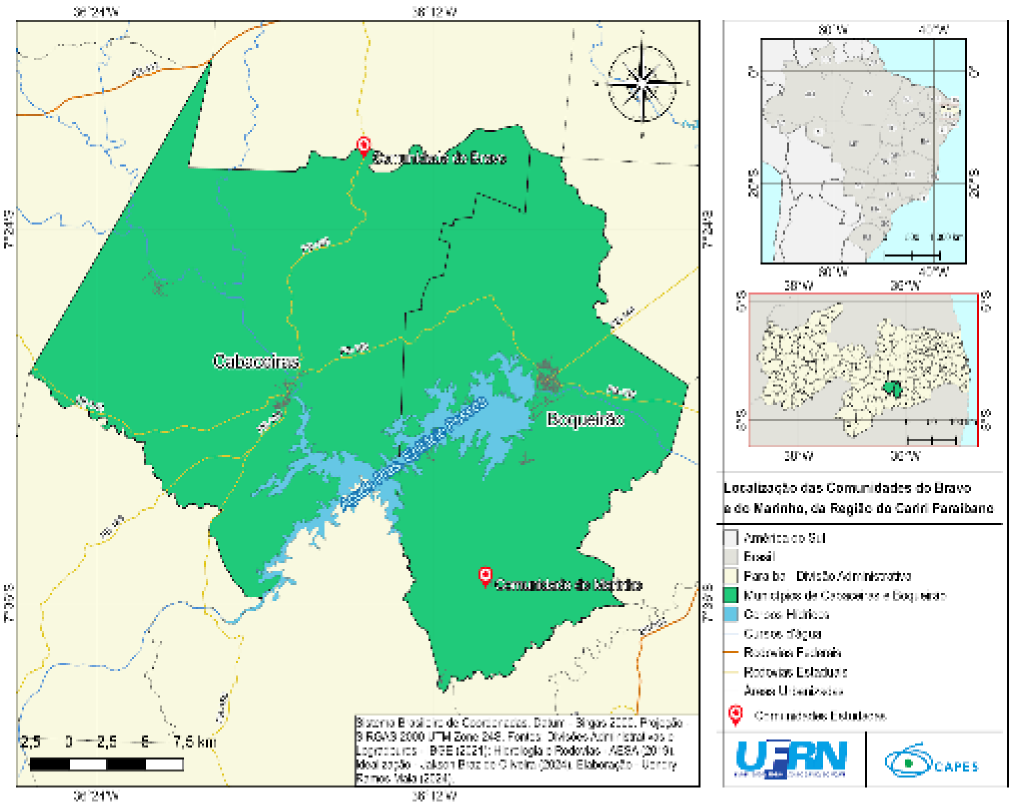
b) They are located in neighboring municipalities, facilitating the operational logistics of the field research;

c) They engage in activities such as ecotourism and cultural tourism;

d) They demonstrate varying forms and degrees of involvement with local and regional tourism.

Access to these communities from João Pessoa, the capital of the state of Paraíba, can be done via two routes, both of approximately equal distance: through the BR-230 to Campina Grande (133 km), then through the PB-148 to Boqueirão (52 km), with the community of Marinho located 14 km from the center of Boqueirão.To reach the community of Bravo, there are two options: from Cabaceiras, about 20 km along the road that connects to the municipality of Boa Vista, or for those coming from Campina Grande via the road leading to the state's hinterland, at the Meio do Mundo square, where you can access the BR-412 to the city of Boa Vista (20 km), then 12 km along the road connecting Boa Vista to Cabaceiras, leading to the community of Bravo.

In the context of socio-environmentalist concerns, the role of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) stands out, as it is based on the principles of the solidarity economy and presents itself as a distinct way of developing tourism activities in traditional communities. According to Bartholo, Sansolo & Bursztyn (2009), Community-Based Tourism is based on development guided by the principles of the solidarity economy, associativism, the valorization of local culture, and, most importantly, it is driven by the local communities themselves, aiming to appropriate the benefits arising from tourism activities.



Map 1. Location of the Marinho and Bravo Communities (study focus)

The relevance of Community-Based Tourism as a sustainable and inclusive development model has raised the need for in-depth investigations into the integration of local communities into the tourism value chain. This study, therefore, aims to analyze the communities of Marinho and Bravo, to understand how these communities are socially organized and integrated into the tourism landscape. The research seeks to identify and explore the activities these communities develop in tourism and their alignment with the principles of Community-Based Tourism.

The general objective of the research was to analyze how the communities of Marinho and Bravo, located in the Cariri region of Paraíba, are integrated into the tourism value chain and their proximity to the development of Community-Based Tourism. The specific objectives are:

• To map the activities that the rural communities of Marinho and Bravo carry out within the tourism value chain.

• To verify whether these communities are closely aligned with the development of Community-Based Tourism.

According to Marujo (2013, p.13), tourism "is a multidimensional phenomenon and, therefore, can be analyzed from various points of view." The author emphasizes that "in tourism studies, any methodology should be selected based on the research objectives and the type of analysis the researcher wishes to carry out."

The studies conducted under the Responsible Tourism project in Brazil, by MTur and Detur/UFRN (2022), based on a synthesis of specialized national academic literature and international CBT declarations, present six principles of CBT, namely: self-management, social equity, solidarity, cooperation, socio-environmental responsibility, and interculturality. Delving into the practical experiences of territories where Community-Based Tourism is present is important for understanding the phenomenon without stereotypes and standardizations.

METHODOLOGY

Given the stated objectives, this research is characterized as exploratory, with a qualitative approach to analyzing the information collected through field research in the two target communities of the study. Two data collection techniques were employed: participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

First, a bibliographic review was conducted, covering the following topics: Cariri Paraibano, Community-Based Tourism, Local Development, and Responsible Tourism. In the second phase, during the exploratory visits, the participant observation technique was applied, "which uses the senses to apprehend certain aspects of reality [...] it consists of seeing, hearing, and examining the facts, the phenomena to be investigated [...] and requires the researcher to have closer contact with the object of study" (Gerhardt & Silveira, 2009, p. 74).

In the Marinho community, field research was conducted from October 9 to 20, 2023, totaling 12 days, during which I stayed in the homes of residents. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with community leaders, residents, and the Director of Culture of Boqueirão. In the Bravo community, field research was carried out from October 23 to November 3, 2023, also totaling 12 days, where I stayed at the headquarters of the Residents' Association of the Cariri Paraibano Geopark, during which five semi-structured interviews were conducted. In December 2023, another visit (without an overnight stay) was made to both communities to collect additional information and take photographic records.

The target audience for the semi-structured interviews included local leaders, residents of the communities, and a consultant from Sebrae-PB who participated in tourism-strengthening projects in the region.

Subsequently, as a methodological analysis procedure, we used the thematic content analysis technique of Bardin (2016), which is characterized by three stages: 1. Pre-analysis, with the organization of the material to be analyzed, transcription, and complete reading of the interviews; 2. Exploration of the material to identify excerpts related to the thematic categories of the research; 3. Treatment of the results for interpretation, analysis, and presentation of findings.

Based on the activities carried out and the participatory management of the members of the Marinho and Bravo communities, we adopted as analysis categories the proximity to the principles of Community-Based Tourism outlined by the Responsible Tourism project in Brazil, by MTur and Detur/UFRN (2022): self-management, social equity, cooperation, solidarity, socio-environmental responsibility, and interculturality.

RESULTS

Community-based tourism creates opportunities for communities, transforming them into host centers and making tourism a tool for endogenous development. This occurs through the production of goods and the provision of services, supported by associativism and cooperativism, among other forms of community organization (Sampaio, 2005).

The Marinho community has approximately 800 residents and is the only district in the municipality of Boqueirão/PB, which has a total population of 17,598 inhabitants (IBGE, 2023). It is located 14 km from the city center, accessible by a dirt road, and about 180 km from the capital, João Pessoa. The district has been gaining prominence in the rural experience tourism scene due to its scenic features, particularly the lajedos (rock formations), as well as options for hiking, horseback riding, camping on the lajedo, gastronomy, and handicrafts. This combination of factors makes the village of Marinho the main destination for rural tourism in the municipality of Boqueirão, offering the services and products mapped and illustrated in Figure 1.

The residents of the Marinho community show strong engagement in discussing, developing strategies, and managing actions aimed at developing and distributing activities and benefits more equitably within the community. In 2017, the Geopark Cariri Residents' Association (ASCCROM) was established in Marinho, and through more participatory management, they gained greater clarity on the collective objectives they wish to achieve.

Figure 1. Mapping of Tourism Products and Services in the Marinho Community

In managing activities, another characteristic observed in Marinho is the socialized commercialization and income generation. When a product or service is consumed, the funds go to ASCCROM's account, and the distribution is done responsibly among the participating community members.

The conservation of nature and the safeguarding of local cultural heritage should guide Community-Based Tourism (CBT) proposals. In this regard, both in the communities of Marinho and Bravo, the appreciation and preservation of natural and cultural resources are seen as important, although they face difficulties in passing on the value and traditional knowledge to younger generations, such as children and adolescents.

Regarding interculturality, both the Marinho and Bravo communities face challenges in seeking recognition, promotion, and appreciation of their cultural expressions, even within their communities, particularly among younger members. The intercultural relations and dialogues between visitors and the communities of Bravo and Marinho reveal significant nuances, shaped by the unique dynamics of visitations and service offerings in each location.

The Bravo community is located at the boundary of the municipalities of Cabaceiras and Boa Vista, 20 km from the center of Cabaceiras, and 185 km from the capital, João Pessoa. About 50 families reside in the Bravo community, and access is via the road connecting the two municipalities. The district has only two small residential clusters with a few houses, a church, a school, and a health clinic.

In 2011, the Geopark Cariri Residents' Association was created in the Bravo community as a voice and representation tool for the community. However, there is low participation by residents in meetings, indicating a challenge in building more collective and participatory management. The main focus is on securing social benefits for the community, with only a few members actively engaged.

In Bravo, there are long trails that cross several other lajedos, with a high level of difficulty, as well as short trails, which are the most popular among visitors. Among the attractions visited on the short trails, the local guides lead visitors to: the Matacões and Itacoatiara and Agreste rock paintings; the Tapuias Caves; the Cactus Gardens; the Planetarium Lagoon; and the Female Fertility Stone. All visits are accompanied by local guides, usually young people from the community. In Figure 2, we identify the main tourist products and services of the Bravo community.

In Bravo, the scarcity of tourism services limits the duration of visitors' stays, reducing interactions primarily between the tourist and the local guide. In this scenario, the exchange of experiences and cultural interactions is generally restricted, focusing almost exclusively on service provision.

It was observed in the Bravo community that one endogenous factor hindering the development of local tourism, particularly Community-Based Tourism (CBT), is the lack of coordination among residents around collective interests related to optimizing tourism-related productive activities.

Figure 2. Mapping of Tourism Products and Services in the Bravo Community

CONCLUSIONS

This work demonstrated that self-management in tourism is driven by collectivity, shared responsibility, and transparency of information. This approach not only strengthens tourism practices but also contributes to building a more resilient, empowered community that is connected to its development.

By being collectively organized around the community's productive activities, exogenous factors such as training courses and partnerships for promotion and commercialization—coming from private initiatives and public authorities—produce greater effects and positive reverberations in the Marinho community. This promotes greater visibility for local tourism and significantly aligns with the principles of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), such as self-management, social equity, solidarity, cooperation, socio-environmental responsibility, and interculturality.

About the Bravo community, it is evident that the endogenous factor hindering the development of local tourism, particularly CBT, is the lack of coordination among residents around collective interests related to optimizing productive activities.

Above all, Bravo differs from the principles of Community-Based Tourism due to its self-management within the leadership of the community, involving values like cooperation among social actors. The more passive stance of the Bravo community, with low participation in associative actions and dependence on the figure of a leader, along with the residents' greater reliance on the mining industry for employment and income, makes local tourism development more dependent on external actions.

Another factor observed in Bravo is the lack of dialogue with other initiatives, which reveals isolation that limits opportunities for learning and collaboration. Additionally, due to the limited availability of services, the contact zone between visitors and the community is still restricted, with the interaction occurring almost exclusively between the local guide and the visitor, preventing a deeper intercultural experience.

In Marinho, a more significant intercultural relationship is found, made possible by the longer stay of visitors in the community due to the wider range of tourism-related services available.

Thus, it is evident that understanding each community's reality and adopting feasible measures are essential to ensuring that the benefits of tourism are more equitably shared, further strengthening social bonds and contributing to a more sustainable and harmonious development of the region.

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THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONALIZED ATTRACTION SERVICES TOWARDS GUEST SERVICE EXCELLENCE

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of the study is to identify the level of influence of personalized attraction services towards service excellence and the factors to consider in aiming for a holistic customer experience. Quantitative descriptive method was used to get the data on personalized services level of influence. Online survey questionnaire was utilized to 156 students taking Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management. The results showed that providing loyalty programs such as points programs, discounts and promos have the highest influence on service excellence alongside the mabuhay greeting with smile and eye contact. In addition, the research findings reveal that human personalized services are more influential than the accessibility, facilities, and environment indicator. Thus, it is crucial that attractions provide more personalized human touch to its products and offering to achieve service excellence. The result of the study can be used as a guide when personalizing services to cater travelers needs and create holistic customer experience towards service excellence.*

KEYWORDS*: service excellence; personalized service; attractions; level of influence*

INTRODUCTION

The growth of tourism confirms that the sector is one of the most powerful engines of growth and development worldwide (UNWTO, 2019). Tourism industry is experiencing a period of continuous unprecedented transformation that results in a complex world of increased travelers and job opportunities. In a study conducted by Dhir and Sushil (2018), travelers' needs are becoming complex and variable, businesses are increasingly challenged by this ambiguous market environment. Gouthier (2013) mentioned that to face this scenario service excellence should not be compromised. Travelers like to feel treated well, needs and expectations should be met in any business interaction, when this happens it results in service excellence through loyalty and travelers returning over and over again to a provider.

Service excellence based on the study of Johnson (2004) is about being easy to do business with. Excellent services come into delivering the promise, providing a personal touch, going the extra mile and dealing well with problems and queries. Horwitz and Neville (1996) assert that service excellence occurs when customers perceive that a service exceeds their previous expectations which creates customer delight. Thus, service excellence can become a

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critical success factor for destinations and firms. Personal approach toward a traveler, knowledge of their expectations and experiences as well as particular engagement with the customer, often trigger service excellence from customer delight (Klimkeit, Meng Tang & Thirummaran, 2021). Destinations and companies who goes beyond service excellence provide personalized services and exceptional customer experience (Williams, 2006). Travelers continue to demand not only experiences but surprises including extraordinary and memorable experiences.

Personalization can create not only a product or service but also a better experience for travelers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). There is a need for tourism destinations and firms to create personalized services to surprise travelers and provide service excellence. According to Buhalis & Foerste (2015), personalization creates new opportunities for delivering new levels of service that enhance travel experience physically and emotionally. Service personalization uses individuals' own information to tailor the service and the transactional environment to improve the benefits accruing to travelers (Shen & Ball, 2012). In a study by Murthi & Sarkar (2003), service personalization includes two subprocesses: (1) learning customer preferences and (2) matching these preferences to specific or personalized offerings to accommodate learned preferences.

Personalization can help improve destinations performance and a potential source of service excellence (Vesanen, 2007). A traveler's positive experience brings repeat business and the co-creation of experience is critical to service suppliers and destination (Sternberg, 1997). Personalized services generate trust and eventually strengthen the relationship between a destination and a traveler (Roth et al., 2018). A survey by Deloitte (2015) highlights that the demand for personalized services and products will constantly increase as many providers try to satisfy their clients and customers. The survey shows that about 50% of customers are interested in purchasing a personalized product; and half of the respondents also expressed their willingness to wait longer for such a service or product. The study also reveals that most consumers are willing to pay more for personalized services.

Personalization has largely been assumed to affect satisfaction and loyalty (Rust et al., 2000), it has an impact on trust but studies on the influence of it to service excellence are lacking. Personalization studies mostly focuses as well on Banking and IT related companies and firms, a few research has been done on destinations and tourism related establishments. The overall context stimulates the researcher to investigate the influence of personalized attractions services among tourism students to service excellence. Thus, the study aims to identify what personalized services contribute to service excellence. Also, it aims to provide a deeper understanding of the level of influence of different forms of services such as accessibility, facilities and environment and human services. Furthermore, to create strategies that will help attractions and staff to personalized their services towards achieving traveler delight and traveler service excellence. The paper address the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic profile of the respondents?
2. What is the level of influence of attraction accessibility, facilities and environment personalized services and human personalized services to service excellence?

METHODOLOGY

The research paper used a quantitative descriptive research approach. The study was designed to identify the level of influence of personalized attraction services to tourism students towards service excellence. The paper involved two variables in which personalized attraction services are dependent variables and service excellence is an independent variable.

The respondents of the study are students who visited any type of tourism attraction domestically or internationally. The researcher used a non-probability technique to select respondents, particularly convenience and random sampling. The participants of the study are 156 students taking the Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management program.

The researcher utilized an online survey questionnaire with four parts as the main instrument in gathering the data needed. The online survey questionnaire is through google form entitled Influence of Personalized Attraction Services Towards Service Excellence Survey. The first part contains a cover letter that explains the rationale of the study and an individual consent form. In the second part, two demographic variables are collected namely age and sex. The third part is composed of statements of accessibility, facilities, and environment personalized services in an attraction. The last part focuses on human personalized services statements where participants marked the level of influence using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4 point. Point 1 represents no influence and point 2, 3 and 4 represents gradual ranking of positive answers (low influence, moderate influence, and high influence). The instrument statements are self-made by the researcher.

Date collection is done online, a google form sheet was sent as an electronic link to an online survey for tourism students through instant messaging application that redirected the researchers survey questionnaire. Data collected from google form is exported into an excel file. Collected data on demographics are described and summarized using frequency and percentage distribution. Data collected on the level of influence of personalized attraction services are calculated using mean and standard deviation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research was conducted to tourism students who visited any tourist attraction to measure the level of influence of personalized services to service excellence in terms of accessibility, facilities and environment and human services. The measurement was carried out using an online questionnaire data collection technique. Distribution and verbal interpretation of the results are based on the following: No Influence (1.00 – 1.74); Low Influence (1.75 – 2.49); Moderate Influence (2.50 – 3.24); and High Influence (3.25 – 4.00). The demographic characteristics of respondents are shown in Table 1.

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15 to 17 years old	0	0
18 to 20 years old	39	25
21 to 23 years old	113	72.40
23 years old and above	4	2.60
Total	156	100
Sex		
Male	27	17.30
Female	129	82.70
Total	156	100

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Profile

The sex distribution of the respondents is not equal, with 17.30% male respondents and 82.70% female respondents respectively. It indicates that respondents are dominated by female students rather than male. The results show, aged 18 to 25 years old covered the 25% of the respondents, while 21 to 23 years represented the majority (72.40%) of the respondents. Aged 23 years old and above signified 2.60% which is the least number of the sample population since no respondents from 15 to 17 years old age bracket.

Personalized Services	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation
Accessibility, Facilities and Environment		
The attraction offers passenger service vehicle to and from the area	3.5	-0.66
The attraction provides loyalty program	3.88	0.88
The attraction offers multiple channels to ask information such as live chat, emails, phone numbers	3.51	0.67
The attraction has customer data and history available including personal info and previous visits	3.34	0.62
The attraction information can easily get on social media and sites	3.79	0.43
The attraction presents various signages and instructions	3.67	0.53
Total Weighted Mean	3.61	
Human Services		
The attraction staff use guest names and says po or opo	3.67	0.56
The attraction staff greets guest Mabuhay with smile and eye contact	3.82	0.46
The attraction staff gives smooth and fast transactions	3.76	0.46
The attraction staff provide recommendations and advice	3.73	0.5
The attraction staff presents customize options and choices	3.64	0.55
The attraction staff asks feedback	3.53	0.68
Total Weighted Mean	3.68	
Level of Influence		
What is the level of influence of personalized attraction services in guest service excellence?	3.62	0.52

Table 2. Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation of the Level of Influence of Personalized Attraction Services

Table 2 indicates the level of influence of personalized attraction services to service excellence in terms of accessibility, facilities and environment and human services. The table shows that all indicators have high influence to service excellence, providing loyalty program (3.88) has the most influence and attractions customer data and history on their personal information and previous visits (3.34) got the lowest influence to service excellence, both of the most and least influential indicator came from the accessibility, facilities and environment factor. Personalized offers tied to point redemption, discounts, loyalty program ensures loyalty and an enduring relationship with travelers and (Forbes, 2021). Destinations and firms that have strong loyalty programs have a roster of customer data from which they can tailor approaches. The Zendesk Customer Experience Trends Report (2019) found that travelers have grown increasingly comfortable with firms collecting personal data, but many are still contemplating this concept and as long as the data is being used to improve customer experience. The share of customers who believe that companies should collect as little data as possible dropped from 29% in 2019 to just 12% in 2020. As per with the accessibility, facilities and environment, attraction information can be access easily on social media and sites has high influence of weighted mean of 3.79, it is followed by attractions presents various signages and instructions (3.67), offering multiple channels to ask information such as live chat, emails, and phone numbers (3.51) and second least influential (3.5) is the passenger service vehicle available in an attraction to and from its area.

As per human services factor, greeting guests in Mabuhay with smile and eye contact have the highest weighted mean of 3.82. It is followed by staff giving smooth and fast transactions (3.76) and providing recommendations and advice (3.73). Staff using guest names and saying po and opo (3.67) and presenting customized options and choices have high influence (3.64) to service excellence. Attraction staff asking feedback to tourists has a high influence with a weighted mean of 3.53 but is the least considered in terms of human services. Mabuhay greeting is a simple act of gracefully laying the palm of the right hand over the center of the chest with simultaneously a slight head nod and an appropriate verbal greeting, a Filipino personalized service used by most tourism destinations, attractions, and related establishments. Tsernov (2019), smile and eye contact are crucial results of firms with the right culture, an employee's smile may be the most significant part of a transaction. Around 73% of customers fall in love with a brand thanks to a friendly employee, meanwhile over 58% are willing to spend more money with companies that provide excellence service through personalization. Destination and firms whom travelers can easily reach out and provide human personalized services is the most personal personalization customers can get.

The table uncovers attraction providing loyalty program and the information can be access easily on social media and sites including staff greeting in Mabuhay with smile and eye contact as well as providing smooth and fast transactions are the major indicator to influence service excellence

Personalized Attraction Service	**Total Weighted Mean**	**Influence**
Accessibility, Facilities and Environment	3.61	2
Human Services	3.68	1
Grand Weighted Mean	3.65	

Table 3. Total Weighted Mean and Influence of Personalized Attraction Services

Table 3 reveals the influential factor to service excellence in the perspective of tourism students. Among the two factors, human services with a weighted mean of 3.68 (high influence) is the most effective personalized service for attraction to achieve service excellence. Making it personal, knowing the customers and hiring and training employees and staff can deliver the one-on-one experience customers want (Forbes, 2019). Despite continuous innovations in personalization technology and automation, the industrial complex; the power of real human-to-human interactions is necessary to a customer relationship with a destination and firms. (Rodriguez, 2021). Research has found that 60% of customers would withdraw doing business with companies that provide unfriendly services. 46% of customers withdraw due to the perception of employees' limited knowledge on their issues whereas 50% of customers stop doing business with companies they don't trust. Also, one in three customers have said that they would never return to a brand they love just because of one bad service. Accessibility, facilities, and environment have high influence as well to service excellence, its weighted mean of 3.61 is not too far from human services. In dealing with service excellence, personalization of human services has more influence compared with accessibility, facilities, and environment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In this fast-growing experience economy, travelers look for affective memories, sensation and symbolism which combine to create a holistic and long-lasting personal experience. The need for tourism and hospitality and tourism firms to create innovative experience design is increasingly important. Personalization, the ability to tailor products to individual customer needs has an influence on the overall service excellence. Attractions should invest in handling customer data, information, and history to create a more personalized service. In this study, overall, attractive personalized services have a high influence on service excellence. Loyalty programs such as point system, discount and promos are found to be the most influential toward service excellence. Attractions must correctly set a loyalty program to encourage and entice more travelers and customers, the programs should match the need. Human services are the major key factor contributing to the overall service excellence in which staff greeting Mabuhay with smile and eye contact is a major contributor and asking feedback is a least contributor. Attraction staff should practice the culture of asking feedback regardless of if it is a constructive criticism, positive or negative feedback. The traveler's view can be used to enhance personalized services and the improvement of services in general.

Attractions should rethink other personalized service in terms of accessing the area aside from the passenger service vehicle as this is not influential on the service excellence. Providing smooth and fast transactions, recommendations and advice and using guest names and saying po or opo should be continued as they play a crucial role in the overall customer experience towards service excellence. Considerations on human services must strengthen for excellent service and attractions could focus on accessibility, facilities, and environment factors.

Overall, personalized services have a high influence on the overall customer experience towards service excellence. The study indicates loyalty programs and mabuhay greetings are the most influential service in an attraction while customer data, information and history are the least influential. Therefore, to sustain service excellence there is a need for attractions to handle and use customer data, information, and history to create personalized services. It is concluded that attractions should carefully consider their loyalty programs necessary to motivate travelers and achieve service excellence.

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VIDEOGAMES AS A LEVER FOR TOURIST ATTRACTION: THE ITALIAN CASE OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF MONTERIGGIONI

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Abstract: *The video game market is one of today's most flourishing sectors. Many gamers spend their time in front of a screen. Moreover, many of them are breaking out of the classic on-screen schemes by immersing themselves first-hand in the places they have explored within the video game. These gamers organize real trips to discover the places where the stories they played were set, thus creating a real flow of tourism. Many tourism enterprises take advantage of this trend and offer travel solutions inspired by video games. The trend is worldwide and is called video game tourism. This paper analyses the video game market and analyzes the tourist flow of this trend; finally, the Italian case of the municipality of Monteriggioni is analyzed.*

Keywords: *tourism, videogames, Italy, film*

Introduction

Videogames are a recent phenomenon, especially when compared to their ancestors: analog games, and can be less than a century old. In recent decades, videogames have become one of the most important social, cultural and technological expressions of the contemporary era, even if they are still little understood (Cassone, 2020). Over the years, the videogame industry has taken on an important role in the lives of millions of people, giving gamers the opportunity to be part of a fantasy world far from the pressures of the 21st century. Videogames have become the main entertainment sector globally and contribute to creating new cultural imaginaries. Its influence can be examined through various economic, social and artistic fields. In recent years, the phenomenon has spread and has also influenced the tourist sphere, leading the player to discover first-hand the place known only through the screen. The main purpose of the work is to investigate the phenomenon of videogame tourism starting from an analysis of the literature on the phenomenon and subsequently analyzing the tourist impact generated by the videogame *Assassin's Creed* 2 in Italy.

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Literature review

To understand the strength of video game tourism in Italy, reference must be made to two trends that are now stable and long-lasting: the growth of the video game market and the enhancement of the territory through the audiovisual format. The growth of the video game market (+4.3% compared to 2022) brings with it an increasing awareness of the potential and content richness of this trend, while the enhancement of the territory through video games leads to considerable benefits in both the tourism and cultural spheres, as it increases knowledge of the heritage (Desseno, 2022). The strand of video game tourism is recent. Consequently, the bibliography is poor, and we cannot count on widespread and in-depth numerical analyses. Still, it can instead be considered a branch of the more famous tourism strand: film tourism. Film tourism can be defined as an experience unique to everyone, based on their interpretation and use of the image proposed by the media (Della Corte, 2012). In its more circumscribed exception, however, cine-tourism is defined as tourist visits to a destination or attraction because of a place appearing on screen (Ritchie, 2003). Technological, economic, and sociological developments in the global world, combined with the needs of tourists, offer tourism alternatives with different dimensions than normal. Film tourism is one of the tourism activities that has become important in recent years, due to the opportunities it offers to reach more audiences through the support and development of technology. The desire to see different components such as filming locations, actors, and local facts of the films they watch is a need that grows with time (Akin, 2024). It is a growing phenomenon worldwide and is fueled by the growth of the entertainment industry and the increase in international travel (Zhang, 2018). Since the first decade of the 21st century, film productions have been used as a tool to promote tourism. Film and television can influence people to choose a location as a tourist destination (Iwashita, 2006). This reality shows that from a destination's point of view, there is a need to understand the opportunities that can be found by combining tourism and film. Currently, many locations are starting to consider cine-tourism as a distinct tourism strategy. In this context of growing interest, it is important to reflect on the different benefits that cine-tourism can produce in tourist destinations, to develop a range of services that can generate as unique and enriching a tourist experience as possible (Valasco, 2021). Usually, seeing a correlation between cinema and tourism is very difficult, as they are two extremely powerful forces. When these forces are interconnected, they represent an inevitable success in the perspective of tourism images. In today's market, there is great competition between tourism companies, so they are constantly creating and recreating new tourist destinations (Nunes, 2020). Film locations have received much attention in tourism as sites that are visited, managed, and experienced. However, the emerging social element shows that film tourists are geographically bound. Importantly, film tourists have an extended time commitment (Croy, 2020). As mentioned above, video game tourism is closely related, by definition and type, to film tourism, but the two differ in terms of form. Video game tourism, compared to film tourism, is closely linked to the possibility of exploring the settings in a free and in-depth manner, allowing for the importance of the dissemination aspect, which can be used to transmit knowledge and disseminate the culture of a given territory. The phenomenon of video game tourism is linked to the exponential growth of video gamers worldwide. Video and computer games have become an increasingly popular form of entertainment over the last three decades. While the digital world is traditionally considered a male space, the number of female online gamers continues to increase. In the subculture of online gamers, however, female gamers are often invisible, mainly because famous players and main characters in video games are typically male. Video games tend to focus on the physical appearance of female characters, rather than on their skills, thus widening the gender gap, as well as relegating women to secondary and supporting roles (Arnold-Ferencz, 2021). The relationship between video gamers and their avatar is a relationship that is unparalleled within the media world and at the same time a distinctive trait that is linked to video game tourism. There are three different forms of video game tourism: induced video game tourism, tourism within the video game, and tourism around the video game. Induced video game tourism leads players to discover real places represented on the screen (Dresseno, 2020). Internal video game tourism is that which takes the player to discover the video game through themed events. The gamer, in this case, becomes a real tourist, as he or she is driven by the interest to reach locations hosting video game events. In recent years, these events have achieved significant success. In fact, in addition to famous trade fairs such as the *E3-Electronic Entertainment Expo* in Los Angeles or the *Lucca Comics and Games* in Lucca, one can also find concerts (*The Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddesses* inspired by the successful series *The Legend of Zelda*), exhibitions, conferences, theme parks, and museums. Finally, tourism around the video game is related to the exploration of virtual spaces through the avatar created by the player. Due to its exponential diffusion among an audience of various ages and genders, the world of video games has managed to create a relevant economic business and gain importance in other spheres it has become a means to interact, educate, train, and communicate (Romano, 2014). Through video games, the gamer processes the symbols on the screen, creating new mental environments, and perceiving the sensation of being truly and completely immersed. As time goes by, these virtual environments multiply, allowing the gamer to embark on a journey in an increasingly complex virtual reality, creating a personal experience between videogame aesthetics and real emotions on the other (Shea, 2016). It seems clear, therefore, that whatever view or perspective the gamer sets himself, he can explore virtual spaces, thus creating a perfect marriage between video game experience and video game tourism.

Objectives and methodology

This paper aims to answer the following research question:

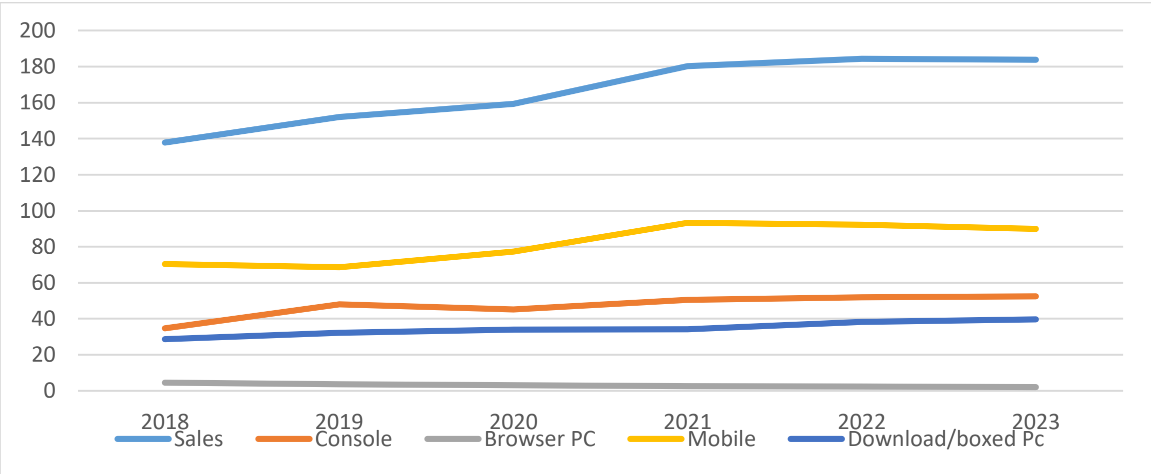
- RQ1: Are video games a thriving and rapidly expanding market?
- RQ2: Which titles are the most successful?
- RQ3: Can video games be a driving force for tourism?

The research methodology used is based on the quality-quantitative analysis of the videogames market and the tourist flows generated by this market, identifying and analyzing the most successful Italian case. The research is based on the analysis of the main national and international literature, on the analysis of various national documents used for the study area, and on the collection of information and geo-localized data, thanks to which it was possible to analyze the data on tourism, with the help of documents and databases provided by the institutional site of the Tuscan region. This study contributes to extending the literature on the phenomenon of video game tourism and provides detailed information on the tourist and financial impact of the phenomenon. It then presents the 'case study' of the municipality of Monteriggioni (Siena), which is the Italian municipality that has most exploited the impact of video game tourism. The data collected on the municipality is the result of a careful analysis of information found on institutional sites. Finally, the conclusions, the implications for science and operational practice, as well as the limitations of the research and possible future developments are analyzed.

Video Game Tourism in Italy: The Monteriggioni Case

The desire to play has been a congenital fact of humans since the dawn of time. For children, it is an essential component in preparing for life's challenges, while for adults, it is a means of escaping everyday reality and allowing themselves some relaxation. The history of video games is closely linked to the evolution of computers; in the 1950s, huge computers took up entire rooms to solve relatively simple mathematical problems. These devices are not intended for entertainment but to demonstrate how technology works. It was during these years that the first video game programmed by American scholars appeared. The game called Tennis for Two was created in 1958 and allowed two people to throw a lighted dot back and forth; this game was presented at a three-day exhibition where everyone lined up to watch a game and try it out. In the 1970s, scholars worked on increasingly compact computer systems, and in 1972, the Atari company developed the game Pong, which was the first video game to be a worldwide success (Gambini, 2009). The 1970s were prosperous years for video games, but the real boom came in the 1990s when the first home consoles were launched on the market. Among the most important were Nintendo and Sony. The world of video games, in those years, was strictly for home use, but in the 2000s with the advent of the Internet, gaming evolved from the home to the online world, giving the video gamer the possibility of being able to play anywhere, anytime (Walliser, 2015). In 2020, video games undergo a further evolution by merging with the virtual world thanks to the constant and exponential development of technology. The growth of the video game market occurred during the lockdown phase due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As can be seen in figure 1, the video game market grew strongly, registering high values precisely during the pandemic crisis. Since 2017, the market has grown by 75 percent from 137.9 billion to 183.9 billion in 2023. As can be seen, the most flourishing market is mobile devices, followed by consoles and PCs.

Figure 1: Global video games market



Source: Personal processing from https://newzoo.com/resources/blog/last-looks-the-global-games-market-in-2023

The geographical area with the largest number of gamers is Asia with 1.48 billion in 2023 alone, followed by Europe with 715 million, and Latin America with 420 million. Looking at individual countries, Japan and the UK are the countries with the most gamers. Japan, the home of consoles, and the UK have a 58% penetration rate of video game users, followed by South Korea with 57%, Mexico with 53%, and Sweden with 51%. Through the sales obtained from the Steam platform, it is possible to analyze which are the five best-selling video games in the world and their respective turnovers (table 1).

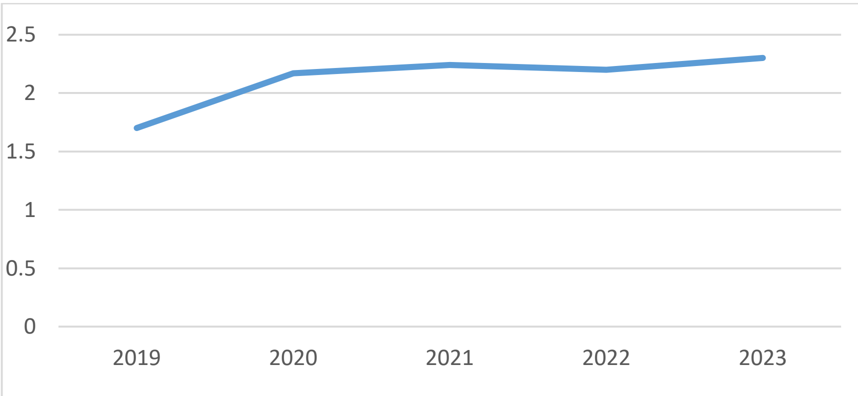
Table 1: Top-selling video games in 2023

Videogames	***Sales (Mln dollar)***
Baldur's Gate 3	657
Hogwarts Legacy	341
Starfield	235
Resident Evil 4	159
Sons of the Forest	116

Source: Personal processing from steam.com

As far as Italy is concerned, however, the market for video games is expanding rapidly. In 2023, the sector exceeded EUR 2.3 billion, up 5% compared to 2022 and 28% compared to 2019 (figure 2), making it the fifth largest in this market.

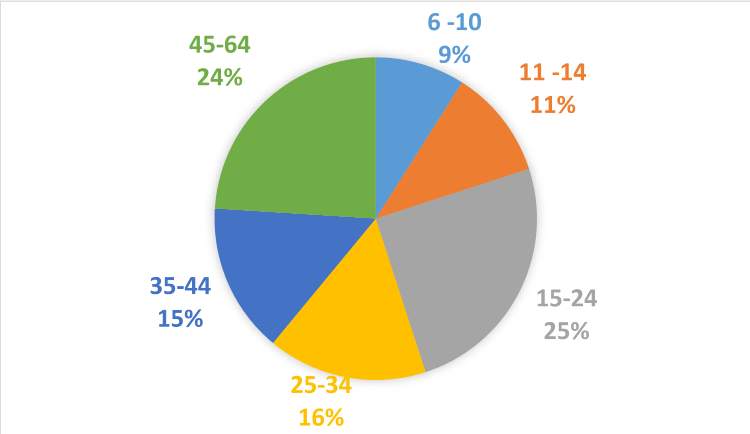
Figure 2: Italian videogames market



Source: Personal processing from report IDEA 2023

Among the favorite devices of Italian gamers are consoles with a turnover of EUR 665 million (EUR 487 million for individual consoles and EUR 178 million for accessories). In 2023 alone, an impressive 577 million euros (+6% compared to 2022) were spent on games: 314 million in digital format (54% of the total) and 264 million in physical format (46% of the total). The best-selling games in the Italian market were Ea Sport FC 24, Hogwarts Legacy, Fifa 23, GTA 5, and Call of Duty: Modern Warfare III. On the other hand, the number of gamers decreased to 13 million in 2023 (-8% compared to 2022), of which 8 million are male and 5 million are female. The age group of Italian gamers is also interesting the largest percentage is in the 15-24 age group (25%) and the 45-64 age group (24%), highlighting that the passion for video games in Italy is not recent. The figure 3 shows the age groups of Italian gamers.

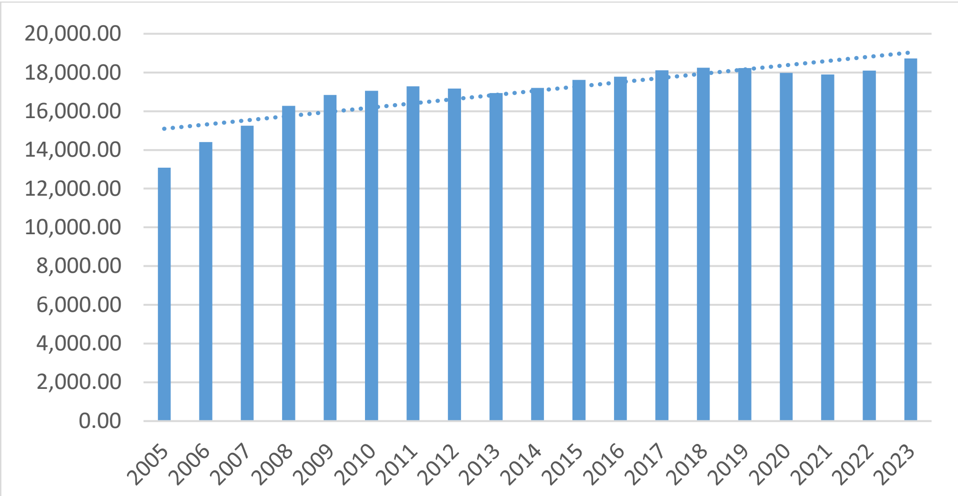
Figure 3: Age groups of Italian gamers



Source: Personal processing from report IDEA 2023

As can be seen from the benchmarking analysis, the video game market is thriving and expanding rapidly, capturing the attention of millions of people. This success is also expanding into other sectors, from fashion through the sale of merchandising to tourism through the desire of video gamers to want to see with their own eyes and touch the places of their adventures. One of the most successful Italian cases is undoubtedly the case of the municipality of Monteriggioni. Monteriggioni is an Italian municipality of 10,000 inhabitants in the province of Siena in the region of Tuscany. The village is already famous for its strong tourist presence as a historical, artistic, and cultural destination. In 2009, the village became the protagonist of one of the most successful video games of recent years: Assassin's Creed 2. The video game, developed by the Ubisoft software house, tells the story of Ezio Auditore, a young Florentine boy who, after the assassination of his father and brothers for alleged treason, learns of a conspiracy on the part of the de'Pazzi family and the corruption of high-ranking personalities and families. The narrative of the game will move from Florence to Monteriggioni where the character will discover the role of the Auditore family in the Brotherhood of Assassins and begin his training to become part of it. In the following years, the video game will present Ezio with various challenges that will lead to the killing of certain targets belonging to the Templar Order, the character's enemy faction, eliminating those responsible for executing his father and brothers. From the point of view of the narrative, the town of Monteriggioni assumes an important role, as it is the place where Villa Auditore is located. Since 2009, with the release of the game, the village has gained worldwide visibility on social media, forums, and communities (Viola, 2021). As can be seen in figure 4, the municipality has recorded a 7.24% increase in arrivals since the year 2010, also recording, in the same year, an increase in visitors to the Armory Museum and the tour of the walls.

Figure 4: Tourist trend Monteriggioni (Siena)



Source: Personal processing from regione.toscana.it

Since the release and success of the video game, there have been many initiatives carried out by fans of the saga within the municipality, which have led to an increase in tourism in the small Tuscan village. One of the most successful events took place on 26 June 2021, when the municipality was the scene of an event conceived by the Assassin's Creed Cosplay Italia association, where many cosplayers roamed the streets of the village, imitating the exploits of the assassins and granting souvenir photos to the public. The Municipality of Monteriggioni, through the "Toscana Turistica Sostenibile" (Sustainable Tourism Tuscany) project, in the period between August and October 2016, administered a questionnaire to assess the level of satisfaction of tourists and to plan the insertion of new products and services and the village's tourist offer. The questionnaire was administered to 500 tourists and the analysis shows that the respondents aged between 18 and 35 came to know about the village through the adventures of the video game. The figure is also confirmed by the various reviews of tourists on web portals such as TripAdvisor, amateur travel blogs, and travel video reports. The village is still often reviewed and presented to tourists as the location of Ezio Auditore's adventures. Several years after the publication of the video game, the name of the village of Monteriggioni is still linked to Assassin's Creed II.

Conclusion

Considering the literature analyzed, we conclude that video game tourism can be considered as a rib of film tourism, as they share many common elements, including the tourists' desire to visit places they have loved and explored only through the screen. In this case, one can speak of gamification, that is, that process which, thanks to the interactivity of modern media, can convey messages of various types capable of leading users to have active behaviors, such as setting out to discover the places developed within the video game. The analysis of the Assassin's Creed II case brought to light that the phenomenon of video game tourism, if appropriately exploited, can be a driving lever for local tourism, and can be the flywheel for several suitable initiatives aimed at attracting new and potential tourists to the area. The medieval village of Monteriggioni provided a report that was able to highlight the importance of video games for the village and the tourist information and reception offices. The municipality of Monteriggioni was able to make the most of the Assassin's Creed II video game by organizing events and working to attract new tourists. Although it is no longer available today, until 2022, an itinerary has been made available to the public online, on the portal Monteriggioniturismo.it, recommends certain points of visit in the village that would inevitably call to the player's mind certain scenes from the video game. Unlike film tourism, however, efforts to make the most of this opportunity in Italy have been very limited and this appears surprising when compared to the number of gamers and videogames set in the country. Italy is often the scene of locations set in successful videogames, just think of the success of Mafia 2 set in World War II Sicily, Syphon Filter the Omega Strain set in Piazza San Cetteo in Pescara, Uncharted 4: End of a Thief set in the Amalfi Coast and Ryse Son of Rome and Shadow of Rome set in Imperial Rome. It seems clear that Italy can exploit this phenomenon to exponentially increase tourist arrivals and become a popular destination for all video gamers worldwide. The results of this work could be a useful starting point for future research aimed at assessing the importance of video game tourism on the Italian territory and evaluating its tourist impact in terms of arrivals and the creation of ad hoc accommodation facilities.

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ONLINE COMMUNICATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF BOUTIQUE HOTELS IN GREECE IN THE POST-COVID-19 ERA

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ABSTRACT: *The concepts of green entrepreneurship, environmental sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are becoming increasingly important in the global tourism and hotel industry, especially in the post-pandemic era. Given the impact of hotels on the environment, the hotel industry is adopting environmentally friendly practices, policies and initiatives as part of its corporate social responsibility, seeking the benefits that can arise from these initiatives, such as improving the corporate image to stakeholders. To this end, it is particularly important to promote these initiatives, especially by using digital marketing tools. In this context, the aim of this paper is to investigate the extent to which boutique hotels in Greece use their corporate websites to publicize information about the environmental policies and practices they implement. In order to achieve this aim, a content analysis was conducted to review the corporate websites of all boutique hotels operating in Greece. The results showed that only a small percentage of the boutique hotel publish environmentally relevant content on their websites, creating great opportunities for improvement especially in the post-pandemic era. For those hotels that do publish such information, the content analysis highlighted a number of key environmental focus areas in which the hotels are engaged. The results of the survey can serve as a guide for hotels looking to develop an online environmental communication program for their stakeholders.*

KEYWORDS: *corporate social responsibility, environmental policies, green marketing, boutique hotels, COVID-19*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has a positive impact on businesses, reducing potential risks and expanding the value of their brand and reputation. Those businesses that respond to consumer concerns about the environment, have a competitive advantage and are generally considered the most successful ones. With the increase in green-oriented behavior and environmental

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consciousness, consumers are now more interested in purchasing products that have less environmental impact. Sustainability issues are particularly prominent in times of crisis, as was recently the case with the COVID-19 pandemic (Elkhwesky *et al*., 2022). The pandemic seems to have further heightened consumer awareness of environmental issues (Trihas *et al*., 2022).

In this context, hotel managers need to recognize the evolving behavior of consumers and the importance of promoting eco-friendly products and services, along with maintaining environmental policies and practices (Foris, Crihalmean and Foris, 2020). After the heavy price paid by the hotel industry during the pandemic (Ntalakos, Belias and Trihas, 2022), this need is even greater in the new post-pandemic reality. Therefore, for businesses, a new market opportunity is created and that needs to be "green". Green marketing is gaining prominence as an effective way to promote sustainable practices (Chung, 2020), while many hotels worldwide have recognized the effectiveness of digital marketing to promote these practices to their target groups (Belias *et al*., 2023). With the advancement of technology and especially the internet, hotels increasingly use their websites as a means of communication and dissemination of their environmental practices.

The aim of this paper is to explore the extent to which boutique hotels in Greece use their corporate websites to publicize information about the environmental policies and practices they implement. The boutique hotel sector has experienced great growth in recent years both in Greece and internationally, with boutique hotels being characterized by their small size, independent management, unique architecture and respect for the local environment (Fuentes-Moraleda *et al*., 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, green entrepreneurship has gained increased momentum (Trapp and Kanbach, 2021). Green entrepreneurship refers to businesses and organizations that emphasize addressing environmental issues, while promoting social change without harming the environment (Madhavi, Todwal and Bhatt, 2024). Green entrepreneurship is not just a subset of entrepreneurship, but a new approach that promotes the creation of innovative business models, making ecological and social issues a central part of business strategy (Tharindu and Koggalage, 2020). Green businesses seek to achieve the balance between the profitable business model and the protection of the environment and society, therefore promoting ecological and social sustainability (Akinsemolu, 2020; Demirel *et al*., 2019). Companies are increasingly recognizing the positive relationship between productivity and environmentally friendly practices, known as "green productivity" (Makhloufi *et al*., 2021). Businesses need to integrate environmental challenges into their decision-making process and develop future scenarios which will deal with expected changes (Neumann, 2022). Innovative environmental strategies can be a source of a competitive advantage for businesses, while they can also create innovative products and services that meet the needs of an ecologically aware market (O'Neill and Gibbs, 2016).

Through the green approach, businesses will achieve the reduction of the environmental impact and of the production costs (Akinsemolu, 2020). This is accomplished by reducing the consumption of energy and materials in the production process (Makhloufi *et al*., 2021; Soomro, Ghumro and Shah, 2020) and by exploiting green technologies and applying environmentally friendly processes (Yin *et al*., 2021). The principle of this strategy is the elimination of waste from the production process. Product recycling can be an effective strategy to reduce costs and maintain environmental sustainability (Yin *et al*., 2021). At the same time, the use of renewable energy sources can reduce energy costs and prepare the company for any future changes in regulatory environmental pressure (Makhloufi *et al*., 2021). Therefore, businesses must be flexible and prepared to respond to this evolution in consumer behavior by creating new products and services that will meet renewed consumer demands (Tharindu and Koggalage, 2020).

The concepts of ecological preservation and environmental protection have been acknowledged and advanced within the tourism and hospitality industry (Edgell, 2019). Implementing sustainability in the hospitality industry is highly complex in practice (Khatter, 2023). Large hotel chains, due to the available financial resources and the burden of economic impacts, have managed to integrate ICT in many areas of their activity with the aim of improving their environmental performance. Successful implementation of these technologies requires proper strategy, education and collaboration with stakeholders to achieve environmental sustainability and public awareness. (Kleinrichert *et al*., 2012). The main motivation behind guests choosing a green hotel, is their belief that their purchase contributes to protecting the planet and creates a sustainable environment for future generations (Dang-Van *et al*., 2023). It is important for hotels to inform potential customers about their environmental policy and their efforts to implement environmental practices (Hazarhun, Çetinsöz and Bilgin, 2023; Paul, 2008). An important factor in hotel selection by customers is its green practices (Salem *et al*., 2022). The hotel industry is a significant part of the tourism industry that poses a serious environmental threat due to its substantial consumption of water, energy, and non-durable goods, as well as the large-scale discharge of raw and solid waste in varying quantities (Kasim, 2007). Jauhari (2014) highlighted several important issues, such as the design of eco-friendly hotels, reducing energy consumption, the role of modern technology in promoting sustainability, and the contribution of human resource management practices to sustainable development.

On the other hand, branding is a key factor for boutique hotels, as they need to differentiate themselves from commercial or large-scale domestic and international hotels through clear branding strategies (Kleinrichert *et al*., 2012). Customers seeking such boutique hotels are relatively rare, as they have developed an extraordinary interest in unique hotel experiences. The choice of boutique hotels is closely related to the type of branding they use, while customers looking for such hotels may have different motivations, but everyone will be interested in their personal well-being and the preservation of the environment (Vlami, 2021). The rising customer focus on environmental sustainability has prompted hoteliers to transform their businesses by adopting green practices (Taliouris and Trihas, 2017). These efforts not only help achieve a competitive advantage but also expand market share by attracting guest segments that prioritize sustainability (Aggarwal *et al*., 2024).

Digital marketing refers to the strategies a business uses to communicate and interact with its customers through the use of digital technologies (Belias *et al*., 2023). It is worth emphasizing that these strategies maintain similar principles to traditional marketing (Trihas *et al*., 2013). This allows marketing strategies to be tailored to customer needs offering a personalized experience (Bala and Verma, 2018). Digital marketing also allows businesses to adapt their strategies to changes in customer needs by tailoring communications and optimizing marketing strategies. Businesses use various tools, from social media monitoring to big data and predictive analytics, so as to understand their customer needs and preferences and adjust their strategies accordingly (Perakakis *et al*., 2016). Successful businesses today are highly dependent on digital marketing and this is due to the digital age we live in; an age that has been made even stronger by the pandemic (Dsouza and Panakaje, 2023). The majority of businesses and consumers are highly dependent on the internet and other digital tools for their daily needs. So businesses need to maintain a strong online presence.

METHODOLOGY

As already mentioned in the introductory section, the aim of this paper is to explore the extent to which boutique hotels in Greece use their corporate websites to publicize information about the environmental policies and practices they implement. According to the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels (2023), ninety-seven (97) boutique hotels are operating in Greece. Content analysis was applied to review the websites of all these hotels, specifically the text related to their environmental policies and practices. In order to analyze the content of the web pages, a number of questions were developed and then used to search for keywords and special markings. Content analysis was used, where coded criteria were identified, then these elements were quantified and counted, following the coding protocol suggested by Jenkins and Karanikola (2014). "Yes" and "No" answers were used to find whether these criteria were present or absent. For the content analysis of boutique hotel websites, the six questions mentioned in the study by Hsieh (2012) were used, regarding whether the following terms are mentioned on the website:

1. Environment or Sustainability,
2. Environmental Strategy or Policy,
3. Participation of the hotel in environmental programs,
4. Control and progress of environmental programs,
5. Attach environmental or sustainability reports.
6. Awards and certifications regarding the hotel's environmental policy and ecological practices.

The content analysis of the websites was applied in May - June 2023. For the validity of the results, the analysis process was performed by two different researchers, and in any website where there was disagreement, the process was repeated by a third researcher.

RESULTS

Of the 97 boutique hotel websites that were analyzed, only 35 of them (36%) included information related to environmental issues. Twenty-one of these thirty-five hotels (60%) mention, either in headlines or in the main text of their webpages, words related to the environment, such as "sustainability", "environmental sustainability", "sustainable development", "ecological consciousness", "ecological sensitivity", "environment", "natural environment", "environmental protection", "environmentally friendly", "green direction" and "green hotel".

Of the thirty-five boutique hotel websites that refer to the environment and sustainability, sixteen websites (45,7%) list environmental statements, containing terms such as "environmental policy", "green policy", "environmental commitment", "ecological philosophy", "environmental strategy", "sustainable development policy", where they state their policy with detailed information. The rest of the hotel websites included some environmental statements and values such as the "protection and respect for the environment", the "reduction of an environmental impact", proposals to customers and partners for ecological actions, compliance with environmental laws.

Twelve of the thirty-five hotels analyzed (34,3%), participated in or promoted environmental programs through their websites. The most common programs include the recycling of materials, the reuse of products and the reduction of waste. Six of the hotels refer to the term recycling or use the statement "Reduce-Reuse-Recycle". Moreover, four of the 35 hotel websites (11.4%), contain information about environmental monitoring systems. In terms of ensuring the accessibility of corporate environmental reports, only 17.1% i.e. six boutique hotels out of 35 have published their annual environmental or sustainability reports on their websites.

Sixteen boutique hotels provided information on awards and / or certifications concerning the integration of environmentally sustainable development programs into their business operations. These awards / certifications are "Green Key", "Ecotourism", "Green Leader", "GREEN Certification" and the organic certification association DIO. Additional, six hotels included on their websites the ISO 14001 certification. By adopting this environmental standard, the hotels achieve the reduction of waste, the saving of unnecessary costs, the strengthening of public relations with society and citizens, the effective management of resources and raw materials, the mobilization of workers and the acquisition of an environmental identity.

During the analysis of the data, additional ecological statements and functions were observed on the websites of the boutique hotels such as the use of energy saving lightbulbs, the use of solar panels for hot water, the utilization of excess organic matter to minimize waste, the use room card keys for electricity saving, the composting process, the use and promotion of local products, toilet cisterns to reduce water consumption, energy fireplaces for heating, the cleaning of rooms and common areas with biological/ecological cleaners and, finally, the installation of an automatic air conditioning shutdown systems. Solar hot water accumulators and biological/ecological cleaners mentioned more frequently.

CONCLUSIONS

It is suggested that hotels should use their corporate websites to highlight and communicate to the stakeholders their commitment to sustainability (Shereni, Saarinen and Rogerson, 2022). However, this does not seem to be the case with Greek boutique hotels, since as mentioned above, only 36% of them included information related to the environment on their websites. It seems that boutique hotels do not have sustainability at the heart of their operation, and prefer to highlight on their websites other type of information, such as their facilities and services. In most cases, hotels use their websites as a marketing tool for achieving bookings, rather than to update information about environmental practices and policies. The absence from the websites of information related to the hotels' environmental policy may mean either that the hotels do not adopt such practices, or that although they do implement environmental practices, they fail to display them to their target audience. In both of these cases the situation is problematic, although in the second case the solution is much simpler. Hotel managers should not forget that consumer behavior today has changed, as customers are more aware of environmental issues, especially in the post-pandemic era. The absence of environmental information weakens the corporate social responsibility of hotels, ultimately leading to a competitive disadvantage against other hotels that follow such practices. This is even more true in boutique hotels because of the different philosophy they promote.

This research has a key limitation. The findings are based on a snapshot of the websites at one point in time. However, websites are a powerful digital marketing tool, and the information on them can change at any time. In addition, new boutique hotels have started operating in Greece following this research. For these reasons, it is recommended to repeat the survey after one to two years and compare the results to see what has changed and how quickly boutique hotels are adapting to the new reality that has been emerged after the pandemic.

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DEVELOPMENT OF WELL-BEING TOURISM IN LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT: *The growing interest in the concept of well-being in tourism helps tourism service providers to seek inspiration and new means for service providers to best meet the needs of their customers and among tourists who want to satisfy their body, mind and soul while traveling and ensure environmental, economic and social sustainability (Lindell et al, 2019). Well-being is perceived differently but in simple terms it is a feeling when a person feels good about receiving tourist services regardless of financial capabilities. The main well-being tourists are those for whom "well-being" is the only goal or the main motivating factor when choosing trips, when the main motivation is to improve well-being, when vacations are devoted to health and fitness, healthy imitation, obtaining spa and beauty treatments, applying environmental friendliness, physical activity or enriching the spiritual world. This area of tourism is being studied by scientists in an increasingly broad assessment of the importance of the application of the topic and practice. This is also associated with trends in the change in consumer needs. According to Smith & Diekmann (2017), tourism studies, which are largely multidisciplinary, over the past few decades are more focused on well-being, both from a theoretical and methodological point of view. The aim of the research is to present the development possibilities of well-being tourism in Lithuania. To achieve the set goal, the theoretical concept of well-being is discussed, the available natural-cultural resources adapted to the provision of tourism services are reviewed, and the possibilities of developing well-being tourism are reviewed. The applied research method is the analysis and systematization of the scientific literature, the analysis of other sources of information about well-being tourism in Lithuania and development trends. Well-being tourism in Lithuania has many potential opportunities. For the development of this direction of tourism, attention is paid, discussion is developed. Available natural and infrastructure and resources make it possible to provide high-quality services and develop well-being service offerings as needed to create the most favorable customer experience possible and increase their spiritual development, reconciling the interests of the host communities.*

KEYWORDS: *Well-being tourism, development, tourists, communities, Lithuania*

INTRODUCTION

The term well-being tourism is primarily associated with tourism, which promotes personal health (Dziadkiewic et al, 2023). Sometimes it is confused with wellness, but it is not the same, although they relate to physical, mental balance and social well-being. Terms have different shades of meaning. In addition, concepts from different disciplines are associated with them, so research is scattered and fragmented terminology. Wellbeing tourism focuses on reconciling people's well-being with those of host communities and the natural environment. Well-being-oriented tourism means the intention to do good, to have a positive impact on people (both guests and hosts), the environment on the planet now and in the future (Lindell ir kt., 2022)

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According to Sun and Guo (2022), the link between tourism and well-being is largely confirmed, In the studies, scientists mainly applied the concept of subjective well-being to study the well-being of tourists or measured the psychological well-being of tourists from positive and negative aspects. In recent years, research has gradually transcended the only concept of well-being and the dichotomy of the positive and negative aspects: from a psychological perspective, the well-being of tourists was divided into eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. Eudaimonic well-being refers to a satisfying or meaningful experience and the search for self-perception and personal development, meaning and self-realization of the purpose of life through social, voluntary or other forms of tourism related to the value of life. Hedonic well-being mainly includes positive emotions, such as pleasure and happiness, reflected in the pursuit of pleasure in leisure activities or during the holidays. However, an analysis of Zins & Ponocny (2022) shows that holiday travel is designed for a variety of purposes, including the long-term impact of hedonic and eudaimonic travel experiences and the importance of satisfying travel aspirations.

The aim of the research is to present the development opportunities of well-being tourism in Lithuania. In order to achieve the stated goal, the well-being theoretical concept is discussed, the existing natural-cultural resources that are applied in the provision of tourism services are reviewed, and the possibilities of the future in the development of well-being tourism are reviewed. The research methods used are the analysis and systematization of the scientific literature, other sources of information about well-being tourism in Lithuania and development trends.

METHODOLOGY

Well-being was a philosophical and sociological exploratory issue, and over time, research expanded into disciplines such as psychology, health sciences, and economics. Over the past few decades, tourism studies have also become more well-being-oriented from both a theoretical and methodological point of view (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). In Lithuania, the concept of well-being tourism is not sufficiently developed, there is no Integral Welfare, which includes the perception of the tourist and the host community. The focus is on the environment and the community, and on wellness tourism, with the focus solely on the health and enjoyment of customers. In recent years, more and more Lithuanian scientists have been engaging in welfare discussions both in tourism-related areas and in medicine, psychology and other health-related fields. This study analyzes the insights of scientists on well-being topics based on Bočkus et al, 2024; Narkūnienė, 2024; Dziadkiewicz et al, 2020, Smith & Diekmann, 2017 et al. Zins & Ponocny, 2022) scientific works. The discussion of the situation in Lithuania in the development of the field of well-being tourism was carried out on the basis of Research on the development of the tourism sector (2023, 2024), documents regulating tourism in Lithuania. The aim of the research is to present the development opportunities of well-being tourism in Lithuania. In order to achieve the stated goal, the theoretical concept of well-being is discussed, the existing natural-cultural resources that are adapted to the provision of tourist services are reviewed, and the possibilities of the future are reviewed for the development of well-being tourism. The research method used is the analysis and systematization of the scientific literature, statistical and other sources of information about well-being tourism.

RESULTS

The Review of the Lithuanian Tourism Sector (2024) reveals the most important changes and trends in the sector. Due to the courageous decrease in tourists due to the pandemic, local tourism has recovered faster than international, already in 2022 the number of local tourists exceeded the level of 2019, but the recovery of foreign tourist flows is slow, especially due to geopolitical factors, i.e. the war in Ukraine and the Lithuanian neighbourhood countries for the aggressors. The largest inbound markets remain Poland, Latvia, Belarus and Germany, usa. Economically, the tourism sector is recovering. Travel exports in 2023 were among the most growing types of service exports in the country, and their values exceeded the level of 2019 by 25%. Key markets such as Germany and United Kingdom make a significant contribution to the financial recovery of the sector. However, tourism service providers, especially inbound tour operators, still face challenges. The recovery in activity and income is slow, significantly lower than the overall activity of the return of foreigners. In order to revitalise the tourism sector, it is necessary to focus on several key areas. First of all, the development of infrastructure and the development of communication opportunities are essential factors that help to ensure attractive tourist services and convenient movement of tourists. According to research by travelers in Lithuania's priority markets, easy direct contact with the country is one of the most important aspects when deciding on the choice of travel destination. Representatives of the tourism business also propose to promote the organization of cultural, entertainment and business events in order to reduce seasonality and increase the occupancy of accommodation establishments. A marketing strategy based on the analysis of target markets helps to attract tourists more efficiently. The National Tourism Information

System (NTIS), which is currently being developed, is an important tool to promote the development of the tourist sector. Taking into account the challenges of recent years, the recovery of the Lithuanian tourism sector requires the work of the entire sector and adaptation to new circumstances. Well-being tourism is closely linked to sustainable tourism and infrastructure developed accordingly. For example, respondents who participated in the Norkiūnienė (2024) survey consider the following factors for the sustainable development of the tourism sector to be the most important: the development of ecotourism; tourist accessibility; development of tourist routes accessible to all; certification of tourist services; development of a common national route and development of infrastructure for cycling tourism, etc.., however, according to respondents, the following problems for the sustainable development of the tourism sector are the most frequently encountered: insufficient investment in the development of sustainable tourism; lack of knowledge about the essence and principles of sustainable tourism in local politics; insufficiently developed infrastructure of the tourism sector. In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector, the full development of tourism is important, ranging from a more accurate understanding of the current situation through high-quality data and its analysis, improving tourism infrastructure, improving the qualification of human resources, increasing the resilience of the sector, increasing its attractiveness, and ending with attracting priority target markets and adapting marketing actions to target groups of potential tourists. For well-beig tourists, natural resources are important, thanks to which destinations are achieved, but proper infrastructure plays an equally important role in achieving a full-fledged travel, leisure or holiday experience.

Bočkus et al (2024) states that the Lithuania has an old wellness and it itself is a health and wellness tourism destination that provides affordable and high-quality services. The offer of health promotion tourism lies in the abundance of natural healing and recreational resources (mineral water, phototherapeutic raw materials, healing mud, salt, amber, microclimate, favorable for health and rehabilitation, recreational natural resources). Well-being tourism is so conditioned by the abundance of these resources. Most of the companies providing health and welfare services are provided in health and wellness institutions in Druskininkai, Birštonas, Palanga, Neringa. They have a legal status that is limited to destinations that meet strict requirements in relation to the possibility of providing health and wellness services. The number of modern hotels that focus on recreation and the provision of well-being is increasing.

Sanatorium business in Lithuania is leading among the Baltic States due to its traditions, professional staff and loyal customers. The spa plays an important role in both health promotion and medical tourism. Traditional health resorts prevail in Lithuania. Sanatoria-style enterprises are still important in the industry, but they are becoming more consumer-oriented and increasingly offering high-quality services (Bočkus et al, 2024;2023). The most important conditions for the development of current well-being tourism and sustainable tourism in Lithuania are the abundance and diversity of natural and cultural resources that allow the development of sustainable tourism products (ecotourism, ethical, responsible, "green" tourism). The prevailing variety of geographical landscapes is due to the development of water (sea and river) and rural tourism, the legal requirements of the tourism business correspond to international standards. In Lithuania, there are enough opportunities to develop welfare and health promotion activities and adequate infrastructure.

In 2023, the positioning of the tourism industry was resumed. The new positioning reflects the values of the general concept "Co-Create Lithuania", which presents the country, the tone of communication and other elements of the brand. Cooperation has not only created a generic positioning of tourism, but also distinguishes the main areas / products representing the country, as well as their value (1 table). Undoubtedly, both visiting tourists and participants in local tourism have the power to receive a high level of service and to acquire their aspirations from a well-beig point of view.

1 table. The study presents the main products / areas representing Lithuania

Areas	Aim	Description
Sightseeing tourism	Discover a culture that blends past and present	Lithuania, which has been creating together with the world for centuries, has a multi-layered heritage. Harmoniously intertwined styles and influences – Baltic and European, Eastern and Western – offer a plethora of unforgettable experiences both in the city, in the museum and in the restaurant Different influences of the past are embodied by UNESCO protects heritage and national dishes, and the creatively cherished present unfolds. In the boiling cultural life of the country, which is full of unexpected spaces, fun events and gourmet experiences. Lithuania is a treasure trove of unique experiences, where the stories you create will not run out of time or space. In this area several interests of tourists are intertwined: UNESCO objects, knowledge of culture, visiting historical objects, cities cognition, gastronomic experiences.
Nature and active tourism	Find a connection with nature that inspires	Lithuanian the origins of the connection with nature go back to the times of paganism, and the possibilities of enjoying the connection with pure nature are whole power: from overnight stays in stylish recreation areas to hiking through the swamps, from "forest bathing" to swimming Lakes. No less important is the fact that nature does not need to

		be looked for with a light. Wherever you turn, everywhere is full of trees, flowers, meadows, rivers and lakes. Even walking through the streets of the city, you can unexpectedly find yourself surrounded by forest. So, it doesn't matter, what you are looking for – adventure or peace, you can have no doubt – you will return to your home after regaining your strength, taking inspiration and being full of the desire to share new stories. Natural beauty often becomes one of the main reasons to visit Lithuania: seaside, sightseeing paths, as well as active entertainment (cycling, swimming) is rapidly gaining popularity kayaking, hiking.)
Health tourism	Explore wellness rituals rooted in nature	The combination of natural wonders, centuries-old healing traditions and the latest scientific discovery in Lithuania ensures the highest quality health promotion experience. Using the powers of mineral water and other healing natural resources (healing mud, amber, honey and herbs), here you will regain the strength of body and spirit, and experienced specialists will take care of your health and well-being. The positive effect of health promotion is further enhanced by the picturesque and tranquil environment of Lithuanian resort towns, framed by pure lakes and river bends. What you would be looking for – to take a breather from the feverish pace of life or to calm the soul and regain the strength of the body, here you will be able to create your own history of wellness. Therefore, Lithuania is a great place to restore strength.
Business tourism –	Build business connections that drive progress	Through its long history, full of co-creation moments, Lithuania has always been a place where different cultures, nations and ideas meet. Today, the country's dynamic business environment, modern spaces and experienced event professionals create memorable conferences, exhibitions and meetings. Quality, digital infrastructure and attention to detail are what you can expect both when organizing and participating in business events in Lithuania. From inspiring spaces to gourmet food, here you will find everything you need for an event full of unforgettable moments.

Source: Turizmo sektoriaus plėtros tyrimas (2024)

Lithuanian users of well-being services are motivated by the desire to lead a healthy lifestyle, disease prevention, rejuvenation and relaxation, authentic experiences, stress reduction and lifestyle habits management, personal growth, spa and beauty and healthy eating. The well-being industry includes various categories of service providers, for example, resort accommodation, healthy food and nutrition, healthy excursions and activities, the purchase of healthy products, internal transport, other services (not directly related to well-being, but acting as ancillary activities, for example, insurance, transport, telecommunications companies). Specific places that can be visited for well-being could include spa salons, resort wellness home centers, retreats, ashram, thermal or mineral baths, cruises and other entertainment.

DISCUSSION

Health promotion institutions seek to implement the main goal – it is important that Lithuanian society is healthier, and consumers understand the benefits of natural resources, the impact of preventive programs on health well-being. The World Tourism Organization (PTO) expert group predicts a growing demand for natural and local tourism, and the results of the studies carried out also reveal a change in tourist behavior, so it is necessary to take this into account in order to attract more tourists and help the tourism sector recover faster. It is likely that one of the most important criteria when choosing a place of destination will be a small number of tourists in the area. Studies have revealed that 73% of those surveyed will give priority to rural and natural tourism (Tourism Sector Development Survey, 2022). It is likely that avoiding cities with large flows of tourists, tourists will be more likely to choose outings and various activities in nature, staying in private property, villas, apartments or small hotels instead of large hotels crowded with tourists. It is hoped that due to the well-being awareness of the benefits, more consumers will become interested in environmentally friendly and socially responsible travel, as well as eco-tourism. Lindel et al (2019) states that in Lithuania, the main motives are conditionally distinguished by several groups: tourists who order medical / cosmetic (have a clear goal to heal, perform surgery, etc.) services. Physical/hedonistic motifs for clients who want to experience pleasures, engage in physical activity and relaxation in order to reduce tension due to routine. Spiritual/communal motives determine the choice of customers who want to be completely disconnected from the routine. They are looking for opportunities to balance their spiritual, mental and physical health by embarking on pilgrimage, engaging in meditation exercises and spiritual healing, etc. People are paying more and more attention to health, organic food and physical activity. Many people want to change their lifestyle to become healthier. However, as sustainable tourism is under conceivable, while the development of environmental friendliness and green products/services is gaining momentum. Well-being tourism as an important form of tourism for tourism participants is being developed to justify its benefits and significance on the basis of research. In future studies, a more detailed explanation of the concepts and content of tourism tourism and health tourism is relevant. With the growing need for well-being tourism services, practical preparation for the provision of welfare tourism services to customers.

CONCLUSIONS

The essence of the well-being tourist is not fully defined, and the discussions that are being developed highlight the distinctive features of this form of tourism. Briefly defining the essence, it can be said, that Well-being-oriented tourism means the intention to do good, to have a positive impact on people (both guests and hosts), the environment on the planet now and in the future. Well-being tourism in Lithuania has many potential opportunities due to the currently developed cognitive tourism, health, business tourism, nature and active tourism services. The essence of these tourist directions creates wide opportunities for getting a pleasant travel experience, but at the same time to achieve the goals of personal growth and self-expression, contribute to the preservation of the local environment by choosing sustainable services, taking into account the interests of the communities.

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WORK STRESS OF RECEPTIONISTS IN THE FRONT OFFICE - A CASE STUDY FROM SLOVAKIA

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ABSTRACT: *The hotel environment's dynamics place high expectations on front office employees' work and personality. Fast decision-making, effective communication, and dealing with difficult situations bring work stress. This paper, recognizing the urgent need, aims to investigate the phenomenon of employee stress in the front office, identify the most common stress factors, and propose effective stress management methods to maintain optimal employee performance. Quantitative research is implemented. Using an electronic questionnaire survey of 170 respondents, we analyze the presence of stress in receptionists in different accommodation establishments in the Slovak hotel industry by territorial selection. The collected data are analyzed by examining the percentage distribution, and descriptive statistics. We find that front office workers perceive their work positively but are minimally satisfied. They evaluate workplace relations and their feelings at work rather negatively. Stress is a daily reality caused by chaos, administrative workload, and many tasks that must be managed under time pressure. Long-term stress manifests itself in psychological and physical symptoms, significantly impacting the well-being of front office workers. More than half of the workers are worried about losing their jobs. The ability to cope with stress is low. Employers do not provide specific training in stress management. Findings suggest the need for a stress management model for the front office. Its provision is important for managing and optimizing the front office work environment.*

KEYWORDS: *work stress, front office, hotel industry, receptionist, stress management*

INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry is an essential sector of tourism in Slovakia. It is a branch of economic activity based on the provision of accommodation and related services in accommodation establishments (Patúš and Gúčik, 2005). In the second quarter of 2024, 4 853 accommodation establishments provided accommodation services in Slovakia. Seventy-one thousand rooms and 200 thousand beds (including campsites) were available to visitors. There are 399 accommodation establishments in the Bratislava region (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2024).

Working in the hotel industry is diverse, creative, and dynamic, offers many opportunities and career advancement, and requires the ability to communicate and cooperate. All these aspects of working in the hotel industry are attractive and motivating for employees, but they can also be sources and causes of stress. Stress is a ubiquitous phenomenon in today's society and the lives of individuals. It is a state of mental tension. It arises as a defensive reaction

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of the body to imminent danger, upsets emotional balance, and causes health problems. It blocks clear thinking and goal achievement (Clegg, 2005; Fontana and Zavadilova 2016; Ritter, 2022).

Many research works indicate that workers in the hotel and tourism industry are exceptionally exposed to work stress (Davis, 2015; Khuong and Ling, 2020; Kang et al., 2021). Previous research in the field in different countries confirms the frequently occurring stressors. These are stimuli from the external and internal environment that disrupt internal balance and provoke a stress response (Mravec, 2011). The most frequently occurring stressors based on various studies include low pay (Lo and Lamm, 2005; Fenyvesi et al., 2024), inadequate working conditions, interpersonal relationships, chaos in the workplace (Lo and Lamm, 2005; O 'Neill, Davis, 2011; Bíziková, 2023). In recent years, since the COVID-19 pandemic, stress and burnout syndrome in the hotel industry have received increasing attention in management theory. They emphasize that stress factors have further expanded during the pandemic (Kumar et al., 2024; Demirović et al., 2021). There is now an increasing number of studies examining employer responsibility and the importance of appropriate working conditions in maintaining employee mental health (Kahar, Wee, 2020; Khuong, Linh, 2020).

The Front Office department in an accommodation facility can be characterized as the first and extremely important point of contact between the guest and the hotel employee - the receptionist. The Front Office has a different organisational structure in different accommodation establishments and therefore its importance and tasks may differ. The Front Office has different job roles and associated work activities. However, the perception of its activities (especially for the non-specialist public) is often limited to the reception area and the work that is carried out by the reception staff. There is no doubt that the receptionist has a key position in this work hierarchy and with guests. In this paper, we will primarily focus on this category of employees. What one receptionist perceives as an overload at work may be an exciting challenge for another. Stress is a complicated complex of different phenomena and above all very individual. Everyone experiences it from a different degree of stress (Ritter, 2022). Everyone needs some degree of stress. It represents the driving force necessary for employees to achieve their set goals. In first-contact workplaces, a certain amount of stress must be accepted naturally by the hotel guest. It helps to deal with different situations concerning guests, colleagues, management, and external co-workers, given that stress can induce better work performance (Putra et al, 2020).

The first impression and overall satisfaction of hotel guests depends on the concierge's ability to manage tasks efficiently. Successful stress management requires a comprehensive approach, including, for example, prioritizing and properly setting up time management at work (Bíziková et al., 2023). Stress management helps the receptionist work productively and rationally in meeting corporate and personal goals. Stress becomes dangerous when it has a long-term effect on a person's organism. It is a trigger for many chronic diseases (Mravec, 2011; Selye and Kudrnáčová, 2016). The ability to relieve stress leads to a sustainable lifestyle and the achievement of work-life balance. Managing stress in the workplace acts as a preventive measure against the "burn-out" syndrome (Acar, Ekran, 2018), which often affects employees in the front office. The practical benefit of learned skills to eliminate or manage stress is coping, which helps health (Ma et al., 2021).

Based on the premise that stress is an integral part of a receptionist's job, the main objective of this paper is to examine the phenomenon of employee stress in the front office, identify the most common stress factors, and highlight effective stress management methods to maintain optimal work performance of front office employees in accommodation establishments. The research questions in the survey are formulated as follows: 1. What are the most commonly occurring stressors in the work of a front office receptionist? 2. How does job stress manifest itself? 3. What type of stress is most commonly found in the job of a receptionist? 4. How do receptionists try to manage stress? 5. How does the employer address stress management in the workplace?

METHODOLOGY

In addition to the secondary sources we applied in the literature review, we also collected material from primary sources. In that context, based on an electronic questionnaire, we obtained data from 170 respondents in the spring of 2024. All of them worked as receptionists. The questionnaire contained thematically divided topics, both open and closed questions. The structure of the questionnaire consisted of demographic and accommodation data; other sections focused on self-knowledge and self-reflection through reflection on experiencing and coping with workplace stress. The sample consisted of 170 accommodation establishments in Bratislava in the following structure: hotels, motels, guesthouses, and tourist hostels. In terms of ownership, both chain (37.1%) and independent accommodation facilities (62.9%) were represented. We apply mathematical-statistical methods and descriptive statistics indicators to process the data. The characteristics of the survey sample are as follows: 77

(45.3%) men and 93 (54.7%) women participated in the survey. The average age of the respondents was 38.2 years, with the median age being slightly lower at 37 years. The standard deviation in age is 4.58 years, indicating some degree of variability in the age of the respondents with a minimum age of 32 years and a maximum age of 45 years. 100 (58.8%) of the respondents had attained secondary education and 70 (41.2%) respondents had attained university education. In terms of length of experience, 107 (62.9%) of the respondents have been doing the job of receptionist for more than four years. 63 (37.1%) respondents had less than three years of experience.

RESULTS

Based on the research conducted and in line with the assertions in the literature review, it was confirmed that receptionists are stressed in front office work. Stress is a part of the working life of the respondents. As many as 121 respondents (71.2%) reported that stress is highly a part of their daily work environment. 49 (28.8%) of the respondents said that stress is part of their daily work life. These figures indicate a high level of stress in the work environment of most of the respondents. Respondents experience varying degrees of stress at work. According to the data, most respondents, specifically 130 (85.5%), are experiencing medium stress levels at work. The high degree of job stress is experienced by 22 (14.5%) respondents. These data indicate that the majority of the respondents experienced a moderate degree of stress in the work environment.

In terms of the duration of stress, 147 respondents indicated that the stress they experience is more likely to be long-term, representing 86.5% of the sample. On the contrary, only 23 (13.5%) of the respondents stated, that the stress is more of a one-off. These data suggest that the vast majority of respondents have experienced long-term stress in their work environment.

According to the data obtained, the most common factor causing stress in the workplace

is chaos (38.2%) and hotel guests (24.7%), followed by meeting deadlines (13.5%), administrative workload (10.6%), and excessive tasks (12.9%). These data highlight the variety of factors that contribute to stress in the work environment, with chaos and interaction with guest requests seemingly being the main sources of stress for front office receptionists.

Respondents experience a variety of psychological symptoms as a result of stress. The most frequently reported psychological symptoms of stress are restlessness (27.1%) and lack of focus (27.6%). Next were feelings of anxiety (11.2%), fear (12.9%), anger (10.6%), and attention disorders (10.6%). These data indicate a variety of psychological manifestations of stress among the respondents, with restlessness and lack of concentration being reported as the most frequently occurring symptoms.

Stress manifests itself through a variety of physical symptoms. The data obtained shows that the physical symptoms of stress among the respondents include sleep disturbance which is reported most frequently (37.1%), followed by headache (25.9%), nausea (12.9%), sweating (13.5%), and voice trembling (10.6%). These data suggest that stress often causes a variety of physical reactions in respondents, with sleep disturbances and headaches being common manifestations.

The assessment of workplace relationships was as follows: 129 (75.9%) of the respondents rated the relationships in their workplace rather negatively. In contrast, only 41 (24.1%) respondents rated workplace relationships rather positively. These data suggest that most respondents consider workplace relationships to be negative to some extent. Respondents had mixed feelings about their job performance. The data obtained shows that 147 (86.5%) of the respondents reported experiencing rather negative feelings or states while performing their jobs. On the contrary, only 23 (13.5%) of the respondents stated that they experience rather positive feelings while performing their occupation. These data suggest that the vast majority of respondents experience negative feelings or states about the performance of their occupation. The survey reveals that 81 (47.6%) of the respondents are rather worried about losing their jobs while 25 (14.7%) of the respondents directly confirmed this concern. Conversely, 41 (24.1%) of the respondents indicated that they were rather not worried about losing their jobs and 23 (13.5%) could not comment on the issue.

Paradoxically, in terms of interest in the profession, the job of receptionist is the dream job for the majority of the respondents 104 (61.2%). On the contrary, 66 (38.8%) respondents said that it is not their dream job. These data indicate that most respondents are interested in the receptionist job and consider it their dream occupation. Respondents admitted that stress has an impact on their health. From the data obtained, 106 (62.4%) respondents felt that stress affects their health. 64 (37.6%) of the respondents did not know if stress affects their health. These data suggest that most respondents are aware of the possible impact of stress on their health, highlighting the importance of stress management for maintaining overall health. Rest is essential for managing stress. From the data obtained, the most preferred type of relaxation is sitting with friends, which 66 (38.8%) respondents prefer. According to 41 (24.1%) respondents, the second most preferred is sports, indicating an active way of relaxation. Only

18 (10.6%) respondents said they prefer reading. In comparison, as many as 45 (26.5%) chose to do nothing and wait for problems to solve themselves—the preference for the type of relaxation results from individual preferences and how individuals manage stress and relax. For example, hanging out with friends contributes to social connection and relaxation, while sports help relieve tension and relax the mind. For those who expect problems to resolve themselves, relaxation is associated with a strategy of inaction or avoiding confrontation with problems. It is essential to choose a method of relaxation that supports the individual's overall well-being and health.

According to the respondents, a significant finding of the survey is that workplace stress management is not being implemented. The data shows that 100% of the respondents indicated that their employer does not manage workplace stress. This result indicates that, according to the respondents, there is no formal or organised system or program to manage and cope with stress at the workplace. This situation can lead to increased stress and discomfort among employees, which harms their overall well-being and work performance. Lack of stress management also means employers do not pay enough attention to their employees' mental and emotional health. Employers must pay attention to stress management and provide the means and resources to promote a healthy work environment and manage work demands through education, training, webinars, etc. This is a crucial aspect of creating a supportive and sustainable work environment.

In terms of specificity of activities, 100% of respondents indicated that their employer does not conduct any stress management activities or respondents do not identify them as part of stress management. The finding that employers do not implement stress management activities suggests a potential lack of concern for employee well-being. The absence of specific stress management programs or initiatives increases employee health and well-being risk. This situation contributes to higher stress levels, burnout syndrome and reduced productivity in the work environment. Lack of support for stress management harms working relationships, cooperation and the overall atmosphere in the work environment. Employers should recognise the importance of stress management and provide adequate tools and resources to help their employees cope with work demands and pressures. Implementing stress management programs could create a more supportive work environment where employees can more effectively manage challenges while maintaining better health and emotional states. This move can have a positive impact not only on individuals but also on the overall performance and success of the organisation.

DISCUSSION

The survey investigated the stress of front office workers in selected accommodation establishments based on territorial selection, focusing on the capital city of Bratislava. We identified several significant findings within the survey.

Front office workers are exposed to medium to high stress levels, which they rate as long-term. The sources of stress are mainly cited as chaotic management, interaction with guests, high work pace and deadline-driven tasks. This stress significantly impacts work performance and workers' overall health, quality of life and well-being. We have found that many of these properties have not developed effective mechanisms to manage the stress of their front office staff. There is a lack of a systematic approach to stress management and inadequate support from management in managing stress and providing the necessary tools and resources to assist staff. This can lead to increased job burnout, employee absenteeism and reduced job satisfaction.

Front office stress management is critical to optimal work performance and employee health. Destination establishments must take a proactive approach to improving stress management in their work environments. This includes implementing stress management programmes, training and workshops and creating supportive working environments where front office staff feel protected and supported.

A similarly oriented national survey on stress management as a soft skill, focusing on the work of front office receptionists, was conducted by Bíziková (2023). The study highlights the demanding nature of the work of receptionists, which induces stress. Its primary sources are identified supervisors, guests, non-functioning technology, and repeatedly excessive tasks and administrative burdens associated with bureaucracy. The author stresses the need to raise employee awareness of the importance of soft skills and encourage accommodation management to provide training in this area.

Our findings are similar to the study by Huang et al. (2018), which examined in detail the impact of coping strategies on job stress and intention to leave a job in the hospitality industry. They found that stress management is critical to improving well-being and job performance. Management support is also essential. These findings provide vital information for managers in the hotel industry who should emphasise stress management and support employees to improve the work environment and maintain workforce stability.

Our findings are similar to those of Choi et al. (2019), who examined the understanding of emotional intelligence, job stress, coping strategies, and burnout in hotel front office employees. Higher emotional intelligence was associated with lower stress and better coping in work situations. Employees use various stress-coping strategies, such as positive reframing. Higher job stress and low emotional intelligence can lead to burnout. These findings highlight the importance of emotional intelligence and effective coping strategies in minimising stress and burnout among employees in the hotel sector.

Our findings were also presented in a study by Ma (2021) addressing how hotel employees cope with stress. Employees were found to use a variety of coping strategies to manage stress, such as seeking support from colleagues and seeking relaxation activities.

A very recent survey within Hungarian Hospitality presents similar results. According to a study by Fenyvesi et al. (2024), hospitality's most frequent stressors are task overload, low salary, uncomfortable atmosphere and management style, expectations that contradict or mutually exclude each other, and inadequate working conditions. Almost all respondents had already encountered symptoms of stress, and independently of gender or age, they mostly had the form of emotional, physical, or mental fatigue.

Based on the above, effective stress management is critical to maintaining optimal work performance and overall quality of life for front office workers in hospitality facilities. Proper coping leads to employee stabilisation, reduces turnover rates, leads to employee satisfaction, and ultimately can impact hotel guest satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the sample our primary research is based on is not representative, the many cases of consistency of our findings with those of other research results (Lo & Lamm, 2005; O'Neill & Davis, 2011; Huang et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2019; Demirović et al., 2020; Ma, 2021; Fenyvesi et al., 2024) confirm the relevance of our conclusions. Comparing the results of the secondary and the primary research, it is safe to say that the study of this subject is justified.

The survey confirmed that front office workers in accommodation facilities face stress daily. This stress is often caused by chaos, complex customer interactions, fast-paced work and challenging situations that require an immediate and effective response. According to our findings, stress significantly impacts job performance and the overall health and well-being of workers, as it is perceived as a long-term phenomenon.

Another finding is that many of these accommodations do not provide sufficient tools and resources to manage the stress of their front office staff. The hotel industry lacks a systematic approach to stress management and often does not receive support from management in managing stress and providing the necessary resources to help workers.

Given these findings in the case study on the example of the capital of Slovakia, accommodation establishments in tourism destinations must take the front office stress issue seriously and actively engage in its management. This could include implementing stress management programs, training and workshops and creating supportive working environments where front office staff feel supported and protected. In addition, it is essential that accommodation management develop a systematic approach to monitoring and assessing front office stress levels and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of stress management measures. This includes regular surveys and feedback from staff and collecting data on absence and stress-related health problems.

Front office stress management is an integral part of effectively operating accommodation facilities. Consistently implementing stress management strategies can improve work performance and employee well-being and contribute to a better customer experience and the overall success of the lodging business.

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STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THEMATIC ROUTES: A CASE STUDY OF MALACATOS AND VILCABAMBA LOCALITIES (ECUADOR)

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ABSTRACT: *The 2020 pandemic hit the world in more than one matter, and our ways to cope with it are still at large. COVID-19 quarantine changed our lifestyles, and world economy experienced a major decline, especially in productive branches, such as trade, customer service and tourism. After eight months of quarantine and another whole year with restrictions, most countries started taking steps towards economic reactivation, and started offering "vaccine travel packages", opening the way for alternative ways of tourism that had already been popularizing in recent decades, such as agritourism and community-based tourism. In Ecuador. as one of the countries with the greatest biodiversity of ecosystems, flora and fauna on the planet, it is of the utmost importance to take advantage of these natural and cultural resources, to achieve economic linkage and reactivation strategies combining tourism with local agricultural activities, as a way of cultural exchange. Coffee is one of many goods Ecuador has presented to the world, and high-altitude coffee from the highlands has taken the interest of tourists all around the globe. That is the start point of this research, with a coffee-based touristic offer, to differ from traditional tour packages, and with the possibility of being managed by local small producers, entrepreneurs and family-owned businesses.*

KEYWORDS: *Agritourism, Eco Tourism, Touristic Routes, Specialty Coffee, Endogenous Development*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an economic activity with significant land use impact, particularly in areas near popular sites and tourist landmarks. The influx of local and foreign visitors affects the primary economic activities and socio-cultural conditions of these areas. Thematic tourist routes are planned itineraries designed to visit multiple attractions and sites of natural or cultural interest within a specific geographic region, equipped with the necessary services and facilities for visitors. These routes aim to involve various communities and local enterprises, boost local demand, enhance intangible heritage, and raise environmental awareness.

Thematic tourist routes emerge from the initiative of urban and rural communities seeking to capitalize on their resources and generate income and employment opportunities.

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According to Alburquerque (2004, p. 17) [3], "*The local economic development approach [...] seeks to disseminate development from below and with local actors, attempting to endogenize the territorial bases for sustaining economic growth and productive employment. This also increases the possibilities of leveraging existing opportunities for external dynamism.*"

The "Tourist Atlas of Ecuador," promoted by the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR), illustrates Ecuador's propensity for community engagement in tourism and the customer service industry, driven by the country's natural landscapes and cultural landmarks along major routes connecting the Pacific coastline, the Andes highlands, and the Amazon rainforests. **Tourism is a major economic sector in Ecuador**, creating 560,574 jobs in 2023, an increase of nearly 30,000 positions from 2022, according to the Ministry of Tourism, and generating an income of USD 1,997.1 million.[13]

In southern Ecuador, near the Peruvian border, Loja province features diverse landscapes due to its proximity to the Amazon region, the Peruvian desert, and the Huancabamba depression—the lowest point in the Andes Mountain range. This depression significantly influences the region's climate, soil, flora, and fauna.[7] Within this southeastern corridor, two key locations are Malacatos Valley, 32 km from Loja city, and Vilcabamba Valley, 38 km from the city. Malacatos, named after the indigenous term "Malacatus," has seen significant demographic growth due to retirees and migration trends following the COVID-19 pandemic.[4] Vilcabamba, known as the "Valley of Longevity," is a popular tourist destination. It was officially founded as a civil parish of Loja in 1861, and its name "Huillopamba," meaning "Sacred Valley," reflects its geographic and cultural significance.[10]

These valleys are popular **year-round tourist destinations** due to their natural attractions, including rivers, waterfalls, and mountains offering panoramic views for trekking and other sports and activities. Over the past decade, Loja has gained a reputation for producing the **best high-altitude coffee in Ecuador.** With the specialty coffee market booming, Loja coffee growers and producers have received the "Golden Cup" award multiple times (2011, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023) (ANECAFE, 2023) and several "Cup of Excellence" awards (ACEDE, 2023).

The "Coffee Route" project, led by the Ministry of Tourism, has great potential for agritourism in southern Ecuador but has not been as well received or promoted as anticipated. **This research aims to propose a network of local routes focused on promoting coffee culture** and traditions in Loja, and are intended to support local developments, reinforce agriculture, and boost small industries producing local products such as coffee, sugar cane, corn, handmade tobacco (*chamico*), and honey, all of which use traditional practices.

METHODOLOGY

The research utilized various information-gathering methods, including an extensive literature review relevant to cultural and thematic routes as tourism products, and their current impact in the region, specifically the "Coffee Route" in Loja. Field research was conducted to analyze the current state of tourism in the southern region, particularly in the case study area before and after 2020.

Surveys collected data on local development characteristics, tourism conditions, and current status. Both qualitative open-ended and closed multiple-choice questions were employed. Interviews were held with producers, farmers, accommodation providers, and tourist service managers. Descriptive research provided a thorough analysis of the area's properties, biophysical and socio-cultural components, land use, and tourist sites.

RESULTS

Tourist routes offer an alternative product and address the growing demand for new destinations, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era. Media advertising and social networks increase awareness of thematic routes, attracting visitors and creating opportunities for locals to offer diverse products and services, including cultural and natural sites, crafts, and cuisine.

The "Coffee Route," initiated by the Ministry of Tourism in 2011, aims to link municipalities with significant coffee production. It covers approximately 29,552 hectares and benefits around 250 coffee-growing families. Loja produces and exports about 130,000 quintals of coffee annually, with key municipalities including Loja, Olmedo, Chaguarpamba, Puyango, Paltas, Quilanga, Calvas, and Gonzanamá. The international coffee market in Ecuador developed alongside the cocoa market in the 1980s, establishing the country as a significant exporter of both washed and natural Arabica and Robusta coffee varieties. Common Arabica varieties include Typica, Caturra, Bourbon, Pacas, Catuaí, Catimor, and Sarchimor.[6]

According to ANECAFE, Ecuador has 230,000 hectares of coffee plantations distributed as follows:

Cofee plantations distribution, Ecuador

Coast Region	Highlands Region	Amazon Region	Galapagos Islands
112,000 Ha	62,000 Ha	55,000 Ha	1,000 Ha

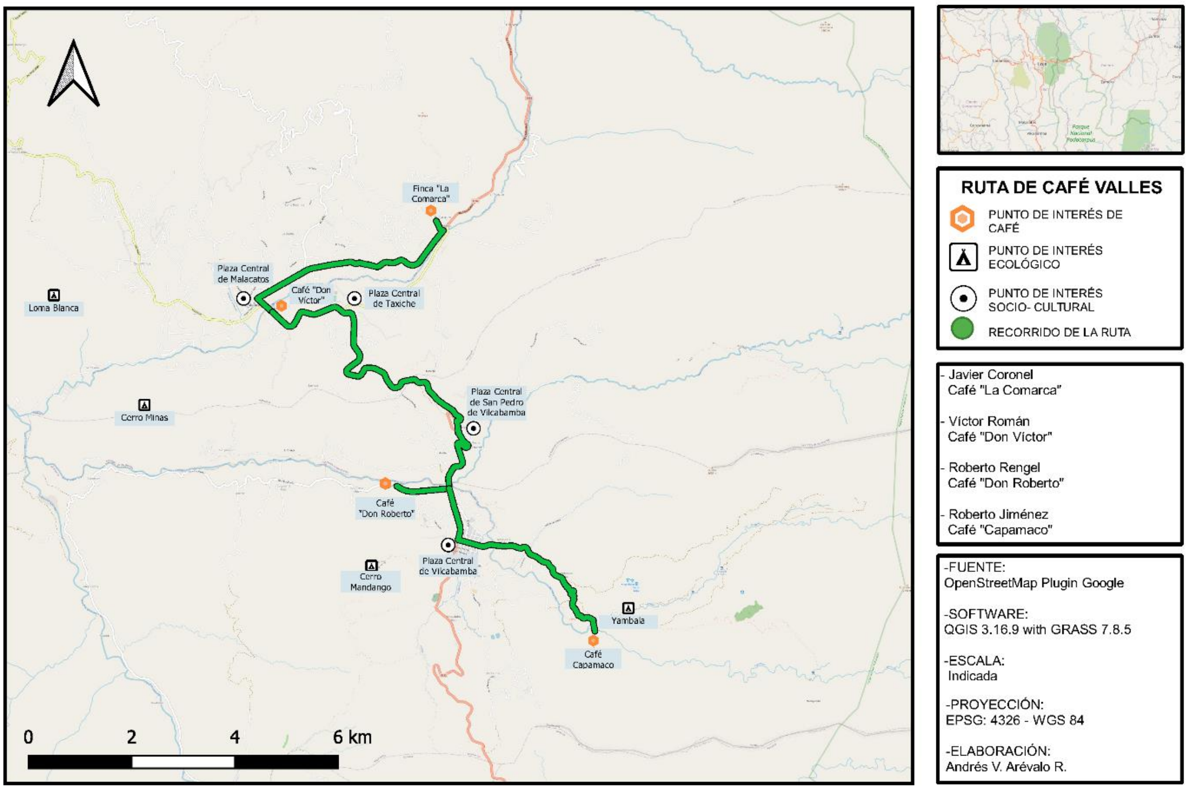
Andrés Arévalo Romero, author

The current global coffee market differs significantly from the 1980s, with specialty coffee commanding higher value due to factors such as plant variety, altitude, and processing methods. After harvesting, beans undergo rigorous classification and selection, with fermentation processes varying based on the fruit's mucilage. The three main fermentation methods are natural, honey, and washed, each affecting the coffee's flavor.[12] Roasting is a crucial step that influences coffee flavor, requiring precise control to achieve the ideal roasting curve.

Despite the Ministry of Tourism's efforts, the "Coffee Route" has not achieved the desired impact due to insufficient information, inadequate advertising, and a lack of incentives for participation. The route has yet to become a significant tourist attraction, as key points of interest related to coffee production remain underdeveloped. **The current offerings focus on processed products rather than providing a comprehensive experience of coffee growth, harvesting, and processing**. The coffee route should be an agritourism route that includes agricultural interest points and is supported by local policies to foster endogenous development and create a replicable model. The research proposes a set of thematic routes within the main coffee route in Loja, particularly in Malacatos and Vilcabamba. **This proposal is based on scientific sources and a local diagnosis of tourism and production impacts**, including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of local development strategies through thematic routes.

Within the research, thematic routes can be categorized into various classifications and types, but they always have an underlying theme. Consequently, routes can be grouped based on their similar themes, their relation to sites of interest, or shared attributes that complement each other. On one hand, there are routes that encompass a comprehensive range of natural, historical, cultural, and social attractions and heritage. On the other hand, some routes focus on a specific theme and develop it in detail as part of their offering.

Figure 1: Coffee route



Andres Arevalo Romero, Author

The coffee-themed route, called "The Valley Coffee Route", emphasizes the product with highest national and international demand and serves as a reference for showcasing local agricultural products as tourism enhancers. It includes four points of interest related to the coffee production chain, four socio-cultural points, and four optional ecological points.

Coffee producers

Coffee-Related Sites	**Socio-Cultural Sites**	**Ecological Sites**
La Comarca Coffee (Cultivation-Drying-Fermentation)	Central Square - Malacatos	Mt. Loma Blanca
Don Victor Coffee (Collection-Selection-Roasting-Grinding-Packaging)	Central Square - Taxiche	Mount Minas
Don Roberto Coffee (Cultivation-Drying-Fermentation-Roasting-Grinding-Packaging)	Central Square - San Pedro de Vilcabamba	Mount Mandango
Capamaco Coffee (Cultivation-Drying-Fermentation-Export)	Central Square - Vilcabamba	Yambala

Andrés Arévalo Romero, author

DISCUSSION

According to the UNWTO, *"Cultural routes, as a type of cultural tourism product, encourage widespread community participation in cultural activities, whereby raising awareness of a common cultural heritage. A number of cultural routes have already begun to co-operate with various key players from both the public and private sectors with a view to providing better services and enhancing the tourists′ experience along the route.*". (World Tourism Organization, 2015, p.14) [11]

Local and regional development is defined as a set of activities aimed at improving the economic well-being of an area. It must also ensure social, ecological, cultural and political well-being, through economic development, research, market and technology strategies. Its main objective is to reduce social inequalities, promote environmental sustainability, foster inclusive governments and the recognition of cultural diversity.[9]

In this context, endogenous (*from within*) development is also mentioned, which is defined as the ability to transform the socioeconomic system and in turn, the ability to react to external challenges, fostering social learning and local regulations. John Friedman [9] considers that *"regions with high culturalism have the capacity to develop from within, or by themselves"*.

Cultural routes are an effective means of integrating agritourism, sustainable models, and local development by leveraging cultural and natural landmarks, such as coffee. They create opportunities for thematic tourism through routes that connect local developments and small enterprises. According to the surveys conducted, most local producers, farmers, and business owners in the case study area believe that cultural routes focused on agritourism and local products could boost tourist demand, generate new income sources, and attract investment. This would enhance the local economy and involve farmers and producers more directly.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is a key instrument for local and regional development, and the starting point for new action strategies and linkage projects. Many places throughout Ecuador are widely known for its natural attractions and have built a whole community around these landmarks based entirely on tourism, such is the example of the Galapagos Islands, Baños de Agua Santa in the north amazon region, the "Spondylus Route" across the pacific coast, or the "Volcano Highway" in the Andes highlands.

The proposal for "The Valley Coffee Route" is based on research focused on the local development of the case study area, including its main economic activities, cultural heritage, and natural landmarks. This route connects local farmers, producers, and entrepreneurs who showcase and promote their products, with restaurant and hotel owners providing accommodation and supplies, and tour guides and drivers facilitating access to coffee-related sites, socio-cultural landmarks, natural attractions, and ecological sites. Implementing local development strategies like cultural routes is crucial for rural settlements in Ecuador, serving both as a tradition and a strategic goal. Experience shows that even small communities can achieve global recognition or create something with international reach, reflecting the country's essence. In an era of rapid change, drawing on our strongest traditions is an effective way to foster diversification.

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BRIEF PROFILES OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND TOURISM IN THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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ABSTRACT: *The origin of the circular economy model dates back to the early 1970s; however, it has only recently attracted some interest from governments, academia, and businesses worldwide. This interest is a solution to the environmental challenges posed by the linear economic model. The contribution provides an overview of the current situation of the European Union (EU) in terms of circular economy. This involves investigating the ways and tools with which the European Union deals with the circular economy. The International tools will be highlighted, starting with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (notes). Other European Union documents will follow, illustrating the involvement on the topic up to the present day, starting with the interest of the European Commission in waste prevention and recycling, with the 2014 Communication, "Towards a circular economy: a programme for a zero-waste Europe." Subsequently, the First Action Plan 2015 for the circular economy was entitled "The missing link - EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy." Then, briefly mention the European Green Deal as a strategy to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient economy. The Circular Economy is a strategy that can also be implemented to make tourism sustainable, as it can have multiple roles in improving the quality and sustainability of the tourism sector. In the tourism sector, the circular economy is also considered as a possible solution for the long-term implementation of sustainable development goals. Conclusions*

KEYWORDS: *Sustainable development, Green Deal, Agenda 2030*

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s, economists have questioned the relationship between the economy, the Environment and sustainable growth, first with the Stockholm Conference in 1972 and the United Nations Environment Programme UNEP launch. The interest continued with establishing the Brundtland Commission on the Environment in 1983, followed by the Brundtland Report on Sustainable Development in 1987 and other international acts. As a new paradigm, the circular economy is part of sustainable development since it emphasises the limits to development highlighted in the Report "Limits to Growth" by the Club of Rome in 1972. The report had already highlighted the unsustainability of an economic model based on unlimited growth. There are various definitions of the circular economy, such as the definition of Ellen MacArthur, which defines the circular economy as a framework of systemic solutions that address global challenges, such as biodiversity loss, climate change, waste and pollution

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(MacArthur, Without Year). Another definition of circular economy is that of Boulding; in his famous article The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth, he states that the global economy must adopt circular systems to sustain human life long-term (Boulding, 1966). Currently, there is still no clear consensus on what circular economy means. According to Fabio Rispadori (2024), the notion of circular economy is different in that it proposes itself as an alternative to the current economic system that can be summarised in the definition of linear economy (take-make-dispose). The foundation of linear economy concerns how individuals obtain the maximum benefit from using material and immaterial resources. The goal of this system is the growth of wealth in goods and services produced and measurable in monetary terms, while it considers the availability of resources necessary for production and how they are used as marginal. The circular economy turns This system upside down since it places resources at the centre, not products (Rispadori, 2024).

THE FIRST DOCUMENTS IN THE EUROPEAN REGULATION ON THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

In the mid-1970s, the European Commission commissioned Walter Stahel and Geneviéve Reday-Mulvey (Stahel and Ready, 2002) to draw up a report on production costs. The report, entitled "The Potential for Substituting Manpower for Energy," found that the increased energy consumption required to produce a manufactured product depends not on the production processes but on the extraction, transformation and transport of the raw materials needed to produce the manufactured product. References to the circular economy can be found in numerous acts of the European Union, starting from the multiannual Action Programmes for the Environment. Essential is the Fifth Action Programme for the Environment, adopted on 1 February 1993 (Council Resolution). In this act, references to the concept of Sustainable Development are identified.

Moreover, during that period, the European Community, in response to the requests made at the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Conference, recognised that achieving sustainable and lasting levels of development required changes in development, production, and consumption models.. The sentence emphasises how development processes, to be sustainable, must not only consider their impact on the natural Environment but must also be rethought, starting from the production phases and involving consumption models. In this expression, the germ of the concept of circular economy appears. This approach will be developed in subsequent acts of the European Union, and in this regard, the European Commission will coin the slogan from "cradle to grave"

(COM (2003) 302 def.). A further measure concerns the Sixth Environment Action Programme (Dec.Parl.Eur.), which considers waste to avoid negative environmental impacts. With the 2003 European Commission Communication entitled "Towards a Thematic Strategy on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste," waste begins to be considered a starting point for a new life cycle of resources to be used in production processes (COM (2003) 301 def.). Subsequently, the same waste is starting to occupy a privileged place in the circular economy concept, with the Communication "Towards a circular economy: A zero waste programme for Europe" of 2014. In this act, the Commission illustrates for the first time the fields in which to intervene to facilitate the emergence of the circular economy in the European Union, even if subsequently, precise commitments are not established, postponing to future acts the possibility of programming strategies and Action plans (COM, 2014 398).

THE FIRST EUROPEAN UNION ACTION PLAN ON THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY (OUTLINE)

With the first European Union Action Plan for the Circular Economy entitled "Closing the Missing Link – European Union Action Plan for the Circular Economy (COM (2015) 614), an important step is taken for the circular economy. With this act, the Commission intends to align itself with the commitments made by the EU and its Member States to the United Nations 2030 Agenda, particularly Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production patterns (United Nations) and waste management. In fact, on the same day as the plan presentation, four legislative proposals related to waste were published (UE Legislazione). However, the central focus of the Action Plan is the value chain, which considers production, consumption, repair, regeneration, waste management and the reintroduction into the economy of secondary raw materials. Particular attention is paid to production processes to develop new technologies to improve the management of so-called primary raw materials, of which Europe has only a minimal part. Another significant point of the Action Plan is consumption, in which consumer orientations are considered. Communication confirms the waste hierarchy as the reference principle, which must be treated according to an order of priority: prevention, reuse, recycling, recovery and disposal. The final part of the Plan focuses on investments and innovation. These are critical points for the success of the circular economy strategy that aims to fit into the groove of existing instruments, such as structural funds, the Action Plan for eco-innovation, the Horizon initiative and others. The European Parliament 2018 approved the European Union Action Plan on the Circular Economy. The same states that for a good conception of circular economy, we need to intervene in the design of products and services and also the affirmation of a rigorous waste hierarchy((EPR)(2018/2489).

THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL (OVERVIEW)

The European Green Deal is a new growth strategy that aims to transform the European Union into a fair society with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, which will no longer generate net CO2 emissions in 2050, in which economic growth will be decoupled from the use of resources. Paragraph 2 of the Green Deal illustrates the policies to transform the EU economy for a sustainable future (COM (2019) 640 final). The policies for this transformation are set out in point 2.1.3. Here, the Commission believes that achieving the objectives of a climate-neutral circular economy requires full cooperation from industry. Transforming the industrial sector and all value chains to be ready in 2050 The EU industry is still too linear; although it has started the transition, it contributes to 20% of greenhouse gas emissions. The transition is an opportunity that will serve to expand a sustainable industry and generate jobs. The Commission, in the document, argues that the current industry is a sector that is a determining factor in climate change and biodiversity depletion. In order to reverse this trend, it is essential to launch a policy that provides sustainable products. Therefore, to achieve this policy, it is necessary to change production processes from the design stage to reduce the use of raw materials. In this respect, the Commission believes that the principle of extended producer responsibility should be strengthened to avoid harmful effects of goods placed on the market. According to the strategic document, the transition to circularity should be implemented starting from the sectors where there is a greater intensity in the use of resources and where it is more urgent to intervene. As in the case of plastics, electronics, microplastics, packaging, textiles and construction. On the consumer's responsibility to guarantee a correct relationship between consumers and producers, the importance of principles such as the right to repair and the fight against the rapid and programmed obsolescence of goods is emphasised

CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND TOURISM

The UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as "one that fully considers its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO). At the World Economic Forum in Davos 2014 (World Econ. Foru.), the concept of the circular economy made its first appearance after the approval by the European Commission of the Circular Economy Package in December 2015

(COM (2015) 614 final), becoming the key to the relaunch of the European economy. The Forum defines the circular economy as a regenerative industrial system, replacing the concept of end-of-life of the product with recovery. It favours using renewable energy, eliminates toxic chemicals, and aims to eliminate waste by designing materials, products, systems, and business models. The current linear economic tourism model contributes to many negative externalities due to high energy demand growth, increased waste production, growing water consumption, uncontrolled discharges, wastewater and increasing global greenhouse gas emissions (EECC). Negative externalities increase even more when tourism is concentrated in a single season, such as winter and summer, creating stress on waste management systems and resource availability. Lately, there has been some interest in destination preferences. Often, destinations are chosen towards higher latitudes and altitudes due to more attractive climatic conditions. For example, climate change has made Venice a common destination, creating many difficulties in reducing the tourism income on which Venice depends. A study published in 2015 reveals that the future consumption of tourism resources will double in the next 25-50 years (Gössling and Peeters, 2015).

Applying circular economy principles can help the tourism industry transition from the linear to the circular economic model. One of the two perspectives (EECC) must be adopted to achieve this transition. The sceptical view of the circular economy argues that it is incompatible with sustainability and advocates for slowing down economic activity. As a consequence, socio-technical innovation will not give countries the possibility to achieve absolute eco-economic decoupling. In the context of climate change, decoupling is defined by the IPCC Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as the point at which economic growth is no longer closely associated with the consumption of fossil fuels as the primary source of CO2 (IPCC). Therefore, the sceptical perspective rationalises resources and leads us to reflect on how we consume produce, preferring a model of degrowth in tourism. Then there is the optimistic perspective of the circular economy, which focuses on capitalism compatible with sustainability and innovation, allowing the relative eco-economic decoupling. Then, the optimistic perspective of the circular economy focuses on capitalism compatible with sustainability and innovation, allowing for relative eco-economic decoupling. This perspective transforms the model from linear tourism to circular tourism and allows a growing tourism company to prosper as it ensures the social bases reduce resource intake, thus limiting its environmental burden. Both perspectives are valid. Doughnut Economics scholar believes that humanity should not compromise its social foundations or exceed the ecological limit of planetary pressures to remain in the right and safe space for all (Doughnut Economics). The application of circular principles has the potential to elevate sustainable tourism and establish it within a safe and just space for humanity.

CONCLUSION

Interest in the circular economy began in small steps from the years the international community began to take an interest in environmental problems. The interest at the international level occurred first with the Stockholm Conference of 1972, then with the Brundtland Report of 1987 on sustainable development and the Rio de Janeiro Conference of 1992. Other international acts followed, such as the 2030 Agenda and its 17 sustainable development goals, in particular, goal 12 on production and consumption patterns, and other acts. Since the concept of sustainable development entered the EU legal system, the European Union has adopted strategic plans and strategies to transition towards the circular economy, initially, with a focus on waste management and subsequent legislation, such as the First Action Plan – the missing link – followed by the Green Deal and the New Circular Economy Action Plan.

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DIVERSIFICATION OF THE TOURIST PRODUCT IN THE EASTERN RHODOPES

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ABSTRACT: *The Eastern Rhodopes are famous for their megalithic culture due to the concentration of megalithic monuments from the Thracian civilization. Although individual tourist centres are known for their tourist experience, most of the Eastern Rhodopes is defined as a relatively new tourist destination on the country's tourist map. Achieving sustainable tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes is directly linked to the diversification of tourism products. Diversification of the tourism product and the offer of alternative forms of tourism, such as cultural tourism, ecotourism, weekend tourism, family tourism, balneo-tourism and route-recognition trips. Offering alternative forms of tourism will solve one of the main problems of the tourist destination, related to the transit of tourists and the extension of their stay.*

KEYWORDS: *diversification, tourism product, sustainability, benefits, quality*

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has faced various challenges in recent years due to changes in consumer demand for tourists. In order for tourism destinations to remain competitive, it is necessary to adapt not only to the changed demands of tourists, but also to the leading global trends for the development of alternative forms of tourism, which are aimed at achieving sustainability linked to both environmental care and local development.

As a tourist region, the Eastern Rhodopes cover 40% of the territory of the Rhodopes. The region is part of the Rilo-Rhodope mountain range, famous for its national parks. The Eastern Rhodopes are famous for their megalithic culture, due to the concentration of megalithic monuments of the Thracian civilization (such as Tatul, Perperikon, etc.). Although individual tourist centres are known for their tourist experience, most of the Eastern Rhodopes is defined as a relatively new tourist destination on the country's tourist map. The archaeological discoveries in Momchilgrad and Kardzhali and the cultural and educational attractions in Zlatograd are essential for the development of tourism in the region. The gradual development of the Eastern Rhodopes as a tourist destination is also conditioned by the construction of accommodation and catering facilities, the improvement of tourist infrastructure and the

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expansion of additional services provided. The cultural heritage is one of the potentials for the tourist development of the region, as the cultural monuments, buildings of architectural value, mounds and burial necropolises, as well as the preserved local traditions and customs, in combination with the natural resources, determine the opportunities for the development of alternative types of tourism, such as ecotourism, rural, cultural, adventure, religious, etc. At the same time, the lack of a clear vision and strategy for sustainable tourism development, as well as problems with insufficiently trained professional staff, lead to a limitation of tourism supply and pose threats to natural resources (Alexova, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology includes a literature review of scientific studies and strategies for tourism development in the Eastern Rhodopes to identify the possibility of diversification of the tourism product. The search was conducted in the electronic databases of scientific research - Google Scholar and Research gate, and the time period of the research covers articles published in the last 15 years.

RESULTS

As a result of the search conducted among scientific articles, numerous studies analyzing the possibility of diversification of the tourism product in the Eastern Rhodopes were identified. It has been found that the quality of the tourist experience depends not only on the attractiveness of the tourist destination, but also on the efficiency and quality of the tourist services offered, such as accommodation, food, accessibility, availability of tourist attractions, etc. (Atanasov, 2021). Achieving sustainable tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes is directly related to the diversification of tourism products. In the specialized literature, it is established that diversification refers to activities through which the revitalization of the economy in individual regions is achieved by using alternative forms of tourism, such as rural, ecological tourism, etc. (Madjarova et al., 2015). The analysis of the Eastern Rhodopes as a tourist destination establishes that (Dogramdzhieva, 2006):

- The Eastern Rhodopes attract the interest of tourists, but most of them do not stay overnight. The high share of tourists in transit and the strong seasonality are the main factors influencing the low occupancy of accommodation and the unsatisfactory efficiency of tourism development.
- Domestic tourists dominate, with the majority of Bulgarians visiting the area on

individual or organised trips. Rarely does the tourist destination attract visitors for long term holidays, and due to its remoteness from major cities and transport links, short term tourist visits of 2-3 days are also established.

- International interest in the area is not great, but in recent years it has started to increase, mainly through sightseeing visits, with most international tourists coming from Europe.
- Although almost all the municipalities in the Eastern Rhodopes have the potential to offer different accommodation options, the tourist demand and overnight stays are mainly found in three municipalities - Kardzhali, Haskovo and Mineralni bani. In recent years, there has been a trend of increasing tourist demand in the municipalities of Zlatograd and Momchilgrad.

Alternative forms of tourism are related to the respectful use of natural resources, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage and the authenticity of tourist destinations. The use of this type of tourism makes it possible to preserve the spirit and culture of the tourist region, as well as to preserve cultural heritage, but at the same time to promote economic development and achieve benefits for the local population from tourism. Achieving sustainable tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes can be achieved through:

- subcontracting the quality of the tourist product offer;
- promotion of the tourist destination as a suitable place for recreation in all seasons;
- developing tourism products that are suitable for tourists of different ages, taking into account their preferences;
- development of product specialization and diversification of the tourism product and simultaneous promotion of opportunities for rural, ecological, cultural, religious, culinary and ornithological tourism;
- improving tourist attractions by building more eco-trails, tourist dormitories and shelters as well as eco-routes to attract tourists to the nature parks;
- introducing good practices and international standards in the provision of different forms of tourism;
- introduction of innovative products such as trolleys, lifts, etc. for crossing gorges and rivers (Slavova, 2017).

Diversification in tourism is about improving the environment through which tourism development can be promoted, by improving existing or building new tourist attractions, improving tourism infrastructure, promoting the tourist destination, improving marketing activities and increasing awareness among the different actors in the sector. The policy of differentiation of the tourism product in the Eastern Rhodopes should be based on the possibilities of the destination to develop summer and winter tourism and different forms of alternative tourism. The implementation of projects related to the development of strategically located tourism products targeting tourist centres is essential for the diversification of the tourism product. The tourism product is an extremely multi-component and complex concept consisting of the following elements (Stankova, 2009):

- Tourist attractions - local attractions (natural-climatic features, infrastructure and anthropogenic features) and attractive events (fairs, exhibitions, festivals and other organized events to attract the interest of tourists to the destination).
- Tourist superstructure - accommodation, catering and various tourist services.
- Accessibility - transport and communication infrastructure.

The tourism product is the result of the joint activity of the local government, tour operators and travel agents, hotels, restaurants, transport companies, entertainment facilities, etc. Diversification of the tourism product is a prerequisite for responding to the changed demand of tourists and offering alternative products and forms (Stankova, 2009).

DISCUSSION

The development of new alternative forms of tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes helps to reduce seasonality and make better use of the tourism superstructure, which increases the return on capital (Grigorova and Mareva, 2019). Diversification of the tourism product is associated with the formation of tourism products that have components of the traditional, but also meet the needs of different types of tourists. For example, as a form of diversification that contributes to achieving sustainable tourism, rural tourism is often used, distinguished by offering a product related to the rural environment. The development of rural tourism takes place with the initiative of the local population and the availability of a suitable environment. Rural tourism is used to attract tourists who want to relax in the countryside, to acquaint them with the history and traditions of the area, and to increase the well-being of the local population without negatively affecting natural resources. The Eastern Rhodopes are well suited for sustainable tourism practices through diversification of the tourism product. Many of the hotels offer opportunities to visit and observe attractive activities related to rural life and culture, as well as observe typical crafts and rituals (Stankova, 2008).

The Eastern Rhodopes have a wealth of tourist resources. The natural resources are based on the typical Eastern Rhodopes landscape, distinguished by picturesque river valleys and the shores of the Studen Kladenets and Kardzhali dams, are of constant interest to tourists. The water resources of the rivers Arda, Borovitsa, Perperek, Varbitsa, etc., the meanders, tributaries and gorges, as well as the dams, allow for water, fishing, holiday, ecological and other forms of tourism. Some of the protected areas are "Sredna Arda" (with a population of rare and protected plants and animals, such as the White-headed and Egyptian vultures, the Rock kingfisher, the Black stork, etc.), the "Sredna Arda" (with a population of rare and protected plants and animals, such as the White-headed and Egyptian vultures, the Rock kingfisher, the Black stork, etc.), "Fist Rock", "Stone Wedding" (a rock formation likened to a wedding procession), "Rock Window" (a rock bridge hanging in the air), "Rock Mushrooms" (sculpted from volcanic tuffs in the shape of mushrooms after the result of underwater volcanic activity), etc.

The anthropogenic tourist resources can be distinguished such as:

- The ancient and medieval town of Perperikon - declared an archaeological monument of culture, included in the 100 national tourist sites of the country. Perperikon has a constant tourist interest, with more than 100 thousand visits per year.
- Ecclesiastical center "Klise Basha" - located about 1.7 km from Perperikon, a cultural monument of national importance.
- Mneakos Fortress - near the village of. Shiroko Pole, with an outer wall and an entrance flanked by two towers.
- Late antique and medieval fortress near the r. Borovitsa - in the complex there is a church and a representative building built on a rock terrace.
- Monastery "St. John Prodromos" in the town of. Kardzhali - included in the 100 National Tourist Sites of the country, with constant tourist interest.

The positives for the development of the tourist product in the Eastern Rhodopes are:

- National and International Renown of the Ancient City of Perperikon.
- Mild climate suitable for tourism development in all seasons.
- Unique landscape and specific topography.
- Favourable opportunities for the development of various types of tourism - cultural and historical, rural, cognitive, holiday, ecological, rural, hunting, fishing, sports, congress, ornithological, religious, etc.
- Formed recreation areas around the "Studen Kladenets" and "Kardzhali" dams.

- Significant investments related to the construction of tourist facilities such as hotels, motels, bungalows, restaurants, cafes, bars, etc.
- Tourism infrastructure built.
- Well-established traditions in the provision of tourist services and in the maintenance of tourist sites.
- Three of the tourist sites are registered in the 100 national tourist sites of Bulgaria.
- Active promotion of tourist sites.
- Synchronisation of activities at local, regional and national level to maintain the tourist infrastructure.
- Presence of protected areas and natural attractions.
- Preserved cultural monuments.

Negative aspects for the development of the tourism product in the Eastern Rhodopes are:

- Insufficiently maintained road infrastructure.
- Remoteness from the capital and main roads and airports.
- Difficult access to the lake. "Kardzhali" due to landslides, which limits the passage of tourist buses.
- Few organised trips by tour operators.
- Lack of facilities for winter sports.
- Chaotic nature of investment processes.
- Lack of modern water treatment facilities in recreational areas.
- Infrastructure in place is inadequate to offer a modern tourist product.
- No clear advertising strategy.

In summary, the problems with tourism development in the Eastern Rhodopes are related to poor transport accessibility, underdeveloped tourism product, limited access to tourist sites and ineffective advertising strategy.

The Eastern Rhodopes has a well-established image as a tourist destination, but the region occupies an extremely small place in the national tourism system. Accommodation in the Eastern Rhodopes is dominated by hotels, with low accommodation capacity. To increase the attractiveness of the region to tourists, it is necessary to diversify the tourism product to achieve attractiveness to specific tourism markets, such as (Dogramdzhieva, 2006):

- Development of itinerary trips that make use of anthropogenic and natural sites and encourage tourists to have at least 1-2 nights in the region. The development of such a tourism product, although it will not have a significant impact on low trip lengths, will reduce the proportion of tourists and visitors who are transients. The development of this tourism product requires raising awareness in both domestic and international markets by attracting organised tour groups and presenting additional tourism services.
- Development of specialized tourist products, using natural and anthropogenic resources, such as hunting tourism, adventure tourism, bird watching, archaeological tours, etc. At present, such products in the country are mainly oriented towards foreign tourists, but some of them have the prerequisite to attract Bulgarian tourists as well. Although the development of these tourism products is not expected to lead initially to a significant increase in tourist demand, it will significantly improve awareness of the tourist destination and increase efficiency, based on extended tourist stays and increased tourism revenues.
- Development of family tourism - although the region has no experience in the development of this tourism, the natural environment, cultural and historical heritage and water sites are a prerequisite for attracting tourists for longer stays.
- Balneotourism - there are limited opportunities for development, mainly in the municipality of Mineralni bani, but there are prerequisites for attracting tourists from the country, as well as from Turkey and Greece.
- Business tourism - currently available mainly in Kardzhali and Haskovo, which, however, has the prerequisites to be changed.

In the Eastern Rhodopes there are conditions for the development of ornithological tourism, due to the fact that on the territory of Madzharovo can be observed more than 250 species of birds, with about 84% of birds of prey in Bulgaria. In the area of the dam. "Studen Kladenets" is a bird hide from which four people can simultaneously photograph birds (Alexova, 2011). The development of ecotourism in the region is conditioned by the relatively preserved natural areas, concentration of protected areas and impressive landscapes.

Apart from the mentioned forms of diversification of the tourism product, the development of tourism in the Eastern Rhodopes can be achieved on the basis of attracting tourists by providing various additional services that are not only available to the customers of tour operators and hotels.

CONCLUSIONS

The Eastern Rhodopes have significant prerequisites for tourism development. The main areas of development should be concentrated in three main groups:

- Diversification of the tourism product and offering alternative forms of tourism, such as cultural tourism, ecotourism, weekend tourism, family tourism, balneo-tourism and sightseeing trips. Offering alternative forms of tourism will solve one of the main problems of the tourist destination, related to the transit of tourists and the extension of their stay.
- Achieving regional cooperation between the different municipalities in the Eastern Rhodopes. None of the municipalities alone has the necessary resources to respond to the changed tourist demand, which is why it is necessary to undertake joint activities to develop tourism in different directions - ecological, cultural, etc.
- Raising awareness of cultural assets, historical sites and natural features to attract more foreign tourists.
- Cooperation between all stakeholders in tourism - tourists perceive the quality of the tourism product in a complex way, which requires improvement of the activities carried out by local authorities and businesses to meet the requirements of modern tourists.

The diversification of the tourist product in the Eastern Rhodopes, besides offering different forms of tourism, should be achieved through the integration of cognitive and adventure elements. It is possible to combine adventure tourism with rare bird watching and visits to the cult sites of the ancient Thracians, as well as passing through various hiking trails. As a result of the diversification of the tourism product, it is expected that the number of tourists in the Eastern Rhodopes will increase and be retained in the longer term, that the tourist services offered will be improved and diversified, and that the marketing of the tourist destination will be enhanced overall.

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THE DIGITAL NOMAD IDENTITY ON INSTAGRAM – A STUDY OF ONLINE SELF-PRESENTATION TRENDS

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ABSTRACT: *The rise of digital nomadism has redefined work and travel, allowing individuals to maintain a nomadic lifestyle while working remotely. This lifestyle prioritizes leisure and freedom, with digital nomads often shaping their identities through online platforms like Instagram. Social media blurs the lines between online and offline personas, challenging the notion of an "authentic" identity while influencing well-being through self-presentation. This research explores how digital nomads construct their identities on Instagram through selective self-presentation, addressing the challenges they face that are often not publicly shared. The study examines how digital nomads use Instagram to shape their identities and the complexities of nomadic life that are often not shared online. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews, the research explores the strategies nomads use for visual storytelling and self-presentation, highlighting the contrast between their curated online personas and the realities of their lifestyle. The findings suggest that while digital nomadism is frequently idealized online, it involves a complex interplay of public and private aspects of life, driven by technological and social media influences. Moreover, this study highlights the need for digital nomads to balance their curated online personas with the genuine challenges of their lifestyle, offering insights for more authentic social media engagement. The research extends previous theories, demonstrating how social media features facilitate the construction of both public and private identities. Additionally, the study contributes to understanding the gender dynamics within the digital nomad community, emphasizing the empowering role of female nomads in reshaping travel narratives.*

KEYWORDS: *digital nomad, social media identity, self-presentation, Instagram*

INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital nomadism highlights the transformative impact of technology on socio-economic landscapes. Digital nomadism, characterized by location-independent work and a nomadic lifestyle, has become an alternative employment style where individuals blend work with travel, leveraging technology to sustain their lifestyle and pursue freedom. The term "digital nomad" was initially coined by Makimoto and Manners (1997) and has since become integral to modern society, enabling people to travel while working remotely. Cohen et al. (2013) further explored this phenomenon with the concept of "Lifestyle Mobilities," defined as

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continuous, voluntary mobility with no fixed return date. Digital nomads often define themselves more by their leisure interests – such as hiking, surfing, or beach activities – than by their remote work, prioritizing activities that align with their desired lifestyle (Thompson, 2019).

Identity, a complex concept studied across disciplines like psychology, sociology, and anthropology, is central to understanding digital nomadism. Goffman (1959) introduced the "self-presentation theory" in his book The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, emphasizing the idea of "Performance." According to Goffman, social interactions are akin to theatrical performances, where individuals strive to present themselves in the most favorable light during face-to-face interactions (Goffman, 1959).

In the digital age, everyone constructs an online identity, either consciously or unconsciously, through social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram (Frunzaru & Garbasevschi, 2016). These platforms allow users to express their identities by curating their profiles, connecting with peers, and presenting themselves through digital tools. To elicit the most desirable response from their audience, individuals continuously evaluate and refine the information they share online (Krämer & Winter, 2008).

Instagram, with its features like posts, stories, hashtags, and geotagging, enables users to construct a carefully curated online identity. Unlike face-to-face communication, computer-mediated communication allows individuals to control how others perceive them (Seidman, 2013). For example, users can take multiple photographs, edit them, and choose the best one to align with their desired self-presentation. This process involves multiple layers of identity construction.

Goffman's (1959) concept of "Performance" applies to social media, where sharing a picture becomes a performance for followers. Posting on Instagram involves editing, using filters, and adhering to socially accepted standards to present oneself in the best possible light. Any mistakes can be corrected before posting, ensuring that the final product reflects the desired image. Followers, as the audience, are left to believe the performance.

Goffman also introduced the idea of "front" and "back" stages in performance. The front stage is where people act when they know they are being watched, while the backstage is where they behave naturally when unobserved (Goffman, 1959). On Instagram, the front stage is constantly monitored, motivating individuals to present a positive, yet believable image (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). The backstage represents the personal information individuals wish to keep private, where they can act more authentically.

Instagram challenges the notion of an "authentic" identity by blurring the lines between online and offline personas. Understanding that online identity construction is facilitated by social media platforms like Instagram is crucial (Ellison et al., 2017). The self-concept encompasses various aspects of identity, including beliefs, roles, attitudes, and attributes. When individuals feel secure in their self-concept, it remains stable, but when they feel uncertain or insecure, their self-concept becomes malleable.

Bonneau et al. (2022) analyzed how digital nomad lifestyle promoters (DNLPs) present and monetize their lifestyles. They identified four archetypes: (1) The Inspirator, who shares personal success stories through books, podcasts, and conferences; (2) The Teacher, who offers mentoring and courses focused on self-discovery and empowerment; (3) The Community Manager, who organizes and monetizes events for digital nomads; and (4) The Influencer, who earns through product placements and sponsored ads, often romanticizing digital nomadism with niche topics and aesthetic content.

Research on Facebook indicates that authentic self-presentation correlates with higher well-being (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). Thus, self-enhancement and authenticity are essential for maintaining favorable impressions. Individuals strive to appear attractive while balancing honesty in their self-presentation (Hancock & Toma, 2009), aiming to project a positive self-image while remaining true to their self-concept.

METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to explore the self-presentation strategies of digital nomads on Instagram, aiming to understand how these individuals construct their identities online. Given the limited academic attention to the nomadic community's use of Instagram, the study addresses the following research questions:

- *RQ1: How do digital nomads' selective self-presentation strategies on Instagram contribute to their identity construction?*
- *RQ2: What challenges do digital nomads face that are not frequently posted online, and how do they navigate these complexities?*

The study investigates the self-presentation of digital nomads – a growing subculture of location-independent individuals who earn income remotely and heavily rely on technology – on Instagram. A qualitative research method is employed, focusing on themes that emerge from participants' lived experiences. This approach is appropriate for examining subjective experiences, behaviors, and perceptions. The research utilizes semi-structured, single-session interviews to explore participants' unique experiences, thoughts, and opinions. Interviews allowed nomads to share their self-presentation strategies on social media with flexibility, enabling the interviewer to capture nuances and gain insider knowledge. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with half recruited from social media platforms and digital nomad meetings in Budapest in March and April 2024. The data pool was intentionally diverse to allow for a global understanding of digital nomadism.

Table 1. Characteristics of Interviewees

ID of participant	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	N6
Age	34	30	30	32	24	28
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male	Female
Occupation	UX designer	Product manager	Finance	Software engineer	Digital marketer	Consultant
Nationality	Italy	Poland	Brazil	Ireland	Hungary	Japan

The participants, aged 24 to 34, were diverse in background, enhancing the depth of the research. Most participants were millennials, with interviews conducted both online via Google Meet and face-to-face in Hungary. The interview durations ranged from 20 to 50 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate thematic coding and pattern identification. The interview questions were structured to align with the research objectives. They were divided into three sections: the first focused on participants' backgrounds as digital nomads, the second on their social media usage, and the third on their selective self-presentation on Instagram and private experiences as nomads. Ethical considerations included ensuring confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and clarifying the potential consequences of data collection. Participants signed consent forms before interviews, with the option to withdraw at any time. Interviews were recorded with video, and the data is used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS

In this section, the semi-structured interviews with six participants identifying as digital nomads are analyzed, focusing on their individual experiences. The participants, consisting of three females and three males, represent a diverse group in terms of nationality, age, and professional background, yet they share the common identity of being digital nomads. The goal is to gain deeper insights into their identities and explore how their journeys as digital nomads are reflected in their self-presentation on Instagram.

Becoming a digital nomad or making a significant lifestyle change is a major commitment. As noted in the literature review, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant increase in the number of digital nomads. The decision to adopt this lifestyle involves several factors, such as securing a sustainable income and a position that allows for remote work. This section delves into the personal decisions that led the participants to become digital nomads. Warm-up questions were posed to understand how they first encountered the term "digital nomad" and their motivations for choosing this lifestyle.

Interviewee N1 has been a digital nomad for the past three years. After COVID-19 pandemic, she was invited to travel to Tenerife to stay for one month, but she ended up staying for four months. She fell in love with this lifestyle and met many people living this way. Currently, she is living in Sardinia, Italy, traveling and working remotely from her van. The concept of being a digital nomad varies; for some, it means living an adventurous life, while for others, it involves a more stereotypical location-independent lifestyle.

Interviewee N2 has been “nomading” for over a year. As he responded, it is more of an exploration phase of his life and believes that people who say they will be nomads their whole lives are probably not being realistic. His perspective highlights that being a digital nomad can be a temporary, exploratory phase rather than a permanent lifestyle choice.

Interviewee N3, a Brazilian digital nomad employed in the finance sector at Yahoo, reflected on her transition to remote work, which was initially prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift provided her with the flexibility to work from various locations, a key aspect of her current lifestyle. She expressed a strong preference for residing in one location for extended periods, which allows for deeper connections with local communities and a more thorough exploration of the surroundings. Like many others, she was unaware of digital nomadism as a lifestyle before the pandemic. However, she noted that the lifestyle gained significant traction and visibility through online platforms and promotion during this period.

Interviewee N5 merged his passion for photography with his business degree to become a digital marketer. He has freelanced for various companies, including lodges in Namibia, allowing him to work and travel globally. He explained, that together with his family, they enjoyed exploring countries off the beaten path, avoiding mass tourism. N5 has spent time in unconventional destinations such as Namibia, Jordan, and the Azores in Portugal, reflecting his preference for non-mainstream locations.

Interviewee N6 has been engaged in the digital nomad lifestyle for over a year. Reflecting on her initial awareness of the concept prior to the pandemic, she recalled her early experiences working remotely while living in community housing in Okinawa. During this period, as her fellow residents left for their offices each morning, she found herself working in cafes and later discovered co-working spaces. By late 2022, as Japan began easing border restrictions, she recognized a desire to travel, which led her to conduct research that ultimately solidified her intention to adopt the digital nomad lifestyle. Since embracing this way of life, N6 has temporarily settled in various locations, including London, Portugal, Bali, Bangkok, and Kenya, enabled by the increasing accessibility of technology and online platforms tailored to digital nomads.

Self-presentation on Instagram

In the digital age, social media users carefully curate their online identities while maintaining authenticity. Instagram profiles contribute to the construction of self-identity, allowing digital nomads to personalize and share details about themselves. The interviews reveal that Instagram holds a distinctive position among social media platforms, largely due to its focus on visual content. Users on Instagram are particularly engaged in sharing images and videos, often employing various enhancement tools to refine their visual presentations. When participants were asked about their strategies for selecting and posting content on Instagram, as well as their use of enhancement tools, their responses highlighted diverse approaches. Interviewee N2 described a methodical process of content curation. He relies exclusively on his phone for image enhancement and maintains a specific aesthetic standard. He mentioned that before making a permanent post, he often tests the content by sharing it first through Instagram stories. This approach underscores his selective nature, with a strong emphasis on maintaining a cohesive visual aesthetic.

In contrast, Interviewee N1 adopts a minimalist approach to her Instagram profile, focusing primarily on nature photography. She uses only her phone settings to edit her pictures, paying close attention to elements like light and color saturation before selecting her favorite images for posting. Unlike N2, N1 prefers creating permanent posts rather than stories, as she views her Instagram page as a personal reflection of her travels. Her content curation process is driven by a desire to document her experiences for herself rather than for an external audience, emphasizing her deep connection to nature and outdoor activities.

Interviewee N3, who upholds high standards in curating her nomadic content on Instagram, provides a detailed account of her process for selecting and posting images. She emphasizes her preference for showcasing the most appealing aspects of her experiences, such as scenic hikes, culinary delights, and memorable moments. Her selection process is characterized by careful curation, utilizing tools like Snapseed to subtly adjust colors and saturation, enhancing the natural vibrancy of her photos without resorting to extensive photo manipulation. N3 also underscores the significance of Instagram's feature to complement the visual contents with music to reflect the ambiance of the location.

Similarly, Interviewee N5, a professional photographer, describes a rigorous approach to content creation on Instagram, which is deeply intertwined with both his personal and professional identity. His workflow involves capturing a large volume of images – sometimes up to 1,000 in a single day – while freelancing or traveling. This extensive collection process allows him to gather a wealth of material, from which he meticulously selects the best shots. He transfers these files to his computer, converts them for easier editing, and uses Adobe Lightroom to fine-tune elements such as tone, exposure, and color. N5's approach reflects a highly selective process driven by professional standards, where precision in each step is essential to maintaining his identity as a photographer.

Affordance theory highlights the importance of understanding how platforms like Instagram enable users to construct and express their identities in the digital age. On social media, identity functions as a tool for individuals to distinguish themselves from broader society. These platforms inherently facilitate the public and visible display of identity, whether for individuals, groups, or social in-groups and out-groups. Instagram's features, in particular, enhance this visibility, supporting users in curating their online personas. For example, N5, a professional photographer, leverages Instagram's hashtag functionality to maximize engagement with his content. He elaborates on his strategy, noting that as a photographer, he extensively uses hashtags related to his location, camera equipment, and travel, in addition to geotagging. This approach connects him with a broader community of travel content creators on Instagram, who often support each other's work. N5's use of hashtags is notably more pronounced compared to other participants, reflecting his professional objectives.

Another participant, N4, frequently employs the hashtag #digitalnomad to distinguish his lifestyle from that of a tourist. He expresses a desire to connect with other digital nomads and possibly inspire others through his posts. While geotagging is a commonly used feature among most participants, it is applied with varying intentions. However, N1 refrains from using geotagging, citing her reluctance to contribute to mass tourism. She prefers to keep her location private, sharing it only in personal conversations and emphasizing that her posts are for personal enjoyment rather than influencer work.

Challenges faced by digital nomads

To investigate the concept of selective self-presentation among digital nomads, the researchers explored which aspects of their nomadic lifestyle participants preferred to keep private. Responses varied, but common themes emerged, particularly around the challenges of forming and maintaining friendships and relationships. On Instagram, digital nomads often highlight the positive aspects of their lives, such as freedom, travel, adventure, and enjoyment. However, as Goffman's (1959) performance theory suggests, the difficulties and challenges behind the scenes are seldom visible to viewers.

Interviewee N2, for instance, discussed the complexities of relationships and friendships, noting that these experiences can vary greatly depending on the individual's personality. While some digital nomads find it easier to maintain connections, others struggle. N2 shared that while he has managed to maintain friendships, the connections he forms while traveling tend to remain shallow, partly due to the transient nature of his lifestyle and the locals' awareness that he will soon leave. Similarly, N1 emphasized the convenience of long-term friendships, which she misses while living as a nomad. She reflected on the ease of socializing when staying in one place, where established friendships reduce the constant need to meet new people. N3 highlighted the challenges of forming relationships while constantly on the move, describing it as one of the most difficult aspects of the nomadic lifestyle. She relies on platforms like Worldpackers, Couchsurfing, and Hangout, as well as dating apps, to build her social network. N3 emphasized that these digital tools are essential for meeting people, as traditional methods, such as meeting in bars, are less effective for her, especially in certain regions like Europe.

The ability to maintain human connections while traveling largely depends on the digital nomad's personality and their use of various social media platforms and apps. Many participants mentioned WhatsApp as a key tool for staying connected within the nomadic community. N2 noted that in some co-living spaces, dedicated apps facilitate communication among residents, allowing them to share tips, suggest events, and connect with one another.

Interviewee N6 pointed out the toll that constant travel can take, noting that while she initially enjoyed the nomadic lifestyle, she eventually grew exhausted from the frequent relocations and the burden of carrying all her belongings. This led her to settle down, viewing digital nomadism as a phase she may revisit in the future. N2 also shed light on the less glamorous aspects of being a digital nomad, explaining that those who haven't experienced the lifestyle often mistakenly equate it with a perpetual vacation. In reality, the constant movement keeps one out of their comfort zone, leading to mental fatigue and logistical challenges, such as navigating public transportation or ensuring access to safe drinking water.

Female participants provided valuable insights into their experiences as digital nomads, particularly the unique challenges they face. N1 discussed how she overcame initial fears by researching safe places to stay, such as co-living spaces, which helped her feel secure while traveling alone. Despite the fear, she found her solo travels, such as a trip to Peru, to be rewarding, noting that sometimes the fear is more psychological than real.

Some women expressed a desire to inspire others through their travels. N1, for example, hopes to encourage other women to explore the world, emphasizing the newfound freedom that women are discovering. N3 spoke about challenging stereotypes by visiting destinations often perceived as dangerous for women. She shared an experience in Izmir, Turkey, where she felt uncomfortable due to the male-dominated environment but ultimately pushed through to empower herself and other women. Conversely, N6 does not aim to inspire others but believes in exercising her freedom to travel, viewing it as a personal choice rather than a statement. She observed that the digital nomad community, particularly in places like Bali, is often male-dominated, yet she embraces her freedom to travel without feeling the need to differentiate herself based on gender.

Overall, the women in this research navigate the complexities of the nomadic lifestyle while embracing their freedom to travel, using platforms like Instagram to document their journeys and inspire others. Despite the challenges, they continue to assert their place in the digital nomad community, challenging the sometimes male-dominated narrative of this lifestyle.

DISCUSSION

This research delves into the rising community of individuals identifying as "digital nomads," with a focus on their use of Instagram to craft and share their narratives. The study reveals how nomadic participants employ strategies of visual storytelling, selective self-presentation, and aesthetic enhancement to depict their journeys in the digital age. This process exemplifies Goffman's (1959) concepts of frontstage and backstage performances. While Goffman's theory was developed before the advent of Instagram and other computer-mediated tools, it remains relevant in analyzing how individuals curate their online personas, creating a carefully managed public image.

In exploring the role of photography in online identity construction, it is crucial to recognize its impact on self-presentation. Van Dijck (2008) argues that visual photographs are pivotal in shaping identity when shared by users. The advent of digital tools and social media platforms has further empowered individuals to control their image exposure, providing them with greater authority over how they present and shape their identities in public. These tools also enable individuals to correct perceived flaws before their image is shared, resulting in a highly curated portrayal of identity.

In addressing RQ2, the study uncovers the complexities and costs associated with the nomadic lifestyle, as articulated by the participants. While digital nomads often highlight the positive aspects of their lifestyles, these portrayals are frequently romanticized and idealized. Bonneau et al. (2022) categorize digital nomadic lifestyle promoters into four archetypes, each contributing to the romanticization and monetization of the lifestyle. This research, however, sheds light on the reality of being a digital nomad, acknowledging that while the lifestyle may appear attractive online, it is not without its challenges. Participants noted that the nomadic lifestyle is often a temporary phase and that it can be difficult to maintain friendships and relationships while constantly on the move. Overall, this study emphasizes the dual nature of digital nomadism – its allure and its challenges – and highlights the intricate ways in which nomads navigate their identities through selective self-presentation on digital platforms.

CONCLUSIONS

Digital nomads are a distinct community characterized by their location independence and remote work capabilities, enabling them to sustain a lifestyle of frequent travel and simultaneous living in different places. This study identified patterns in how these individuals present themselves on social media platforms, particularly Instagram. To explore this, two research questions were formulated: *RQ1 – How do the selective self-presentation strategies used by digital nomads on Instagram contribute to the construction of their identities? RQ2 – What are some complexities that come with being a digital nomad that are not frequently posted online, and how do nomads navigate them?*

This research provides valuable insights into the construction of nomadic identity in the digital age through semi-structured qualitative interviews. The participants were selected based on their status as digital nomads and active Instagram users. The findings reveal that women are using their resources and newfound freedoms to travel the world, and their representation on Instagram is empowering to other women. Whether intentional or not, the female participants have become inspirations for other women through their self-presentation on social media, receiving positive feedback.

Overall, the findings suggest that the nomadic experience is widely shared and strategically curated on social media platforms, with considerable attention given to the processes of creating posts and the selective self-presentation involved. While the personal experiences of nomads vary, reflecting individual efforts to explore and adapt to different lifestyles, digital nomadism continues to generate numerous opportunities, a trend unlikely to decline given ongoing technological advancements.

However, the study faces several limitations, including potential sampling bias due to the homogeneity of the participant pool, small sample size, social desirability bias, contextual constraints, and researcher bias. Given the limited number of digital nomad participants, these qualitative interviews cannot be generalized to represent all digital nomads. Nonetheless, the study offers a glimpse into the motivations and values of some of the over thirty-five million digital nomads worldwide, providing an insider perspective on this growing phenomenon.

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SANTOS DUMONT AND TOURISM

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ABSTRACT: *The study aims to understand some of the most significant contributions of the Brazilian figure Alberto Santos Dumont to tourism. Despite some disagreements, many researchers believe him to be the 'Father of Aviation'. However, it is evident that tourism lacks more research to highlight Alberto's potential contributions, even if they are indirect to the sector. To effectively address the study question, exploratory, bibliographic, and qualitative research was conducted in specific databases. After mapping previous studies, the findings revealed a series of activities carried out by Santos Dumont that may have direct and indirect connections to tourism. Among the findings of the study are aspects such as the exhibition of his remains and heart for visitors, his ballooning and aviation activities, museums and events dedicated to his memory, among other contributions. Finally, a significant gap in literature was also identified regarding studies on Santos Dumont and tourism which constitutes a limitation of this study while strengthening its potential relevance to the field of tourism studies. It is suggested that further efforts be made on the subject, which may include interviews with key figures in the tourism industry, bibliographical and documentary research among other strategies and methods aiming to shed light on the remarkable achievements of this illustrious Brazilian figure.*

KEYWORDS: *Tourism; Santos Dumont; Aviation; Heritage; Brazil.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is gradually consolidating itself as a development alternative worldwide, acting as a strategic axis across different territories and realities. The tourism business network consists of a complex set of elements, the relations between which are an essential part of its development (Donaire, Pereira, and Gaspar, 2009). Tourism activity can be considered to occur within a network that includes activities related to lodging, travel agencies, airline companies, restaurants, and leisure companies, among other types of service providers.

This study focuses on the pillar of transportation, notably air transportation. According to Oliveira (2021), the first air travel symbolized by Santos Dumont would be considered an

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advanced stage of 'technological cosmopolitanism', which would make borders obsolete and establish faster routes between destinations.

However, records show that over 180,000 warplanes were built and used by several nations in World War I (Barros, 2006). According to Godoy and Guimarães (2014), commercial aviation has played a significant role in tourism after World War II, despite this, studies are still limited. Thus, it was noted that studies on the relation between Santos Dumont, aviation, and tourism also represent a gap, facts that make this research relevant to the field of tourism studies.

Given that humanity has been experiencing the globalization of markets, the World Wide Web, and soft power, among other forms of international relations, it can be seen that air transport is consolidating itself as a pillar for long-distance tourism, especially when considering the different modes, such as land or water, from an economic perspective, displacement, the impacts generated, the provision of services, among other factors.

It should also be stated that the human desire to fly has existed since the oldest civilizations, whether among the Egyptians, through paintings of winged figures or in Greek mythology, with Daedalus and Icarus (Fay, 2005; Aguiar and Cota, 2021). However, until the early 20th century, the control of flight remained imprecise, representing a challenge for human beings, despite numerous attempts and disputes at the time (Visoni and Canalle, 2009).

In this context, the research aims to identify in the scientific literature the contributions of the Brazilian Alberto Santos Dumont to tourism. This is a bibliographical, exploratory, and qualitative research based on national and international literature.

THEORETICAL BASIS

A brief overview of Alberto Santos Dumont

Born in 1873 in the current city of Santos Dumont, Minas Gerais (MG), Alberto Santos Dumont, a naturalized French citizen in 1892, made significant contributions to the field of mechanics and aeronautics. His historic flight with the 14-bis in 1906 marked him as the first man to fly publicly in a heavier-than-air aircraft (Jorge, 2007; Frazão, 2021).

The International Federation of Aeronautics (1905) determined that, for flight to be recognized, at least five criteria would be required, including the presence of an official body, in suitable weather conditions, autonomous take-off, engines, flight in a straight line, changing direction and performing a circular maneuver to return to the starting point (Barros, 2006).

In Brazil, Alberto spent part of his childhood and adolescence at Fazenda Arindeúva, in the city of Ribeirão Preto (São Paulo), where he was first introduced to the world of machinery, especially train mechanics, as the farm was highly mechanized, which also allowed his father to become one of the largest coffee growers in Latin America by the end of the 20th century (Sodré, 2006; Frazão, 2021).

In 1892, near the end of his life, his father emancipated him. From then on, Dumont moved to France, and in 1898 he presented his first two inventions, the "Balão Brasil" and the "Balão Amérique", winning a competition at the Aeroclub de France with the second invention by staying in the air for more than 23 hours straight (Jorge, 2007; Frazão, 2021).

The Brazilian's ambition and desire to conquer the air were the real driving forces behind his inventions, which began with ballooning and the development of dirigibles. In 1901, in the competition for the Deutsch prize, Dumont flew around the Eiffel Tower with airship No. 6, winning 100,000 francs, and from then on he became a reference in Paris, known around the world (Fay, 2005).

A brief history of tourism

Tourism has been present in society since the beginning of human history, dating back to the Olympic Games in Greece and the discovery of Brazil. After all, the first maritime expeditions were already engaged in a kind of adventure tourism or business and event tourism (Ignarra, 2013). In turn, the modern tourism model only emerged after the 18th-century Industrial Revolution, which introduced advances and innovations capable of greatly boosting the sector.

According to Andrade (1999), during the Industrial Revolution, between the end of the 18th century and the middle of the 19th century, people from wealthier social classes who had free time to travel gave rise to grand tours, considered a type of "study trip" that conferred a position of power and social status on the practitioners.

Mass tourism began in the 1950s with the introduction of package tours, a greater number of people with free time and the financial means to travel, as well as advancements in means of transportation, such as ships, trains, and planes (Ruschmann, 1997). Furthermore, according to Silva and Kemp (2008), tourism has historically stood out as one of the socio-economic segments that has most driven global urbanization and the growth of cities.

World Wars I and II are important for the history of aviation. World War I saw the introduction of warplanes, while World War II revealed the need to establish international agreements to ensure each nation's sovereignty, showing the world the importance of regulating international airspace (Fay and Fontes, 2017). Santos Dumont had been asking this question since the early 20th century when flight control ceased to be a distant horizon and began to reveal itself with conviction (Jorge, 2007).

In addition, Fay and Oliveira (2011) state that metallic and aerodynamic constructions were only developed in the first half of the twentieth century, with manufacturers entering and competing in the market, to transport people and products more rapidly and safely. However, few people saw commercial aviation at first as a rational, planned, and successful business, the result of a scientific and industrial era, that would bring significant advances to humanity.

METHODOLOGY

This is a bibliographical, exploratory, and qualitative study, based on national and international literature, with subjects including tourism, aviation, and history, based on the persona Alberto Santos Dumont. The research aimed to highlight some of Alberto's most significant contributions to tourism over time. Considered the "father of aviation", is it possible to say that the Brazilian left some contributions to the industry? What were they?

A bibliographic review was carried out of journal articles found in the *Scopus*, *Web of Science*, *SciELO*, *Redalyc*, and *Google Scholar* databases. A gap was noticed in studies on these topics, prompting searches to grow more wide and comprehensive. After all, searches using the strings "Turismo / Tourism" AND "Santos Dumont" in peer-reviewed publications in the aforementioned databases produced no results, highlighting the importance of this work in the field of study.

In turn, the data was analyzed qualitatively and through content analysis, observing aspects that indicate possible connections and contributions of Santos Dumont to tourism, which are presented below in the Discussion of Results.

RESULTS

The invention of the airplane is one of the first discoveries to appear in the bibliography, even though some authors credit other actors with driving the breakthrough at the time. Although there is still a limited number of studies, the research has revealed some passages that show an important connection between Dumont and tourism, as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Santos Dumont's contributions to tourism

Contribution	**Tourism**	**Author**
1st Automobile in South America	Mode of Road Transportation	Cheniaux (2022).
Research, Inventions, and Innovations	Science and Tourism	Sicsú (2007).
Expansion of Railways and Ports	Tourism Infrastructure	Oliveira (2021).
Ballooning	Adventure Tourism; Ecotourism	Barros (2006); Visoni and Canalle (2009); Fay and Fontes (2017); Soppelsa and Stein (2013).
Invention of the Airplane	Mode of Air Transport	Barros (2006); Sicsú (2007); Moraes (2008); Visoni and Canalle (2009); Mello Junior *et al.* (2009).
Events, Exhibitions, and Flying Competitions	Sports Tourism; Business; Events	Barros (2006); Moraes (2008); Visoni and Canalle (2009); Bitencourt *et al.* (2011).
Realization of a race at the Parc des Princes, Paris	Adventure Tourism; Business and Events; Sporting	Oliveira (2021).
Iguaçu National Park	UNESCO Heritage	D'Oliveira, Bursztyn and Badin (2002).
National and International Figure	National Identity; Marketing	Fay (2005); Moraes (2008).
Dates and Official Events	Civic Tourism; Business and Events	Fay and Fontes (2017); Fraga (2014).
Aero Club of Brazil	Civic Tourism; Business and Events	Fay and Fontes (2017).
Santos Dumont Statue (RJ)	Civic Tourism; Cultural	Fay and Fontes (2017).
Visit to São João Batista Cemetery (RJ)	Dark Tourism; Civic; Cultural	Fay and Fontes (2017).
Public Exhibition of Santos Dumont's Heart (RJ)	Dark Tourism; Civic; Cultural	Fay and Fontes (2017).

Santos Dumont Airport (RJ)	Tourist Infrastructure; Air transport equipment	Monteiro (2011); Rodrigues *et al.* (2014).
Santos Dumont Square, Umuarama (PR)	Public spaces, Planning and Development	Hulsmeyer *et al.* (2011); Souza and Bueno (2011).

Source: *Created by the authors, 2024.*

Dumont played a role in the arrival of the first automobile in South America, as at the age of 18 he purchased a Peugeot car and was the first person to drive it in Brazil (Cheniaux, 2022). His participation in events, studies, and research into means of transportation, as well as his role as a tourist, highlight his mobility between different destinations (Sicsú, 2007). Oliveira (2021) also states that the expansion of coffee production in the Province of São Paulo led to investments in railroads and ports, connecting the region to transatlantic circuits.

Ballooning was also one of his early interests and accomplishments, and he even received awards in this area. Visoni and Canalle (2009) point out that the Brazilian had been experimenting with the operation of gas-powered balloons, and with dirigible No. 6, he completed the journey required to win the Deutsch Prize in 1901.

Nowadays, ballooning attracts tourists to different destinations, such as Cappadocia, in Turkey, and Praia Grande, in Santa Catarina, Brazil. However, his successful experience was not limited to lighter-than-air balloons, the inventor moved on to devote himself to his greatest achievement, which he claimed arose from the evolution of his dirigible balloons (Visoni and Canalle, 2009). Therefore, for most of the authors analyzed, Alberto Santos Dumont is the inventor of the airplane (Barros, 2006; Sicsú, 2007; Moraes, 2008; Junior et al., 2009; Bitencourt et al., 2011; Fay, 2012; Soppelsa and Stein, 2013).

The flight that established him as the "Father of Aviation" in 1906 is notable for the development of heavier-than-air aircraft, becoming the first plane to win an aeronautical award and reinforcing his contribution to tourism, especially in the events and sports sectors, among others (Visoni and Canalle, 2009). Oliveira (2021) reinforces this connection with sporting events, highlighting the motorized tricycle race that Alberto promoted in the Parc des Princes, Paris.

Alberto was impressed by the beauty of the Iguaçu Falls when he visited in 1916, and knowing that the land belonged to a single owner, he asked the Head of State of Paraná for it to be expropriated, a request that was accepted by the State, and they were also recognized as a World Natural Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization (UNESCO) in 1986 (D'Oliveira, Bursztyn and Badin, 2002).

Silva (2023) points out that Alberto was encouraged by Mayor Jorge Schimmelpfeng and hotelier Frederico Engels to seek resources for local tourism, demonstrating that he made a substantial contribution to the development of the Park. According to the Ministry of Tourism (Brazil, 2023), the Iguaçu Falls is the top attraction in South America.

It was evident that Alberto continued to contribute to Society even after his death. As an example of his ongoing contributions, in addition to civil and military honors, Santos Dumont's name appears as Honorary President and Founding Member of the first board of the Aeroclube do Brasil, where he acted as an intermediary between Brazil and France (Fay and Fontes, 2017).

Based on these issues, further manifestations of his contributions include the creation of Aviator's Day and Wing Week by the Air Tourism Commission of the Touring Club of Brazil in 1935, which were made into law by the Federal Government the following year (Fraga, 2014). In addition, a statue was built in his honor in Rio de Janeiro, to associate his image with the Brazilian military and civil aviation (Fay and Fontes, 2017).

Alberto is associated with several tourist activities, including festivals, exhibitions, and museum visits, such as the Cabangu Museum in Minas Gerais, the Santos Dumont House Museum in Rio de Janeiro, and the Alberto Santos Dumont Historical and Pedagogical Museum in São Paulo, among others. In Rio de Janeiro, his heart is displayed at the Aerospace Museum (MUSAL), and his remains can be visited at the São João Batista Cemetery (Fay and Fontes, 2017).

As seen, territorial circulation is a reality in the current context of globalization and can occur through a range of modes, focusing in this research on air travel, which has in its airport infrastructure true connection bridges between destinations, such as Santos Dumont Airport in Rio de Janeiro (Monteiro, 2011; Rodrigues et al., 2014; Fay and Fontes, 2017; Edra and Dantas, 2020; Pereira, Luquez and Bartholomeu, 2023). This is considered by many to be one of the most beautiful views for landings and take-offs in Brazil.

The name Santos Dumont has become to such prominent in Brazil that it has been adopted for cities, avenues, squares, and schools, among other purposes, such as Alberto Santos Dumont Avenue (Florianópolis, Santa Catarina) and Santos Dumont Square (Umuarama, Paraná). According to Hulsmeyer et al. (2011), the urban landscape holds great historical significance because it can be considered cultural heritage; so public spaces are important records of the traditions, values, and identities of territories and their people. Thus, it is common to find public spaces, including those for tourism, named after Santos Dumont in Brazil.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has satisfactorily met its objectives, by presenting a series of contributions made by Alberto to tourism, such as ballooning, the invention of the airplane, the establishment of the Iguaçu National Park, several museums dedicated to the character, areas and public spaces named after him, among others. A significant gap in the national and international bibliography regarding research on Santos Dumont and tourism has been identified, which this work aims to address by stimulating new research that will also contribute to the construction of knowledge in tourism.

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LITERATURE REVIEW ON ALBERTO SANTOS DUMONT

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ABSTRACT: *The research aims to map what has been discussed scientifically about the Brazilian Alberto Santos Dumont in literature, focusing on tourism. Many authors refer to him as the inventor of the airplane, despite some disputes. Furthermore, there are also indications that he made other important contributions to the sector, especially in Brazil. The article aims to understand how research and publications on the theme have been carried out in databases of peer-reviewed articles, identifying aspects such as the places where these studies occurred, the respective fields of knowledge, and the years of these publications, among other elements that support the general understanding of this discussion. Through exploratory and qualitative research into the national and international scientific literature, it was sought to understand what has been examined academically about the father of aviation. The results reveal issues such as the lack of studies like this, as well as the non-existence of studies that seek to understand the relation between Santos Dumont and tourism. It was also possible to identify how current studies are distributed, as it is believed this research will encourage new studies among distinct fields of knowledge.*

KEYWORDS: Literature Review; Santos Dumont; Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Icarus' failed attempt can be seen as the first great symbol of humanity's desire to fly. (Palhares, 2002). Leonardo Da Vinci designed an artifact for this purpose in the 15th century, while others, like the biblical character Simon Magus and the painter and architect Paolo Guidotti, passed away while trying to fly (De La Torre, 2002). The first significant achievement in the ability to reach the skies came from balloons, with the Montgolfier brothers developing the first successful project in France in 1783 (Palhares, 2002).

Currently, there are still divergences about the mastery of heavier-than-air aircraft. In general, different names are credited with the achievement, including Alberto Santos Dumont and the Wright brothers (Aguiar and Cota, 2021). The fact is that these are the forerunners of world aviation, who had contrasting attitudes regarding the disclosure and protection of their

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inventions, while Santos Dumont opted for openness and transparency, meeting the criteria of the International Aeronautical Federation (FAI), the Wright brothers preferred to keep their creations hidden and protected by patents (Dias, 2004).

According to Petrescu et al. (2017), the Wright brothers conducted their first experiment with a heavier-than-air aircraft, the Flyer, in the dunes of Kitty Hawk on December 17, 1903, using a rail fixed to the ground and a catapult for take-off, but it lacked wheels, and the engine's low power prevented take-off in windy conditions.

As a result of his revolutionary innovations, Santos Dumont stood out as a larger-scale inventor and innovator than the Wright brothers (Dias, 2004). In addition to the first public flight in history with the 14-Bis in 1906, he had already shown his desire to master the air since around 1898 (Jorge, 2007; Frazão, 2021).

At the beginning of the 20th century, humanity witnessed the birth of the airplane as one of the first aerial devices, thus overcoming one of the greatest challenges in human history (Silva and Santos, 2009). Given the existence of exponents such as Dumont, considered the "flying Brazilian" in Paris, today Brazil is regarded as one of the pioneers in world air transportation (Rinke, 2014).

In this context, the research aims to identify the theoretical discussions regarding Santos Dumont, with a focus on tourism. Based on national and international scientific literature, the locations of these publications were identified, as well as the periods and fields of knowledge, among other aspects. The aim is to answer the research question: What is the national and international scientific production on Santos Dumont like? As a result, it is believed that the results found show the mapping of research on the subject, as well as presenting gaps and opportunities for further research.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Alberto Santos Dumont in Literature

Born in Brazil, Dumont spent part of his childhood at Fazenda Cabangu, in Santos Dumont, Minas Gerais, and his entire adolescence at Fazenda Arindeúva, in Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo (Frazão, 2021). According to Sodré (2006), it was at the Arindeúva farm that the inventor had his first contacts with some fields of science, such as mechanics.

In 1891 he took his first trip to Europe, where he learned about the advent of internal combustion engines, and on that occasion he gave his family a car powered by a gasoline engine, the first automobile to circulate in Brazil (Jorge, 2007; Silva, 2007). The following year, his father emancipated him to study combustion engines further (Jorge, 2007; Frazão, 2021). Alberto then moved to Paris to pursue his dream of flying (Dias, 2004). Once in France, Santos Dumont won various awards and titles for his inventions.

According to Visoni and Canalle (2009), in 1906 Dumont built a hybrid Vehicle named No. 14, by combining an airplane with a hydrogen balloon, but after attempting to navigate with the hybrid, he realized that while the balloon helped take off, it made flying more difficult. He then disposed of the balloon, giving rise to the model known as the 14-Bis, which was given the name Oiseau de Proie by the press, meaning "bird of prey".

Several authors refer to Alberto Santos Dumont as the inventor of the airplane. After all, on October 23, the biplane took off, remaining in the air for six seconds, reaching a height of three meters and flying for around 60 meters, a distance more than double that required for victory. Thus, the Oiseau de Proie "II", or 14-Bis, went down in history as the first machine to win an aeronautical award (Visoni and Canalle, 2009).

Back in Brazil, in 1914, Dumont visited the house where he was born, the Cabangu farm (Minas Gerais), recognizing it as his birthplace. In 1919, the Federal Government donated the land to the inventor who, after renovations, transformed it into a cattle farm, becoming a landowner and later returning it to the Federal Government, a condition in which it remains to this day, housing the Casa Natal Museum, also known as the Cabangu Museum (State Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage of Minas Gerais, 2014; Jorge, 2007; Kingma, 2018).

Alberto Santos Dumont also lived in Petrópolis, a city in the state of Rio de Janeiro (RJ), where, between 1918 and 1919, he designed and built "a Encantada", a house that served as his summer residence for most of his time in Brazil. Today, this residence houses a small museum that is widely known for the outstanding aesthetic features he left behind, such as the unusual staircase with steps designed in the shape of a racket to prevent tripping, which many people give superstitious meanings (Jorge, 2007; Frazão, 2021).

Since his death, the world has paid countless tributes to the renowned Brazilian. Today, in Brazil, the name Santos Dumont and some of his inventions are used to name biological species, streets, squares, cities, airports, and computers, among other things, such as his hometown (Minas Gerais, 1932).

According to Ramalho (2013), at the beginning of the 20th century, Santos Dumont and his achievements were praised and celebrated, but there were still not enough efforts to investigate the things that occupied his time, his life, his contributions, his way of being, and his beliefs. Such neglect may explain the abundance of gaps, inaccuracies, and inconsistencies in biographies. In an effort to strengthen and motivate these studies, this research emerges.

METHODOLOGY

The research is exploratory and qualitative, based on a review of national and international literature in peer-reviewed journals. Searches took place in different databases on the themes of Santos Dumont and tourism. The research aims to identify what has been stated about Alberto and where this scientific production stands in terms of year, country of publication, field of knowledge, and main discussions, among other aspects.

In order to answer the research question and understand the current state of studies, searches were initially carried out using the strings "Turismo / Tourism" AND "Santos Dumont" in national and international journals in the Scopus, Web of Science, and SciELO databases, but no results were found.

It was then chosen to narrow the search to the string "Santos Dumont", which indicated 86 articles for Scopus, 33 for Web of Science, and 15 for SciELO. This resulted in 134 mapped articles, eight articles were chosen because they contained some direct or indirect relation to the character Santos Dumont. Given the limited number of articles used to map scientific production on the theme, the search was expanded to *Redalyc* (635 articles) and *Google Scholar* (10 articles). This indicated a lack of studies relating Santos Dumont to tourism. However, out of the 779 studies found, 57 were identified with the potential to contribute to this study, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Papers that may contribute to this study.

Database	**Search strings**		**Articles selected**
	Tourism AND Santos Dumont	**Santos Dumont**	
Scopus	**0**	**86**	**06**
Web of Science	**0**	**33**	**02**
SciELO	**0**	**15**	**00**
Redalyc	**-**	**635**	**45**
***Google* Acadêmico**	**-**	**10**	**04**
Total	**0**	**779**	**57**

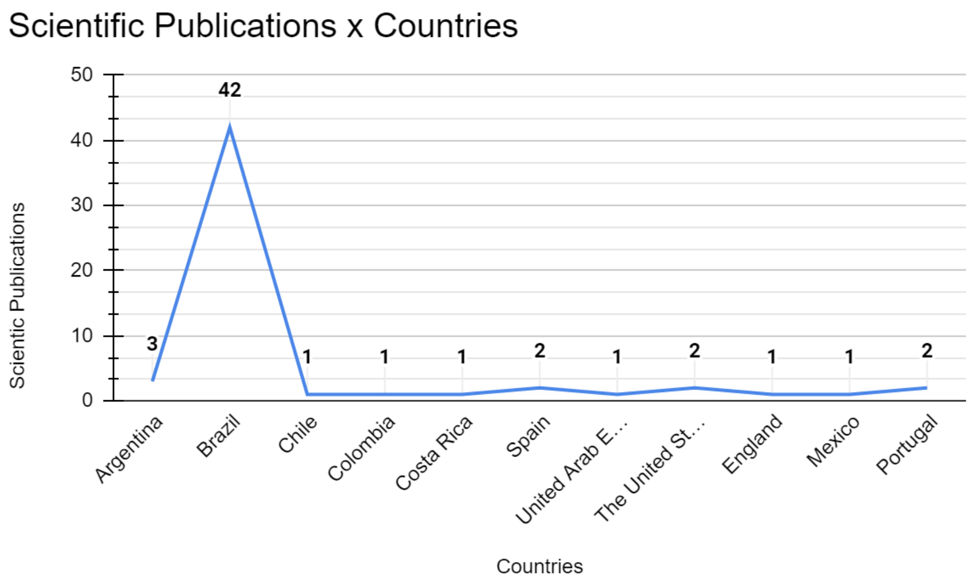
Source: *Created by the authors, 2024.*

The data was analyzed qualitatively, focusing on aspects that relate to some of the most essential characteristics of scientific publication on the theme. As a result, for this categorization and analysis, a total of 57 articles were selected, with greater attention on aspects such as direct or indirect citations to Alberto Santos Dumont, objectives, methodology, and primary results. The study results and discussions were built based on the content analysis approaches, to present a mapping of scientific production on Alberto Santos Dumont.

RESULTS

The research identified that studies on Santos Dumont were conducted in different countries. By analyzing where the research was published, it is feasible to conclude that Brazil published the most on Santos Dumont, with 42 scientific publications, accounting for roughly 75% of the papers selected. In addition to Brazil, initiatives were identified in Argentina, the United Arab Emirates, and England, among others, as shown in Chart 1.

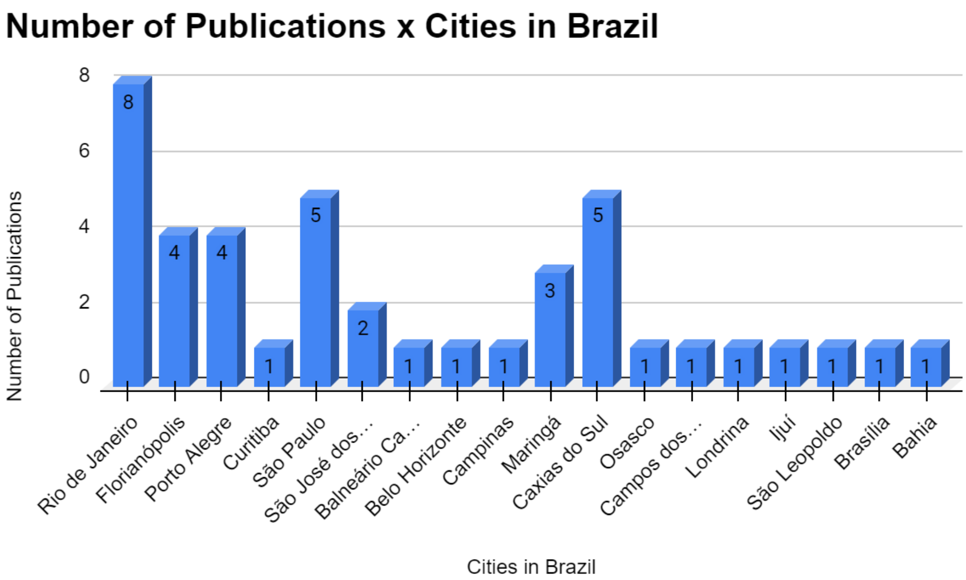
Chart 1. Number of scientific publications per country.



Source: *Created by the authors, 2024.*

An analysis of the representativeness of these studies published in Brazil identified 18 Brazilian cities where these studies took place. Chart 2 shows that Rio de Janeiro (eight), São Paulo (five), Caxias do Sul (five), Florianópolis (four), Porto Alegre (four), and Maringá (three) emerged as prominent locations.

Chart 2. Number of scientific publications per city.



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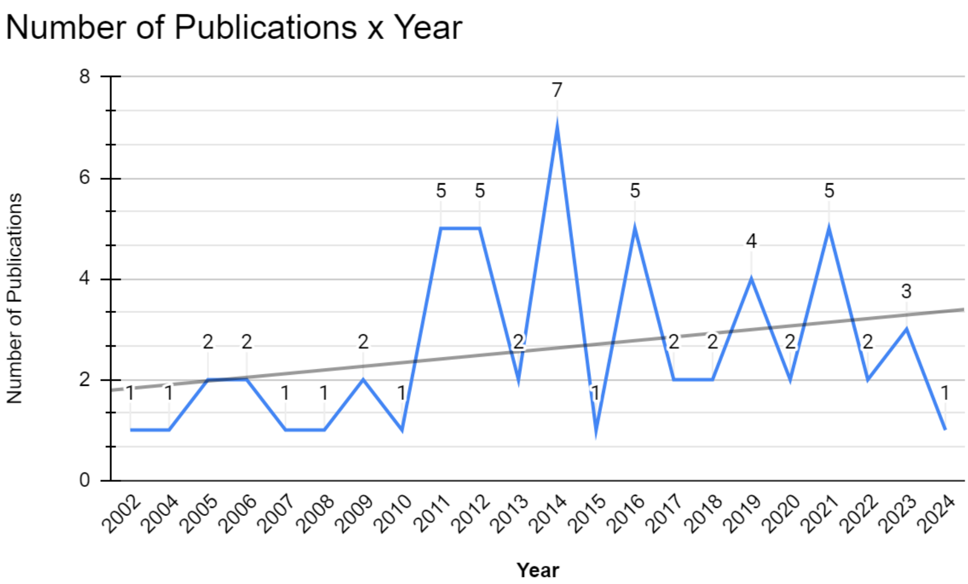
Next, we observed the periods of these publications, which showed that between 2002 and 2024, 2003 was the only year in which there were no publications. There was also an upward trend over time, with 2014 being the year with the most publications (seven studies), followed by 2011, 2012, 2016 and 2021, with five annual publications, as shown in Chart 3.

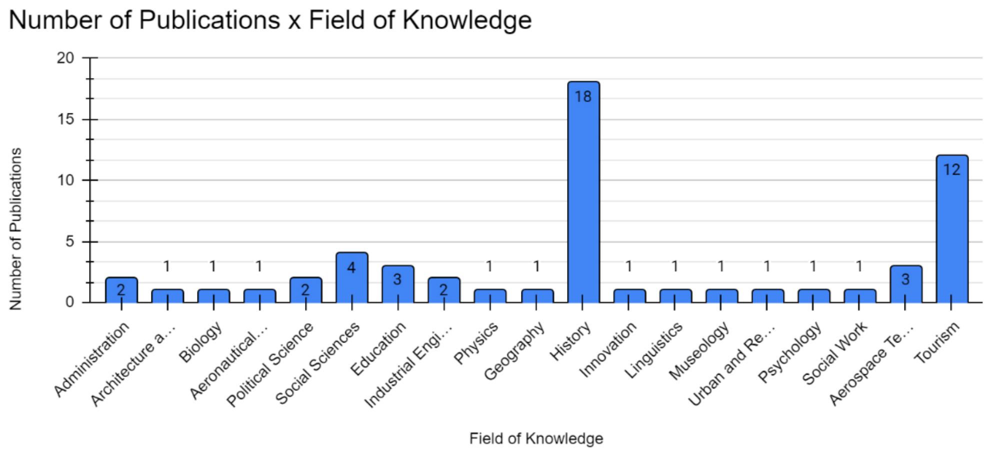
Chart 3. Number of publications per year



Source: Created by the authors, 2024.

Once we understood the number of studies, the locations, and the years in which they took place, we began to identify the respective fields of knowledge, which followed the specialities indicated in the journals. Nineteen fields of knowledge were found: Aerospace Technology and Management, Administration, Architecture and Urban planning, Biology, Aeronautical Sciences, Political Science, Social Sciences, Education, Industrial Engineering, Physics, Geography, History, Innovation, Linguistics, Museology, Urban and Regional Planning, Psychology, Social Work and Tourism. Of these fields, History and Tourism accounted for the largest number of studies, with 18 and 12 respectively, as shown in Chart 4.

Chart 4. Number of scientific publications per country.



Source: Created by the authors, 2024.

The discussion of the results therefore focuses on the fields of History and Tourism. History studies portray the Santos Dumont character based on the revolutionary biases surrounding his creations, specifically the airplane, which in turn also plays an important role in tourism, as it relates to travel over long distances.

The inventor is also portrayed in a way that reflects themes associated with the development of Brazil as a nation-state, reinforcing the sense of patriotism, militarism, civism, and the use of his image and history as political tools. In addition, other elements such as modernity, technology, and innovation are used in the composition of the urban landscape.

In tourism studies, Santos Dumont is also represented by his achievements in aviation. However, other conditions are presented based on his influence, which bequeathed various monuments to Brazil, such as the creation of the Iguaçu National Park, in the state of Paraná, and his work alongside entrepreneurs in the tourism sector at the time.

Thus, the studies indicated contributions to tourism, culture, and national heritage, such as commemorative dates and events alluding to the first flight of the 14-Bis, the existence of monuments in the states of Paraná and Rio de Janeiro, where there is also the Santos Dumont Square, in Umuarama (PR), and the "A Encantada" Museum, in Petrópolis (RJ). His remains are also on display at the São João Batista Cemetery and his heart at the Aerospace Museum (MUSAL), in Rio de Janeiro.

DISCUSSION

Overall, a significant gap in research on Santos Dumont's connection to tourism was identified, although 57 studies were found, 42 of them in Brazil. In addition, contributions were found from countries such as Argentina, Spain, the United States, and Portugal, among others. However, the overall number is still significantly low given the character's global significance as the "father of aviation" for many authors.

By analyzing the subject since 2002, the research revealed the general output figures, with a focus on the decade between 2011 and 2021 (31 publications) and the year 2014 (seven publications). It also showed the main Fields of knowledge in terms of publications on the theme, where History and Tourism appear as the main ones, however, the fields of Aerospace Technology and Management, Social Sciences, Education, and Administration proved to be productive.

The general representations of Santos Dumont in the literature, especially in the fields of History and Tourism, indicate that his figure is described as revolutionary and innovative, primarily because of his advances in the field of aviation, his influence on the formation of Brazil as a nation-state, and also because of his contributions to contemporary tourism through heritage sites such as the Iguaçu National Park, various museums, holidays, commemorative dates (military and civic), among other resources that exist around his figure.

CONCLUSIONS

The research achieves its purpose by mapping studies on Santos Dumont in national and international literature, presenting a significant gap in knowledge on the theme. It also demonstrates how the respective scientific productions are based on elements such as year, place of publication, and field of knowledge, among other aspects. Finally, it highlights some of the character's contributions to tourism and encourages further studies.

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NON-HOTEL ACCOMMODATION: SHORT TOURIST LEASES

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ABSTRACT: *The article explores the phenomenon of short tourist rentals in Italy, highlighting recent dynamics and regulatory and tax implications. In 2023, the non-hotel sector experienced significant growth compared to the pre-COVID period, fostered by the perception of short rentals as a safe investment. However, this boom has led to transparency, security, and tax evasion issues, especially in non-professional management.*

The regulatory framework, although still fragmented, has evolved in recent years. At the civil law level, tourist leases are mainly regulated by the Civil Code, while some regions have introduced their regulations, creating inhomogeneity. At the fiscal level, measures have been introduced, such as extending the 'flat-rate tax' to short leases and establishing a differentiated rate to discourage the excessive spread of the phenomenon.

On the administrative level, introducing the Accommodation Facilities Database (BDSR) marked an important step towards greater transparency, imposing the obligation to register and certify facilities with stricter controls at the municipal level.

Finally, short-term rentals, while contributing to the development of the tourism sector, have generated tensions in cities of art, where the shortage of long-term accommodation exacerbates social problems. The challenge for the legislator will be to balance economic needs with the need for sustainable development of the sector.

KEYWORDS: *Short tourist rentals; Fiscal regulation; Urban sustainability; Overtourism; Accommodation Facilities Database.*

INTRODUCTION

On 4 June 2024, the Ministry of Tourism published a provisional report on 'Tourism trends in Italy. The first evidence for 2023' was drawn up based on integrating two databases on tourist accommodation: 'Web accommodation' of the State Police and 'Customer movements in accommodation establishments' of Istat. The former is fed with the communications made by hotel and non-hotel accommodation facilities managers to comply with the obligation to transmit the personal details of persons accommodated for reasons of public safety. Integration of the data shows that in 2023 compared to 2022, arrivals in Italy amount to approximately 134 million, with 451 million presences, registering an increase compared to 2019 (prior to COVID) of 2.3% and 3.3%, respectively compared to 2022, on the other hand, the increase is 13.4% and 9.5%. Within the overall accommodation sector, the non-hotel sector recorded an increase compared to 2022 16.9% for arrivals and 11.00% for presences, respectively, far higher than

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that of the hotel sector of 11.5% and 8.1%, respectively (ISTAT and Ministry of tourism, 2024). In practice, Italians in recent years have seen an essential possibility of increasing their incomes through the management of non-hotel accommodation activities in the various forms of room rentals, holiday homes, B&Bs and short tourist rentals, both in entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial forms (D'Amicis, 2024). The phenomenon of non-hotel accommodation in general, and short-term rentals in particular, has reached such a dimension that the Italian government has issued regulations allowing cities to limit these rentals to safeguard long-term residential rentals (D.L. 50/2022). Therefore, this so-called 'over-tourism' phenomenon has created a conflict of interest, especially in cities of art, particularly in their historical centres, between the demand for residential properties for long-term residential rentals and the supply of residential properties for short tourist rentals. La. Italy ranks third after the United States and France regarding the number of real estate units offered for short-term rental on Airbnb. The Centro Studi Aigab (Italian Association of Short-Term Rental Managers) found that out of the 35 million residential flats in our country, there are 9.6 million unused second homes. This real estate is mainly in the hands of individual owners, while only to a small extent is managed by professional operators (Idealista news, 2024).

Italians consider the destination of real estate for tourist rental as a safe investment to protect the value of their savings as it allows them to generate a higher average income than other uses. Real estate is purchased in tourist resorts not only for one's use but also as an investment capable of generating income, with a consequent increase in prices, sales and rentals as demand consistently exceeds supply (F.I.M.A.A., 2024).

However, the considerable growth of the tourist rental market in Italy over the last five years is also a consequence of the sector's deficient and confused administrative, civil and fiscal regulations. Such a high number of real estate units available for short-term rentals managed in an unprofessional manner has created quite a few safety problems for guests, transparency in administrative procedures, and considerable pockets of tax evasion.

To put an end to the jungle that has arisen in the sector, especially in the non-professional sector, our legislator has intervened with stricter regulations through the establishment of a database of accommodation facilities (BDSR) aimed at taking a census of all hotel and non-hotel real estate units.

SHORT TOURIST LEASES: CIVIL LAW ASPECTS, A POSSIBLE FRAMEWORK

Specific rules do not regulate tourist leasing in Italy. The Tourism Code (D. Lgs. 79/2011) refers to the provisions of the Civil Code: 'Accommodation rented exclusively for tourist purposes, wherever located, is governed by the provisions of the Civil Code on leases.'

On the other hand, the binding regulations on letting residential property also state that its rules do not apply 'to accommodation rented exclusively for tourist purposes' (L. 431/1998) On the other hand, tourist leases have been regulated in some regions, creating a lack of homogeneity of treatment at the national level.

Therefore, the first reference to frame tourist leases is the Civil Code regulations on leases, which define the lease contract as follows: 'A lease is a contract by which one party undertakes to let the other party enjoy something ... immovable for a given time, for a given consideration'.

The characteristic distinguishing this type of contract from the others is not so much the duration, although regulated by the code, as the tenant's tourist purpose and the mere provision of a residential property furnished with an attached bathroom and kitchen without additional services. The growing phenomenon of short leases mentioned above has led the Italian legislature to regulate this type of lease from a fiscal point of view without distinguishing the purpose for which the lease is granted (D.L. 50/2017).

Under this legislation, 'short leases' are considered to be 'leases of immovable property for residential use of a duration not exceeding 30 days, including those providing for the provision of linen and cleaning services of the premises entered into by natural persons, outside the exercise of business activities, ...'.

Therefore, with the combined provisions of the regulations above, as of 2017, a sui generis type of contract has come into being, namely that of 'short tourist leases,' which is characterised by the following features:

- the party renting out the residential property must carry out this activity outside the exercise of business activity;

- the property granted for use must be furnished, complete with a bathroom and kitchen with linen and tableware, as well as other comforts typical of a home such as utilities, wi-fi, TV, etc.;

- the duration cannot exceed two years, and the lease must last at least two years. The tenant must have a tourist purpose.

- providing additional services such as cleaning the premises and supplying linen is possible. It should be noted that exceeding the threshold of four real estate units designated for short-term rentals results in a legal presumption that the activity is being conducted as a business, thereby rendering the special tax regime for short-term rentals inapplicable and the consequent application of the regulations provided for the management of accommodation activities in an entrepreneurial form.

A similar situation arises when no more than four properties are intended for tourist rental, but ancillary services, perhaps to the person, are provided. It has been discussed both in jurisprudential terms (Cassation, 2014) that in administrative terms whether the provision of the additional services would not lead to the re-qualification of the contract in other types of accommodation type contracts such as bed and breakfast, holiday homes, room rentals, etc. In those instances, the issue was resolved by holding that the provision of additional services of a merely occasional nature or only at the change of guest would not alter the nature of a rental contract.

FISCAL ASPECTS OF SHORT TOURIST LEASES: WHAT IS NEW INDIRECT TAXATION

There are two main innovations in the field of direct taxation put in place by the Italian legislator following the considerable development of business in this particular segment of the accommodation business: the first is the possibility of opting for the so-called flat tax (flat-rate tax) even for income other than land-based income; the second consists in providing for a second rate of flat-rate tax that is higher than the first for leases after the first. To this end, it is necessary to distinguish between the nature of the income produced by the short-term tourist rental activity: land-based or other income.

If the rental contract is stipulated directly by the property owner, the income produced falls into the category of property income and, as such, can be taxed with ordinary taxation, or one can opt for taxation with a flat rate; it is necessary to make a cost-benefit calculation.

If, on the other hand, the lease is entered into by a tenant or a bailer, we are faced with a sublease contract, the income of which in Italian tax law does not have the nature of landed income but of other income and as such is not subject to the dry coupon tax. Exceptionally and derogating from the general rules (D.L. 50/2017), Other income from subletting by the tenant or the tenant-lessee, on the other hand, maybe taxed under the flat-rate taxation scheme. Even in this case, a cost-benefit calculation is required. It is just the case to note that the first measure, extension of the flat rate tax to other income deriving from short tourist leases, tends to incentivise this type of contract, while the second, raising the rate, tends to disincentivise it. This economic policy choice tends to disincentivise the use of residential property for short tourist rentals, aiming to limit the phenomena of overtourism mentioned above.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS OF SHORT TOURIST RENTALS: NEW SAFETY AND PREVENTION ASPECTS

The first novelty consists of establishing the Accommodation Facilities Data Bank (BDSR) at the Ministry of Tourism aimed at improving the protection of competition and transparency of the accommodation market, including short tourist rentals in the abovementioned sense. The aim is to enable the prevention and control of irregular forms of hospitality, more security on the territory, and a more significant fight against tax evasion in the sector (D.L. 34/2019).

Registration takes place at the lessor's request, to whom the Ministry of Tourism assigns a National Identification Code (CIN).

This code must be displayed outside the building where the property intended for short-term tourist rental is located and indicated in the advertisements wherever they are published. The control functions regarding compliance with the abovementioned requirements are assigned to the municipality where the property is located, which exercises them through the police. Heavy penalties are provided for non-compliance. The second novelty consists in improving the safety conditions of properties intended for short tourist rentals, such as the obligation to equip the real estate unit with devices for detecting combustible gases and carbon monoxide, as well as portable fire extinguishers and their periodic maintenance (D.L. 145/2023; Ministero turismo, 2024).

With these novelties on the administrative level, the substantial approximation of this type of accommodation activity to those of an entrepreneurial nature is increasingly evident.

CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of short tourist leases is the subject of conflicting impulses; on the one hand, it contributes to the growth of the Italian Tourism System, the maintenance of real estate assets, the development of the real estate market and the creation of value for the actors of the system, on the other hand, especially in the cities of art and in their historical centres it is fuelling the phenomenon of the scarcity of long term residential units, which tends to amplify the already significant housing problem, creating not a few social discomforts. The regulation of the sector is still evolving, and the policy is called upon, as always, to make balanced economic policy choices that perhaps tend towards sustainable development from an economic-social point of view.

An analysis of the abovementioned data shows that the phenomenon of short tourist rentals will continue to be a fundamental tool for developing the tourist accommodation sector in the future.

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THE INFLUENCE OF AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTIONS: A CASE STUDY IN GENIPABU/RIO GRANDE DO NORTE, BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT: *This study aims to investigate the influence of audiovisual productions on tourists' perceptions of a tourist destination in the Northeast, examining whether this influence remains significant despite recent changes in the scenarios in question. The methodology adopted was qualitative, using content analysis of the categorical type (Bardin, 2011) and User-Generated Content (UGC) collected from TripAdvisor. The data was filtered based on keywords related to the theme, such as "soap opera" and "movie." The results show that terms like "scenery" and "soap opera" are positively associated with the location through visual and television narrative experiences. The similarity analysis highlighted how the association of Genipabu with TV productions is an integral part of the location's identity and marketing, attracting visitors interested not only in the natural beauty but also in the cultural experience. The study concludes that film tourism is a significant phenomenon, where media shapes public perception and influences tourist flow, reinforcing the visual and cultural identity of the destination. It is recommended for future analysis to evaluate comments on social networks for a broader understanding of media influence on tourist perception.*

KEYWORDS: *Film Tourism, Tourist Perception, Content Analysis, Visual and Cultural Identity.*

INTRODUCTION

According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE Agency, 2023), the total number of households in the country equipped with television increased from 69.6 million to 71.5 million between 2021 and 2022. Despite the numerical increase, the percentage of households with TV decreased from 95.5% to 94.4% during this period.

According to the "Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2023–2027" report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), the shift in media consumption patterns is a striking trend. The report indicates that media consumption is increasingly focused on digital platforms and

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streaming, a transformation driven by the expansion of technology and internet access. The research highlights the growing importance of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies that are reshaping the industry, allowing content such as movies, series, and soap operas to be accessed anytime and anywhere, thus increasing convenience and accessibility for the global audience (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2023). In 2022, streaming usage was present in 43.4% of households with TV in Brazil (IBGE Agency, 2023).

Traveling and enjoying a landscape that has been featured in a soap opera or movie can be a motivational goal for a tourist. Some studies discuss the importance of cinematic representations in shaping the image of tourist destinations and motivating visitors (Bolan, Boy & Bell, 2011; Domínguez-Azcue et al., 2022).

Audiovisual productions significantly shape tourism by conveying information about the main landscapes, attractions, and services of a destination. This results in considerable impacts on tourist flow, job and income generation, cultural exchange, and the use of local attractions (Melo, 2021).

It is observed that the representation of locations in audiovisual productions—such as soap operas, movies, and series—can inspire the audience"s desire to travel or motivate research about these places. This study aims to investigate the influence of audiovisual productions on tourists" perceptions of a tourist destination in the Northeast, examining whether this influence remains significant despite recent changes in the scenarios in question.

For this purpose, the destination of Genipabu, located in the municipality of Extremoz, in Rio Grande do Norte (RN), was chosen as the object of analysis. The destination of Genipabu was selected because it has been the setting for soap operas such as Tieta, O Clone and Flor do Caribe (Lima & Silva, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

The study is characterized as qualitative and intentional, utilizing categorical content analysis (Bardin, 2011) and User-Generated Content (UGC) as the data source for interpreting tourists" perceptions. The mapping of comments was conducted from May to July 2024.

The chosen platform was TripAdvisor due to its larger number of comments. The analysis focused on comments related to the theme, beginning with the filtering of user posts using the following keywords: "movie," "soap opera," "scenery," "series," "audiovisual," "advertising," and "publicity".

Initially, the search was conducted in hotel establishments at tourist destinations, but it did not yield results corresponding to the predefined keywords. However, upon expanding the search to include different locations, significant results were identified in the destination Praia de Genipabu. On TripAdvisor, as of July 2024, 5.729 reviews were recorded, demonstrating the relevance for comment analysis.

The searches revealed a varied distribution of results: "Scenery" resulted in 122 comments, "soap operas" in 60 and "movie" in 17. The terms "advertising," "series," and "publicity" presented, respectively, 1, 3 and 8 comments. No results were found for the keyword "audiovisual." Specifically, comments referring to soap operas filmed in Genipabu indicated: 4 mentions of "O Clone," 13 of "Flor do Caribe," and 7 of "Tieta." Table 1 provides an overview of the filtering process for the collected comments, divided by keyword categories.

Table 1. Filtering Process of Comments by Keyword

Category	Total Initial Comments	Observations
Scenery	122	-
Soap Operas	60	-
Movie	17	-
Advertising	1	-
Series	3	-
Publicity	8	-
Audiovisual	0	No results found in the search
Specific		
O Clone	4	Soap opera filmed in Genipabu/RN
Flor do Caribe	13	Soap opera filmed in Genipabu/RN
Tieta	7	Soap opera filmed in Genipabu/RN
Total	**235**	

The validation process of the comments for analysis involved excluding repeated comments or those that did not substantively contribute to the research objective. It was observed that, in most comments, the keyword "scenery" was used as a synonym for "place" or "landscape," exemplified by expressions such as "beautiful scenery." Therefore, the analysis specifically focused on comments that addressed the scenery from an audiovisual perspective. As a result of this selection, 110 comments were validated for the final sample.

To assist in data interpretation, the Iramuteq software was used, which stands out for enhancing data analysis, improving the quality of the categorization process and results in qualitative research (Kami et al., 2016). The following are the results found.

RESULTS

Genipabu Beach is located on the northern coast of the municipality of Extremoz, approximately 25 km from the capital of Rio Grande do Norte, Natal. The beach is part of the Genipabu Dunes Ecological Tourist Park, an Environmental Protection Area (APA) managed by Institute of Sustainable Development and Environment (IDEMA) and the state government (Guedes, 2016).

According to TripAdvisor, Genipabu Beach ranks number one out of 13 things to do in Genipabu. Analyzing the comments, it was observed that there were few comments from 2022 onwards. This can be explained by the lack of access to the TripAdvisor platform by those who watch soap operas and by the increasing number of comments being made on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

Based on the collected results, it can be interpreted that visiting certain destinations can be increased when they serve as settings for movies or soap operas. Additionally, it was noted that tourists receive information about the soap operas filmed during their visit. By mapping the comments related to tourists" perceptions using "soap opera," "scenery," and "movie," the following keywords were obtained (Figure 1)

Figure 1. Keywords from Selected Comments

The highlighted keywords, such as "soap opera," "scenery," "movie," "beach," and "dune, suggest an association by tourists with the visual and environmental experiences of these places. The presence of terms like "wonderful," "incredible," and "paradisiacal" reflects a positive perception by visitors, while "buggy" and "dromedary" point to specific tourist activities offered at the location. However, since May 2024, dromedaries are no longer an attraction in Genipabu (Bezerra, 2024). The term "Natal" is also highlighted in association with

Genipabu, often understood as a destination of Natal. However, it is actually located in the municipality of Extremoz. Some comments highlight the soap operas that were filmed at the destination:

"The place truly looks like a soap opera set, an incredibly beautiful location" (comment by a tourist in 2022, on a couple"s trip).

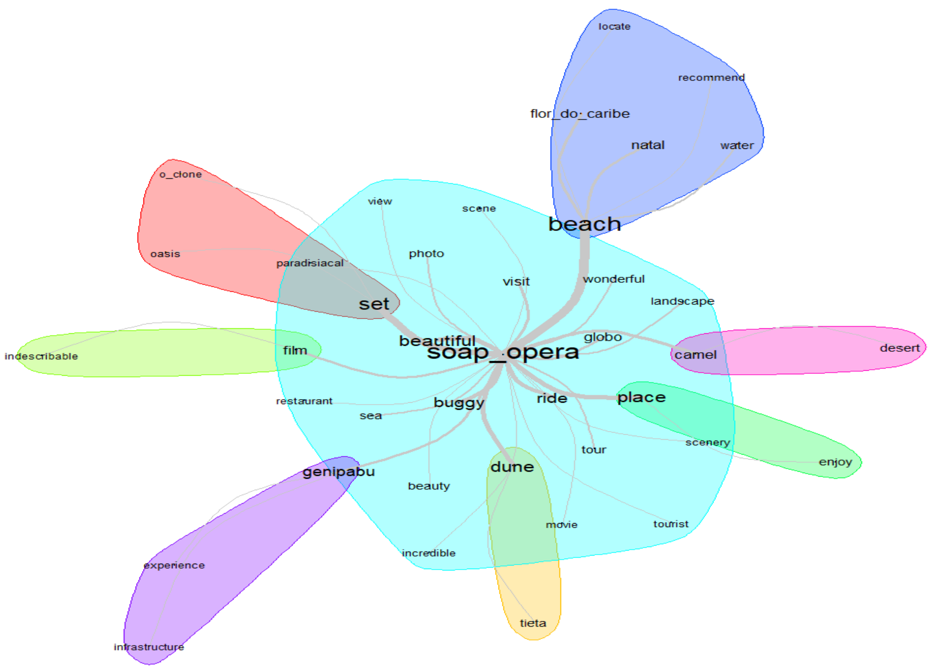
"The location has already been the setting for soap opera recordings. Extremely photogenic" (comment by a tourist in 2022, on a couple"s trip).

"The beauty of this beach is indescribable. No wonder soap operas are filmed in that wonderful scenery" (comment by a tourist in 2016, on a family trip).

"A beautiful environmental preservation area. Its dunes are famous for being the setting of several soap operas like Tieta, O Clone and Flor do Caribe" (comment by a tourist in 2014, on a trip with friends).

In the analysis involving comments with the keyword "movie" it can be assessed that the use of the term "movie" is connected to the aesthetic perception of the place, suggesting that Genipabu offers a visual experience as impactful as watching a movie with beautiful natural settings. Therefore, it can be evaluated that the term is not merely a literal description of films being shot there, but an expression that communicates the visual enchantment of the location. Figure 2 presents the similarity analysis of comments with the word "soap opera".

Figure 2. Similarity Analysis of Comments with "soap opera"



The recurrence of the word “soap opera” in the comments suggests that the association of the beach with TV productions is a significant part of the identity and marketing of the place. Visitors are attracted not only by the natural beauty but also by the cultural aspect and the chance to be in a location where famous stories have been told. This connection with soap operas adds an appealing element, enhancing tourist interest.

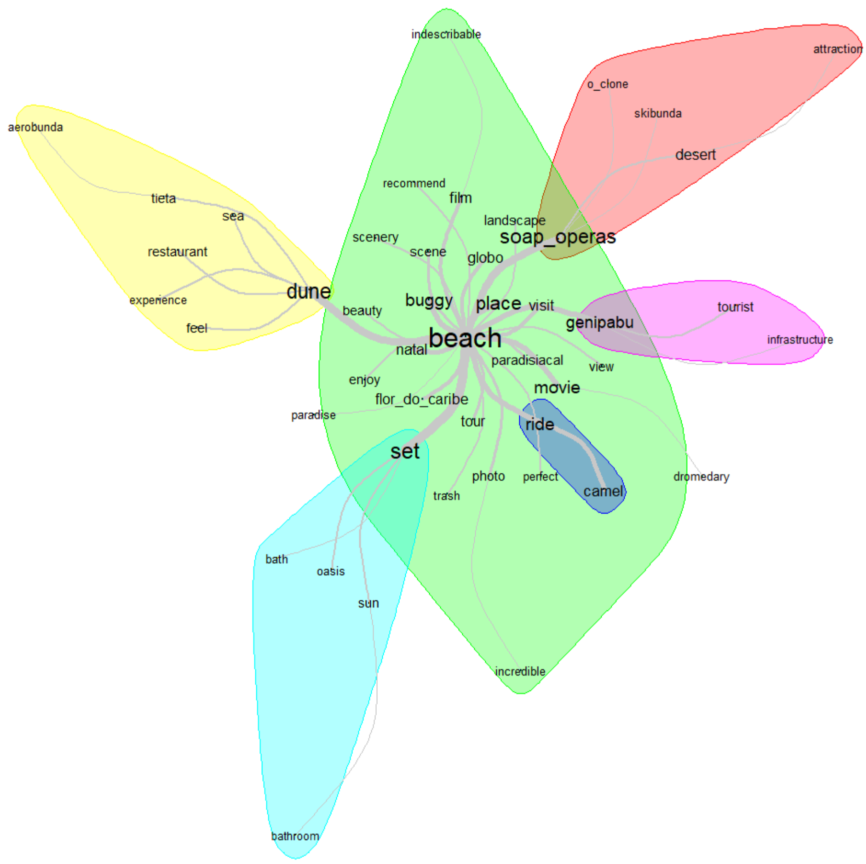
Light green highlights the main terms directly associated with the concept of “soap opera”. Words like “set”, “place”, “buggy”, “dune”, “ride” and “beautiful” are frequently mentioned, suggesting that users associate soap operas with scenic beauty locations and specific tourist activities. Light blue groups terms related to the word “beach”, “Flor do Caribe”, “Natal”, “water” and “recommend”. This set underscores the connection between soap operas and beach destinations, with “Flor do Caribe” being one of the soap operas filmed in Genipabu. The color lilac is associated with the term “Genipabu”, which was the destination chosen for this analysis, widely known for its dunes and buggy rides.

The words “experience” and “infrastructure” reinforce the idea that Genipabu is a place where tourist infrastructure has been significantly boosted by exposure in soap operas, turning it into a point of tourist interest. Light pink highlights terms like “camel” and “desert”, associated with exotic and adventurous settings.

The Yellow groups words like “indescribable” and “tieta”, with “Tieta” being a soap opera that was filmed in Genipabu, while “indescribable” suggests that the beauty or visual impact of some of these settings surpasses the ability of viewers to describe. Finally, **red** is associated with the recording “set”, linking words like “paradisiacal”, “oasis” and “O clone”, the latter being another soap opera that was also filmed in the dunes of Genipabu. With the aim of evaluating all the comments, a similarity analysis was conducted, as presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3 shows associations between Genipabu beach and various cultural and natural elements. The largest group, in light green, associates the beach with film and soap opera settings, including terms like “movie”, “set” and “soap opera”, suggesting the use of beaches as locations in audiovisual productions. Other groups highlight the tourist experience at the beach, such as the yellow group, which links “dune” to “restaurants” and the red group, which connects “desert” with tourist activities in the dunes, like “skibunda”.

Figure 3. Similarity Analysis of Comments



Moreover, the Figure highlights specific terms related to tourist attractions, such as the purple group, which refers to "Genipabu" directly linked to "tourist". The light blue group emphasizes elements of relaxation and infrastructure, with terms like "oasis" and "bathroom", the latter being one of the negative characteristics in the comments, as there is no public restroom on the beach.

Furthermore, the Figure indicates that the dunes of Genipabu, represented by terms such as "dune", "sea" and "oasis" are natural elements that contribute to the experience offered to visitors. It was possible to analyze the connections between these elements and interpret how Genipabu consolidates itself as a tourist destination that combines natural beauty with a strong media influence, shaping visitors" perceptions and attracting tourists in search of this experience.

DISCUSSION

Film tourism is a form of tourism primarily motivated by visits to locations that served as settings for specific audiovisual productions, including movies and television series (Di

Cesare & La Salandra, 2015). Domínguez-Azcue et al. (2022), in a literature review discussing both the positive and negative aspects of film destination management, highlight how films are significant sources of information that influence people"s motivation to travel to certain destinations. Additionally, Bolan, Boy and Bell (2011) explore how the authenticity of filming locations impacts the tourist experience.

However, Tzanelli (2004) points out that films not only engage but also shape tourists" perception and behavior, creating tourist experiences that transcend the traditional search for authenticity, capitalizing on the creation of an alternative reality that attracts visitors (Tzanelli, 2004).

In this regard, "Brazilian soap operas have a great influence over their audience, as they disseminate content daily that instantly reaches thousands of viewers" (Dutra, 2022, p. 176). In the study conducted by Golets (2019) with participants from Eastern Europe, it was observed that almost all respondents unanimously expressed the desire to visit Brazil due to the influence of the television genre in forming a positive perception of the country in the studied region.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of tourist comments about Genipabu Beach highlights the significant impact that audiovisual productions, such as soap operas and movies, have on the tourist attraction of certain locations. The narratives and images projected, especially after the soap operas filmed in Genipabu/RN, not only emphasize the natural beauty of these locations but also promote a rich cultural dimension that attracts visitors interested in experiencing the setting of famous stories. This phenomenon, known as film tourism, leverages the influence of media to shape public perception and direct tourist flow, reinforcing the cultural and visual identity of the destination.

Furthermore, the renewed interest in visiting such locations reveals an overlap between media consumption and travel decisions. While media continues to be a tool in promoting tourist destinations, tourism managers must consider strategies that integrate authenticity and sustainability to preserve the integrity of filming locations. Thus, by fostering conscious management and promoting an authentic narrative, it is possible to ensure that the impact of tourism is positive for both visitors and local communities, maintaining the charm of the destinations without compromising their essence or overloading their capacities.

For future investigations, it is recommended to conduct an in-depth analysis of comments on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to assess how tourists perceive and discuss destinations that served as settings for movies or soap operas, in order to better understand the influence of these platforms on the tourist perception of these locations.

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EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES IN PUBLIC POLICIES FOR SMART TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT: *This paper addresses epistemological issues in tourism, focusing on Smart Tourism Destinations (STDs) and their relationship with public policies. Using a qualitative research methodology, with bibliographic and documentary research as the main data collection techniques, the research is guided by the central question: is a smart tourism destination truly a smart city? We explore the complexity of the concept of intelligence applied to destinations, highlighting the role of the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism (MTur) in adapting the Spanish model to develop the "Modelo DTI Brasil" (STD Brazil Model), which outlines public policy guidelines to be implemented by cities that wish to transform into STDs (Brasil, 2022a; 2022b; 2022c). We analyze the theoretical approach to intelligence (Bruner, 1997; Ceci & Roazzi, 1994; Jahoda, 1986; Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1986; Roazzi, 1999; Psicologia Diz, 2024; Roazzi & Souza, 1999, 2002), emphasizing the need to avoid reductionism. Focusing on Brazilian STDs in transformation as the object of analysis, we examine a practical example. When analyzing public policies for STDs, we observe the emphasis placed on technology by MTur, highlighting the importance of considering human, managerial, resilience, and sustainability elements. We emphasize the connection between smart and sustainable destinations, recognizing the social, environmental, and economic pillars (iParadigma, 2024). We conclude that epistemological studies can contribute to an intelligent view of the destination, which must involve and consider all stakeholders, promoting a continuous cycle of interaction between tourism actors so that a tourism destination is truly considered intelligent.*

KEYWORDS*: Concept of Intelligence; National Tourism Policy; Innovation; Technology; Sustainable Tourism.*

INTRODUCTION

This scientific article addresses the discussion on epistemological issues in contemporary tourism, focusing on Smart Tourism Destinations (STDs) and their role in promoting public policies. The study starts from the premise that defining what constitutes a smart tourism destination is a central issue, highlighting the relevance of the concept of intelligence in formulating more effective public policies and guiding government strategies. The bibliographic research reveals that the term STD has gained prominence in tourism

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academia, with scholars such as Ávila *et al.* (2015), Boes, Buhalis & Inversini (2016), Buhalis & Amaranggana (2015), and others suggesting a new theoretical approach to public policies in this field, both globally and in Latin America and Brazil.

In Brazil, several initiatives have been developed through the National Tourism Plan (PNT) 2018-2022, led by the Ministry of Tourism (MTur), with the aim of identifying destinations that implement public policies that promote not only economic growth but also social, cultural, and infrastructural advancements (Brasil, 2024; Chaves & Secchi, 2022; Costa & Vilela, 2020).

This paper, therefore, is guided by the central question: is a smart tourism destination truly a smart city? Using a qualitative research methodology, with bibliographic and documentary research as the main data collection technique, the research suggests that maturing reflections on the concept of intelligence can offer a new theoretical and practical perspective for the development of STDs, enabling the recognition of these destinations as effectively smart, which will be outlined throughout the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of "intelligence" is vast and varied, with divergent interpretations between laypeople and experts (Bruner, 1997; Ceci & Roazzi, 1994; Jahoda, 1986; Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1986; Roazzi, 1999; Psicologia Diz, 2024; Roazzi & Souza, 1999, 2002). It is important to reassess the debate on intelligence, highlighting the shortcomings of both traditional and contemporary approaches, especially those that neglect social, cultural, and environmental dimensions (Roazzi & Souza, 2002). Psychology offers various theories of intelligence, generally seen as the ability to solve problems and adapt to one's environment (Psicologia Diz, 2024). Common-sense definitions include the ability to solve new situations and the capacity for understanding and reasoning (Buarque, 2010). Criticism of computational models of intelligence points out that the human mind processes information differently from computers and that emotional and volitional factors are difficult to logically represent (Roazzi & Souza, 2002). Therefore, the literature reveals the complexity (Morin, 2001) surrounding the concept of intelligence, as well as the need to avoid reductionism.

The concept of "smart city" gained popularity in the late 1990s with the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in urban services (Washburn *et al.*, 2009; Jasrotia & Gangotia, 2018). The "Smart Growth" movement inspired this idea, seeking innovative solutions to urban problems (Jasrotia & Gangotia, 2018). The smart city approach emerged in the late 1990s with the increasing integration of ICTs into various urban services (Jasrotia & Gangotia, 2018), as a response to challenges posed by globalization and population growth, proposing technological solutions to urban problems such as congestion and pressure on resources and services (Bollier, 1998). However, there was no clear consensus on what truly defines a smart city. The evolution of this concept has moved from a focus on technological infrastructure to a more comprehensive model, including information and resource management, aiming to improve urban quality of life (Ramaprasad, Sánchez-Ortiz & Syn, 2017).

Something is considered "smart" when it integrates advanced technologies that allow data processing, information sharing, decision-making, and environmental monitoring (Dawid et al., 2017). However, it is important to explain that, although the literal translation of "smart" into Portuguese is "intelligent" (Smart Tourism Destination or STD in English is translated as Destino Turístico Inteligente or DTI in Portuguese) and applied to products, cars, homes, and even cities, its contextual meaning is broader.

Several countries have developed STD models to guide the transformation of tourism destinations— including the Spanish model, which encompasses aspects such as Governance, Innovation, Technology, Sustainability, and Accessibility (Brasil, 2021; Brasil, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; Invat.Tur., 2015; Segittur, 2013). In Brazil, the Spanish STD concept was adapted to the Brazilian context with the "Modelo DTI Brasil" (STD Brazil Model) launched by the Ministry of Tourism in 2022, which added four new pillars: Creativity; Security; Mobility and Transportation; and Promotion and Marketing (Brasil, 2022a; 2022b). Excessive focus on technology is criticized, pointing to the need to consider the socioeconomic impacts and sustainability of actions, especially in emerging economies, where external models may be poorly adapted (Cavalheiro *et al*., 2021). However, there are concerns about the superficiality of some transformation models for STDs that focus on technology without adequately considering social impacts and Sustainability, especially in developing countries (Guimarães & Almeida, 2023; Boukhris & Peyvel, 2019; Cavalheiro *et al*., 2021; Gretzel *et al*., 2015).

METHODOLOGY

The study's methodology is qualitative, focused on ensuring the authenticity, reliability, and scientific relevance of the research. It primarily uses bibliographic and documentary research techniques for data collection, with an emphasis on scientific articles published in the last five years. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research follows a process that begins with identifying a question or problem, proceeds through a review of relevant literature, formulation of research questions, data collection and analysis, and culminates in the creation of reports. This approach aims to deeply understand the characteristics and dynamics of the study focus, without the concern of numerically representing the studied population (Silveira & Córdova, 2009).

Bibliographic research allows the researcher to analyze theories and concepts to understand phenomena and ground their investigation, enriching the knowledge accumulated by other authors (Doxsey & Riz, 2002-2003). The collection of documentary data helps to reconstruct and systematize events to explain current facts and trends (Doxsey & Riz, 2002-2003). Thus, the adopted methodology provides a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon under analysis.

RESULTS

This study on Smart Tourism Destinations (STDs) examines the relationship between intelligence and sustainability. The central question aims to determine whether being sustainable implies being smart and vice versa, and how a destination's intelligence can support balanced and responsible tourism growth.

Analyzing these concepts requires an examination of the definitions of sustainability and intelligence in the context of tourism. Understanding the connection between them is essential for comprehending the concept of STD, especially in light of the recent proposals from the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism (MTur). The intelligence of a tourism destination, like human intelligence, depends on interactions with its cultural and local environment.

The concept of sustainability is present in MTur's policies, such as in the National Tourism Plans (Brasil, 2024) and other programs, and must balance the social, environmental, and economic pillars (Ferrari, 2024). It is assumed that an STD should promote a continuous cycle of interaction among all stakeholders, ensuring that innovation and urban development are accompanied by the well-being of the local community. Mutual collaboration and consideration of the population's needs are essential for the effectiveness and sustainability of the destination (Brandão, Joia & Teles, 2016). The sustainability of an STD is promoted through the efficient use of data, innovation, and technologies, enhancing visitor experiences and resource management while integrating the local community. Therefore, the "intelligence" of a destination emerges from the collaboration between people, technologies, and the local environment, creating an accessible, innovative, and sustainable space.

The study also analyzes public policies related to STDs and aims to evaluate whether the new approaches are truly innovative, smart, and sustainable. In 2021, MTur launched the "Modelo DTI Brasil" pilot project, which adapts the Spanish methodology (Segittur, 2013) of Smart Tourism Destinations to the Brazilian context, aiming to make tourist cities more competitive, attractive, and innovative, without losing sight of sustainability, safety, and accessibility (Brasil, 2022a). This project follows Antoine Lavoisier's idea that "nothing is created, everything is transformed" (Toda Matéria, n.d.), importing and adapting the Spanish concept to the Brazilian context.

A practical example is the implementation of the STD Brazil Model in the city of Rio Branco, located in the state of Acre (AC), one of the cities selected by MTur for the STD project. Situated in the North region of Brazil, Rio Branco is considered a city with great tourism potential due to its location in the Amazon (Rio, 2022). In its bid to become one of the pilot cities for the "Modelo DTI Brasil" project, the Rio Branco City Hall presented MTur with a proposal outlining various actions and projects to be worked on at the municipal level, particularly in the areas of sustainability, accessibility, innovation, and public transportation (Rio, 2022), securing its place by winning the bid in 2023. However, the city faces significant challenges, such as smoke from urban and rural fires, which worsened during the pandemic and impacted the health of the population, as well as infrastructure problems like irregular water supply and poorly maintained streets (Pontes, 2023; Rio, 2024).

Figure 1. Research Quaest[1] Results | Percentage of Each Problem

- **Poorly maintained streets:** 33%
- **Basic infrastructure**: 19%
- **Health:** 14%
- **Security:** 12%
- **Economic problems: 5%**
- **Flooding:** 4%
- **Social issues:** 2%
- **Education:** 2%
- **Corruption: 1%**
- **Culture:** 1%
- **Public transportation/traffic:** 1%
- **Urban cleanliness**: 0%
- **Others:** 3%

Source: Rio (2024).

Finally, this study discusses only a few facts (which certainly affect tourism activities in the municipality) and opts to present a critical synthesis on the matter.

[1] Survey conducted in person with 704 people aged 16 or older in Rio Branco from August 23 to 25, 2024, and registered with the Electoral Justice under protocol AC-04219/2024. The confidence level of the survey is 95%. The margin of error is 3.7 percentage points, plus or minus (Rio, 2024).

DISCUSSIONS

The investigation focuses on evaluating whether the criteria established by MTur truly promote adaptive and sustainable intelligence for tourism destinations. The "Modelo DTI Brasil" manual defines nine strategic axes of action (Governance; Innovation; Technology; Sustainability; Accessibility; Creativity; Security; Mobility and Transportation; and Promotion and Marketing) for a destination to be considered intelligent (Brasil, 2022b).

However, it seems to emphasize primarily the integration of technologies and the tourist experience, while aspects such as holistic management and resilience are less highlighted. This approach may be seen as insufficient, as technology alone does not encompass all the necessary elements for a smart destination (Brandão, Joia & Teles, 2016). The criticism is that a smart destination should integrate actions related to much more complex layers that go beyond the adoption of technologies (Freire-Medeiros & Freitas, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

In the concluding remarks of this paper, it becomes relevant to highlight the interconnection between the concepts of intelligence and sustainability in the context of Brazilian Smart Tourism Destinations (STDs) and the public policies developed by MTur. Throughout this paper, the complexity of these concepts and their applicability to tourism destinations is evident, recognizing that a destination's intelligence is not limited to technology alone but encompasses a range of actions aimed at sustainability.

The literature indicates that the tourism academy recognizes our knowledge as eurocentric and colonialist (Guimarães & Almeida, 2023; Boukhris & Peyvel, 2019). In this sense, this scientific article highlights that MTur imports the DTI concept from Spain and adapts it, transforming it according to Lavoisier's principle, for the Brazilian context, despite Brazilian researchers already discussing the risk of transplanting successful DTI models from developed countries to emerging economies without "customization" (Cavalheiro *et al*., 2021).

The documentary analysis of public policies developed by MTur concerning STDs reveals an approach that incorporates essential elements established in the nine pillars of the "Modelo DTI Brasil", which intrinsically include intelligence, operational/technological efficiency, and emphasize the importance of sustainability, responsible management, and engagement with the local community. This approach reflects the understanding that a truly smart tourism destination not only provides memorable experiences for visitors but also promotes the well-being of local communities and preserves the environment.

In the practical example, however, it is observed that out of the 21 cities currently in the "STD in Transformation" stage in Brazil, only two are located in the North region, four in the Northeast, four in the Central-West, five in the Southeast, and six in the South of Brazil. Notably, the state of Paraná has the most STDs in transformation in the country (Curitiba, Ponta Grossa, and Foz do Iguaçu). Therefore, it can be inferred that MTur's selection of destinations may indicate a potential regional disparity in the development of STDs as a national tourism policy.

Regarding the city of Rio Branco (AC), it is evident that there are many infrastructure problems and other challenges that need to be overcome for it to be considered an STD. In addition to the projects submitted to MTur that led to the destination's selection as an STD, a series of complex actions are necessary to ensure sustainable tourism, not to mention the new challenges that may arise during the process. These challenges likely require significant financial resources, political will, and long-term planning, demanding continuity from future municipal administrations.

It is also important to emphasize that the intelligence of a tourism destination requires much more than simply adopting advanced technologies. It involves creating an environment conducive to fostering innovation, establishing collaborative partnerships among various stakeholders, and promoting sustainable practices in all areas of management. This holistic approach is essential to ensure that STDs are not only competitive and attractive but also resilient and capable of promoting long-term sustainable development.

The combination of theoretical reviews and recent document analysis allowed us not only to identify patterns and trends but also to interpret the nuances and complexities inherent to the study object. This results in the production of relevant knowledge, going beyond superficial descriptions, and significantly contributing to the field of investigation to which the research is embedded.

Aiming to answer the research question, we conclude that Tourism Epistemology can contribute to the conceptual enhancement of STDs, which in turn represent a new theoretical and practical approach to the development of this field of study, recognizing the importance of human, social intelligence, and sustainability in formulating effective public policies. By integrating concepts, MTur could aim not only to boost economic growth but also to promote social, cultural, and environmental advancements in the implementation of national STD policies for Brazilian tourism destinations.

Finally, we understand that the process of transforming a tourism destination into an STD requires a holistic approach that includes innovation, stakeholder collaboration, sustainable practices, among others, depending on numerous factors at various levels. The epistemological study of tourism, therefore, offers an opportunity to contribute to the conceptual enhancement of STDs, promoting not only economic but also social, cultural, and environmental advancements, consolidating a more sustainable and integrated development model in national tourism public policies.

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EFFECTS OF TRAVEL ON MENTAL HEALTH POST-COVID-19

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ABSTRACT: *The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted mental health and reshaped travel behavior globally. This paper investigates the therapeutic role of travel in post-pandemic mental health recovery, examining how travel behavior has evolved due to increased health consciousness and pandemic-induced anxiety. By reviewing studies and analyzing trends, the research highlights the critical importance of travel in alleviating psychological stress, fostering personal growth, and combating the adverse mental health effects caused by prolonged isolation and fear of infection. The findings suggest that while travel remains essential for well-being, post-pandemic anxieties present new challenges to realizing its full benefits.*

Keywords: *mental health, COVID-19, travel behavior, post-pandemic anxiety, tourism industry*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic created a global mental health crisis, with rising cases of anxiety and depression due to lockdowns and isolation. Travel has long served as a vital coping mechanism for stress, offering opportunities for relaxation, personal growth, and recovery. The pandemic disrupted travel, intensifying feelings of isolation and negatively affecting mental well-being. This disruption highlighted the essential role travel plays in mental health, while innovations like virtual reality emerged to build psychological resilience in travelers (Flaherty & Nasir, 2020). This paper aims to explore the effects of travel on mental health in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on how travel behavior has changed post-pandemic and the implications for psychological well-being. Additionally, the paper examines how the tourism industry has adapted to these changes and what this means for future travel patterns and mental health.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected mental health globally, with marked increases in depression, anxiety, and stress reported across various populations. Social distancing and lockdown measures have notably contributed to feelings of loneliness and isolation, particularly in urban environments. Meta-analyses indicate that social restrictions were strongly associated with heightened mental health symptoms, such as depression and loneliness. A dramatic global reduction in mental well-being was observed during the pandemic, with a significant rise in depression rates as restrictions intensified (Wilke et al., 2021). Restrictions on international travel, private gatherings, and contact tracing across 28 European countries were found to negatively impact mental well-being, with diverse effects on different demographic groups. For individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions, these restrictions exacerbated social isolation and loneliness, reduced access to health services, and intensified symptoms (Murphy et al., 2021).

Changes in Travel Behavior Post-Pandemic

Despite these challenges, travel continues to be a crucial factor in mental health recovery in the post-COVID-19 era. Travel offers an escape from daily monotony, cultural engagement, and personal growth, all of which contribute positively to psychological well-being (Krippendorf, 1986). Research reveals significant shifts in travel behavior and preferences due to the pandemic. Notably, there has been an increased focus on domestic tourism, nature-based experiences, and shorter trips (Khan et al., 2022). Although travel anxiety persists, many individuals plan to resume travel within 0-6 months post-pandemic, preferring nature tourism and short-duration trips. The pandemic has also accelerated trends towards safety, hygiene, and contactless services (Khan et al., 2022). Interestingly, individuals who attribute the spread of COVID-19 to their own countries are more inclined to travel internationally (Abraham et al., 2020). However, pandemic anxiety has led to a paradoxical increase in the attractiveness of domestic destinations and affected attitudes towards supporting the domestic tourism industry (Gyimóthy et al., 2022).

Psychological Impact of Travel Risks and Coping Strategies

Studies on the psychological impact of perceived health risks during travel, especially in the context of COVID-19, highlight that fear and anxiety significantly influence travel intentions and behaviors. Factors such as the perceived severity of COVID-19, infection probability, and expected pandemic duration are strong predictors of travel intentions (Golets et al., 2020). The pandemic has intensified perceived health risks, impacting mental well-being and increasing perceived uncertainty. Psychological distance factors, including temporal, spatial, and social dimensions, also moderate the relationship between risk perceptions and travel intentions (Fuchs et al., 2023). In response to pandemic-related stressors, travelers have developed new coping strategies. Revenge tourism, characterized by a desire to make up for lost travel opportunities, has emerged. Travelers are engaging in growth, seeking strength, and maintaining cautious optimism as part of their coping strategies (Meenakshi et al., 2023). Additionally, mindfulness has become a significant approach, promoting meaningful and sustainable tourism experiences and serving as a low-cost solution to mitigate negative psychological effects.

Psychological Benefits of Travel

Psychological research on stress relief through tourism emphasizes experiences that promote relaxation, detachment from work, mastery, and personal control (Chen et al., 2016). These experiences contribute to increased life satisfaction and well-being post-travel (Chen, 2018). Short trips have been shown to aid in work stress recovery, with longer trips offering more opportunities for stress relief. The importance of travel correlates positively with stress relief benefits. While much research relies on self-reported data, recent studies incorporate physiological measurements like heart rate monitoring to assess actual stress levels during travel. This approach, guided by the cognitive activation theory of stress, offers insights into optimizing stress relief through travel experiences (Petrick et al., 2020).

Theoretical Frameworks

Travel, particularly in its adventurous and tourism-related forms, is a multifaceted phenomenon with potential psychological benefits. Adventure travel is defined by risk, coping, and transcendence. Psychological research draws on theories of stress, coping, culture learning, and social identification (Berno & Ward, 2005). Standardized scales and questionnaires, such as the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), General Health Questionnaire, HAD Scale, and Short Form 36 (SF-36), are essential for measuring changes in mental health and stress levels (Bartlett & Coles, 1998; Cohen, 2014). Physiological indicators like heart rate, heart rate variability, blood pressure, cortisol levels, and other measures complement self-reported data.

The Biophilia Hypothesis posits an innate human affinity for nature, supported by research showing that natural settings enhance positive affect and reduce physiological stress compared to urban environments (Gaekwad et al., 2022; Gaekwad et al., 2023). Attention Restoration Theory (ART) suggests that natural environments replenish cognitive resources, benefiting attention, mood, and stress recovery. Eudaimonia, encompassing psychological happiness, life satisfaction, and perfectionist happiness, is supported by theories such as self-determination theory, broaden-and-build theory, and human flourishing theory.

The integrated Travel-Happiness model suggests that autonomy and relatedness mediate the relationship between positive travel experiences and psychological well-being (Lee, 2018).

Theories like Self-Determination Theory, Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions, and Theory of Human Flourishing underpin these findings.

While existing literature covers the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and on in travel behavior, there is a need for a more detailed analysis of how post-pandemic travel affects various aspects of mental health, beyond general well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourist behavior and mental health, with a primary focus on understanding changes in traveler preferences and the strategies employed to manage stress in a post-pandemic context. To achieve these objectives, the study includes a review of contemporary travel trends, an analysis of the impact of post-COVID-19 experiences on mental health, and an examination of stress management strategies used by travelers. A thematic analysis approach is employed to explore these research objectives. The methodology involves data collection through a systematic review of contemporary sources. An in-depth review of online travel blogs and mental health blogs, along with related online content, is conducted to identify emerging trends and shifts in traveler preferences since the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as its effects on travelers' mental health. The analysis techniques focus on three key areas: trend identification, the impact of post-COVID-19 experiences on mental health, and stress management strategies. The data analysis process involves identifying key phrases, recurring themes, and significant shifts in traveler behavior.

RESULTS

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel and mental health, we conducted a thematic analysis of online blogs discussing post-COVID travel trends. This analysis aimed to explore how the pandemic has influenced travel behaviors and mental well-being, providing insights into how travelers are adapting to the new realities and managing their mental health in a post-pandemic world. The findings from this analysis reveal that post-COVID Travel Trends have been significantly shaped by the pandemic. One prominent trend is the heightened emphasis on "health and hygiene," with travelers now prioritizing "exceptional cleanliness" and "safety measures" when choosing travel options. This shift reflects a growing need for reassurance and trust in travel providers, who are increasingly highlighting their commitment to maintaining high health standards. Another critical trend is the embrace of digital transformation and technology. The integration of "contactless" services, "AI-assisted communication," and "virtual reality" has become essential in reshaping travel experiences. These technological advancements not only cater to new traveler preferences but also enhance the efficiency and safety of travel. The analysis also identifies a significant shift towards domestic and flexible travel. Travelers are increasingly opting for "domestic travel" and seeking "adaptable travel options" as they navigate ongoing uncertainties. This preference highlights a desire for safety and convenience, driving a renewed focus on local destinations. Additionally, there is a noticeable rise in sustainability and regenerative tourism. Travelers are now more inclined to choose destinations and operators that emphasize "environmental stewardship" and positively impact "local communities." This shift underscores a growing demand for travel that is both respectful and beneficial to the places visited. The revitalization of travel agencies is another key trend, as these agencies adapt to new traveler preferences by offering enhanced "insurance coverage" and flexible "booking options." This adaptation has led to a resurgence in the relevance of travel agencies, providing travelers with reassurance and support. Lastly, the concept of 'revenge travel' has gained prominence. Characterized by increased travel frequency and spending, this trend reflects travelers' desire to make up for lost time with "experiential" and "wellness-oriented" trips. In terms of post-COVID mental health and coping mechanisms, the pandemic has led to a notable rise in mental health issues, particularly anxiety and depression. Research indicates a 25% increase in these conditions globally during the pandemic's first year, exacerbated by long COVID and heightened emotional struggles. The impact on traditional support networks has also been significant, with disruptions to schools, workplaces, and community networks leading to increased feelings of isolation and impacting mental health. In response, seeking professional support through therapy and counseling has become essential for addressing complex emotions and mental health issues arising from the pandemic. Rebuilding social connections and routines has emerged as a crucial strategy for managing mental health post-pandemic. Engagement with others and the establishment of new routines help alleviate feelings of isolation and provide a sense of purpose. Finally, resilience and adaptability are key to navigating ongoing uncertainties and managing stress. Developing emotional resilience and staying adaptable are vital for maintaining mental well-being in a rapidly changing world. Commonly recurring language and concepts in the blogs include references to "anxiety and depression" as primary concerns, the need for new "support systems," the notion of "post-COVID malaise" describing emotional and psychological exhaustion, and various "coping strategies" emphasizing professional support, social engagement, and personal routines.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal significant shifts in travel patterns and mental health in the post-pandemic period. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a notable increase in mental health issues, particularly anxiety and depression, which is consistent with the global rise in these conditions during the pandemic's first year (Wilke et al., 2021; Toffolutti et al., 2022). The study highlights that travelers are increasingly focused on health and hygiene, emphasizing "exceptional cleanliness" and "safety measures" when choosing travel options, aligning with previous research that underscores the heightened need for caution during travel (Khan et al., 2022). The increased inclination towards "sustainable tourism" and "regenerative tourism" reflects a growing demand for travel that positively impacts local communities, supporting trends observed in the literature (Gyimóthy et al., 2022). The results are largely consistent with previous studies highlighting the rise in mental health issues during the pandemic and the emphasis on the need for support through therapy and counseling (Murphy et al., 2021). Furthermore, the finding of "revenge travel" and the increased frequency of travel as a way to compensate for lost time confirms earlier studies emphasizing the emotional need for travel as a form of psychological recovery (Meenakshi et al., 2023).However, there is a divergence in the focus on new technologies and digital solutions, such as "contactless" services and "AI-assisted communication," which indicates an accelerated digital transformation in tourism that has become crucial for reshaping travel experiences (Khan et al., 2022). This development can be seen as a new trend compared to previous research, which focused more on physical aspects of travel and less on digital adaptation. This study contributes to existing theories on the impact of travel on mental health by adding new dimensions related to post-pandemic travel patterns. For instance, the increased focus on domestic tourism and sustainable destinations supports theories like the Biophilia Hypothesis (Gaekwad et al., 2022). These findings can inform future theories on how changes in travel patterns might have long-term effects on psychological well-being. Given the shifts in traveler preferences towards digital solutions, this research can inform the development of new strategies in tourism, such as enhancing digital infrastructure and integrating new technologies into tourist services, which can improve traveler experiences and safety.

This study faces several limitations, including reliance on data from blogs, which may be subjective and limited in sample size. Additionally, the analysis is based on secondary data that may not fully capture all nuances of changes in mental health and travel patterns. These limitations may affect the interpretation of results, as blogs do not provide quantitative data that could offer a more comprehensive picture.

Future research should consider including quantitative studies to provide measurable data on the impact of post-pandemic travel on mental health. Additionally, studies could encompass diverse demographic groups to examine specific patterns and needs across different populations. Exploring the impact of new technologies on the travel sector could also provide valuable insights into how digital transformation affects traveler mental health.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only altered travel patterns but also the way travelers approach their mental health. Post-pandemic trends, such as the emphasis on health and hygiene, digital transformation, and sustainability, reflect changes in traveler attitudes and behaviors. Understanding these changes can aid in shaping future strategies in tourism and enhancing travelers mental well-being.

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TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN TOURISM AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A PERSPECTIVE ON ACADEMIC STUDIES

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ABSTRACT: *The increased access to technological innovations and the changes in consumer behavior, intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic, have transformed perspectives on tourism, raising the following question: How do studies in the field of tourism relate technological adoption to Covid-19? To address this, the study aims to identify the use of technological innovations and their contributions to tourism after Covid-19. The research set out to systematically review the literature to understand the interaction between technology and tourism in the post-pandemic context. The methodology employed was exploratory, qualitative research, based on a literature review using the Scopus database. A total of 35 articles were analyzed, covering topics such as the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by tourist destinations, the use of apps, short-term rental platforms like Airbnb, mobile technology, and the possibilities offered by 5G, as well as the use of live streaming. The results indicated that the pandemic accelerated the use of digital technologies in tourism, impacting everything from bookings to destination management. The importance of digital tools, such as apps that enhance communication and tourism services, as well as sustainable solutions that optimize energy consumption and personalize experiences, was highlighted. The study underscores the need for future research on digitalization and its impact on the tourist experience and the competitiveness of destinations.*

KEYWORDS: *Covid-19, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Tourism.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a crucial role in the development of localities, driving the flow of visitors, which, in turn, leads to transformations in the urban layout, stimulates economic activity, and, most importantly, directly impacts the quality of life of the local population. The way people travel has changed significantly with the advent of new technologies, such as cloud computing,

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virtual and augmented reality, mobile technologies, and social media, all of which have fostered the growth of smart tourism (Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2017). As a result, today's tourist is more connected, informed, and demanding, requiring higher standards of quality and service in the destinations they visit.

Advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs), along with associated infrastructures, widespread internet use, and a continuous and stable connection, can accelerate the involvement of organizations and stakeholders in the value chain through various technology-mediated activities, such as e-business, e-commerce, digital governance related to travel, e-tourism, and other innovations in digital tourism (Guamán et al., 2023).

This transformative scenario requires local management to adapt to the new expectations of tourists, using technologies to promote smarter and more sustainable destinations. Tong, Yan, and Manta (2022) highlight that automated systems are essential for managing visitor flow, with technologies to recommend alternative destinations during periods of high demand, benefiting both businesses and local management by promoting more sustainable tourism.

With the global health crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the closure of cultural attractions, and the cancellation of events, exposing the vulnerability of tourism in times of crisis (Tsalpara et al., 2021), the importance of technology for the continuity of tourism activities came to the forefront. The rapid adaptation of digital technologies enabled the continuation of events and cultural interactions in a virtual format and provided an opportunity to reorganise tourism from a more sustainable and digital perspective (Guamán et al., 2023).

Based on the points outlined, the following research question is posed: How do studies in the field of tourism relate technological adoption to Covid-19? Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify how the use of technological innovations and their contributions to tourism after Covid-19 are represented in academic studies.

The debate surrounding this topic has become even more relevant as tourist destinations seek to adapt to a post-pandemic scenario, given that Covid-19 brought profound and immediate impacts to the tourism sector, with widespread travel restrictions and the closure of sites, resulting in a significant decline in tourist numbers (Tsalpara et al., 2021). Technology has emerged as the central tool for maintaining the sector's operations and competitiveness.

The research developed here is justified by the need to deepen understanding of the impact of technological innovations on tourism, particularly in crisis contexts such as the one faced during the pandemic, and to provide support for local management to be better prepared for future adversities. The health crisis presented an opportunity to reorganize tourism, steering it towards a more sustainable model, with an emphasis on heritage conservation and the adoption of sustainable practices (Tsalpara et al., 2021).

The relevance of this study lies in the ability of technologies to respond to crises, such as the pandemic, and to anticipate and prepare the tourism sector for future challenges, promoting a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable activity.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve this objective, an exploratory research design with a qualitative approach was chosen (Gil, 2002). According to Romanowski and Ens (2006), studies that systematically review other research aim to organize and synthesize the intellectual output in a specific field, enabling a better understanding of research within that subject area. For this purpose, the method proposed by Romanowski (2002, p.15-16) was employed, which comprises seven detailed stages:

1. Definition of descriptors to guide the information search: Three broad terms were used for the search: "Covid-19" AND "information and communication technology" AND "tourism";
2. Definition and identification of research databases (articles, theses, collections, etc.): The database chosen for this study was Scopus (Elsevier), which indexes over 39,743 titles and is relevant for research in tourism and other areas (Letunovska, Kwilinski & Kaminska, 2020);
3. Establishment of criteria for the selection of study material: The material selected for this study consisted of research on the use of technologies in tourism activities post-Covid-19, aiming to highlight its increase, the most investigated areas, and the scientific evidence of this stimulus;
4. Collection of research material: From the Scopus database, data were collected between 15 and 30 August 2024, organized into an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate extraction and analysis. Using the descriptors from step 01, an initial search found 60 documents related to tourism, technologies, and Covid-19;
5. Reading of publications and creation of preliminary summaries: After collecting the material, titles, abstracts, and keywords were read to verify alignment with the study's objectives. This reading was carried out independently by three researchers, ensuring the effectiveness of selection and minimizing personal bias. Of the 60 documents found, all articles,

conference papers, and conference reviews were selected, totalling 44. Of these, 9 were discarded as they were systematic reviews, resulting in 35 articles being analyzed in depth;

Stage 6 corresponds to the organization of reports involving the summaries and highlighting trends in the topic addressed, while stage 7 refers to the analysis and preparation of preliminary conclusions based on Romanowski's (2002) protocol, which are presented as the results of the current research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is evident that 2020 marked the emergence of the first studies, which is justified by the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2020 (Figure 1). Furthermore, the same graph shows that 2022 had the highest number of publications, with a total of 15 articles.

The main authors on this topic were also identified (Figure 2), with Rob Law ranked first, having a total of three articles (Chen et al., 2022; Cheong & Law R., 2022; Lin, Fong & Law, 2022), followed by a tie among several authors with only one publication each. This indicates that the topic is relatively recent, with a diversity of authors contributing their reflections.

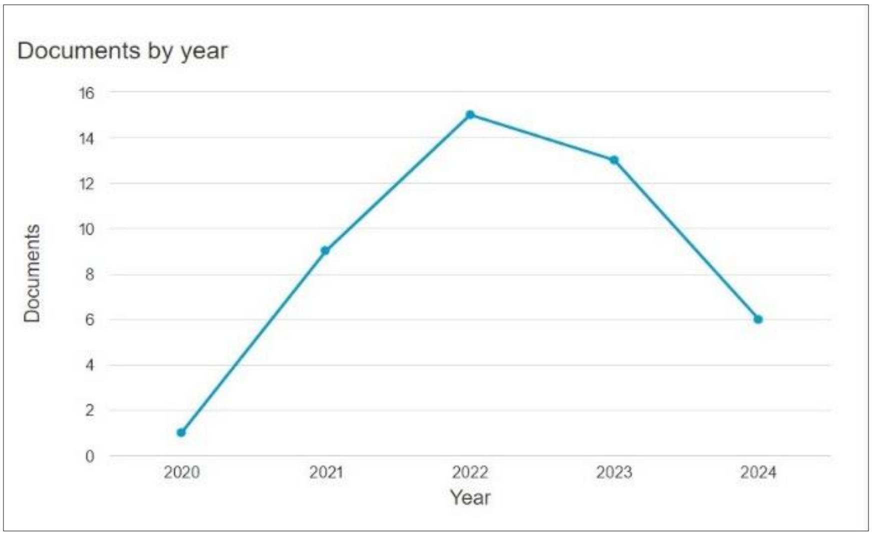

Figure 1 – Documents Published per Year

Source: Scopus, 2024.

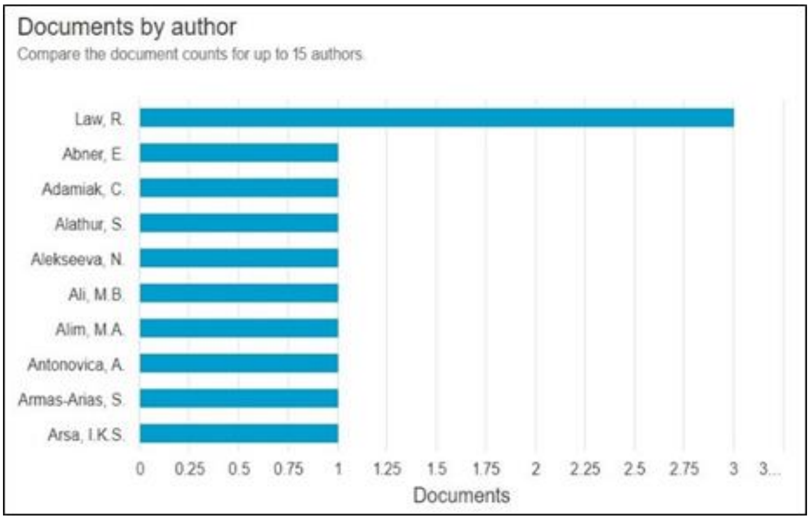

Figura 2 – Documentos publicados por autor

Source: Scopus, 2024

Regarding publications by country (Figure 3), Spain leads with 7 articles, being a pioneer in the field of technologies and tourism, with the development of Smart Tourism Theory and Smart Tourist Destinations. Italy ranks second with 4 articles, which is understandable given that it was one of the first countries to face the consequences of the pandemic (BBC News Brasil, 2020).

On the other hand, when analysing the field of study for which the research was developed (Figure 4), it was observed that business is the most researched area, accounting for 25.3% of the publications, which aligns with the findings on management actions aimed at increasing the competitiveness of destinations. This is followed by social sciences, with 19.8%.

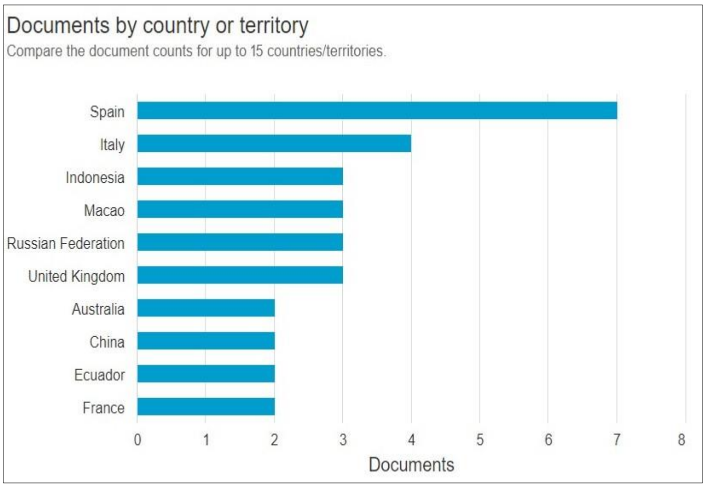

Figure 3 – Documents Published by Country

Source: Scopus, 2024.

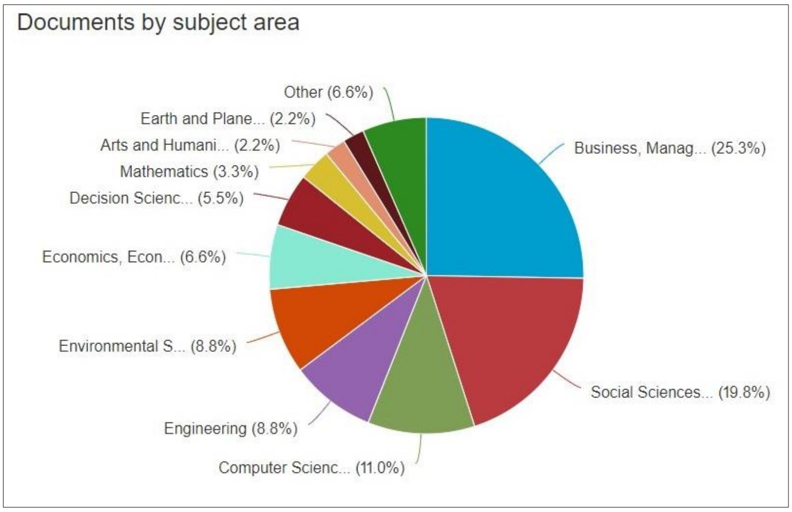

Figure 4 – Documents Published by Field

Source: Scopus, 2024.

Following the research stages, the main approaches, the technologies used, and the context in which the studies were conducted were identified. Of the 35 articles analyzed in depth (Table 1), five key themes emerged, which account for 72% of the research, or 26 studies. These themes include the adoption of ICTs by tourist destinations (Shabankareh et al., 2023; Guamán, 2023); studies on apps implemented in the tourism sector and their relationship with the tourist experience (Ali et al., 2024; Cheong & Law, 2022; Polese, Botti & Monda, 2022); reflections on the impact on short-term rental platforms, such as Airbnb (Dolnicar & Zare, 2020; Dabija et al., 2022); research on mobile technology/5G (Chen et al., 2022); and the impacts and prospects of new possibilities like live streaming (Lin, Fong & Law, 2022).

The primary focus of the research, with 15 studies, centred on the impact of ICT adoption by tourist destinations as a tool for competitiveness and resilience. The pandemic accelerated digitalization, affecting processes such as bookings and destination management, enabling businesses and localities to adapt to changes in consumer behavior

The second most researched topic, with 5 studies, was on apps, highlighting the importance of these tools across various sectors of tourism. The studies explored the use of apps in areas such as the food sector, facilitating food delivery and communication with customers. Other apps were developed to provide information about Covid-19 and protective measures for tourists, disseminating details on requirements and expected behavior. The theme of sustainability was also present, with research on apps designed to assist in managing energy consumption in hotels, as well as apps offering personalized experiences and tours for tourists/users.

Three themes tied for third place, with two studies each: short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb, highlighting their importance and the consequences of health restrictions. The increased demand for more flexible and isolated accommodation options during the pandemic is also noteworthy. The analysis shows that these platforms adapted swiftly, offering services such as enhanced cleaning and online check-in.

The next theme focused on research concerning mobile technology and 5G, emphasizing its importance during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic landscape. The expansion of 5G and improvements in mobile networks enabled more personalized services and new tourism experiences, as well as facilitating analyses such as GPS monitoring in urban and tourist mobility.

The final highlighted theme, which also had two studies, explored the impacts and prospects of using live streaming, demonstrating the potential of this technology to transform the way people travel and seek inspiration for travel. It enabled the hosting of virtual events and the promotion of tourist destinations remotely.

In the remaining nine studies, a variety of themes and approaches to technologies were identified, covering topics such as teleworking, digital marketing, virtual experiences, digital nomadism (Garcez et al., 2023), e-learning, user-generated content (UGC), social media (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram), online travel agencies (OTAs), virtual intelligence, and smart tourism.

The diversity of technologies and aspects to be explored regarding their impact on tourism is noteworthy. The adaptation of technologies can enhance content distribution, create value through personalized recommendations, optimize management processes, develop business models, and ultimately improve the tourist experience, which is fundamental to smart tourism (Gretzel et al., 2015).

Table 1 – Overview of the Analyzed Publications

	Title	Authors	Objectives
1	*Characteristics of crises resilient organizations in the hospitality and tourism industry*	Aydogan et al., 2024	To examine the resilience of organisations in the hospitality and tourism sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2	*Acceptance and use of ICT in tourism: the modified UTAUT model*	Ali et al., 2024	To identify factors that influence tourists' intention and behaviour regarding the use of ICTs.
3	*Covid-19 Pandemic's Influence on Popular/Folk Culture and Tourism in Greece: Shaping the Future and Beyond*	Tsalpara et al., 2021	To investigate how COVID-19 influenced popular culture and tourism in Greece and recommend sustainable tourism development post-pandemic.
4	*Diagnostic instrument design: teleworking efficiency index*	Maresca, 2024	To present a new diagnostic tool capable of assessing teleworking performance across various business sectors, including tourism.

5	*Evaluating the strategies and solutions to improve cultural and national tourism services*	Guamán et al. 2023	To propose a theoretical model to revitalise the tourism sector in Ecuador using both technological and non-technological solutions.
6	*Value co-creation and data-driven orientation: reflections on restaurant management practices during COVID-19 in Italy*	Polese, Botti & Monda, 2022	To investigate changes in restaurant managers' perceptions of ICT use during the COVID-19 pandemic.
7	*Digital cultural tourism: older adults' acceptance and use of digital cultural tourism services*	Tuomi et al., 2023	To explore the acceptance and use of digital technologies by older adults in cultural digital tourism, especially in the context of reduced mobility (e.g., COVID-19).
8	*Utilization of the Visiting Jogja Mobile Application as a Provider of Information Regarding Limitations of Tourism Activities During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Special Region of Yogyakarta*	Triastutiningsih & Rachmawati, 2022	To identify how the Visiting Jogja app provides information about restrictions on tourist activities during the pandemic and analyse the app's usage by tourists.
9	*Digital Nomadism an Opportunity for Low-Density Territories: Trás-os-Montes Lands Case*	Garcez, Correia & Carvalho, 2022	To investigate whether a region in Portugal has the potential to position itself as a destination for digital nomads.
10	*Thoughts on Spanish urban tourism in a post-pandemic reality: challenges and guidelines for a more balanced future*	Torres-Delgado et al., 2023	To identify the challenges faced by urban destinations in transitioning to the new tourism reality, focusing on mobility, ICTs, digitalization, sustainability, and governance.
11	*Modelling a smart tech user journey to decarbonise tourist accommodation*	Coghlan, Becken & Warren, 2023	To investigate how hotel managers use data generated by smart energy measurement systems to make sustainable decisions.
12	*Effects of information and communication technology improvement on revisit intention during covid-19*	Shabankareh, et al., 2023	To investigate the inter-relationship between ICT improvement, destination brand image, destination satisfaction, and how this influences tourists' intention to return during COVID-19.
13	*Online synchronous model of interpretive sustainable guiding in heritage sites: The avatar tourist visit*	Viñals et al., 2021	To propose new options and strategies to reconnect the public to heritage and offer safe and healthy tourism services.
14	*Will Macau's Restaurants Survive or Thrive after Entering the O2O Food Delivery Platform in the COVID-19 Pandemic?*	Cheong & Law, 2022	To explore the risks associated with the adoption of online-to-offline (O2O) platforms in accommodation and beverages (A&B).
15	*Hitchhiking: history, digitalisation and the future after the COVID-19 pandemic;*	Sienkiewicz & Adamiak, 2023	To discuss the developments and modern challenges in the ride-sharing culture, with a focus on the use of ICTs during the pandemic.
16	*An analysis of the competitiveness of the tourism industry in a context of economic recovery following the COVID19 pandemic*	Salinas Fernández et al., 2022	To identify the countries most affected by the pandemic, where tourism is crucial to GDP, to evaluate their vulnerability in recovery efforts.
17	*Sustainability, Tourism and Digitalization. The City Smart Approach in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Canary Islands)*	García & Battino, 2021	To highlight the role of ICTs in the island of Gran Canaria (Canary Islands) in promoting tourism during the pandemic.
18	*Leading Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism and Hospitality Within the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic*	Alekseeva, Kevorkova & Chernikina, 2023	To discuss the benefits of cutting-edge emerging technologies in containing COVID-19.
19	*How do micro, small, and medium enterprises (msmes) in Bali survive the pandemic? A qualitative study in*	Widiastini et al., 2023	To explore survival strategies adopted by micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to maintain business operations

	Buleleng, Tabanan, Gianyar, and Denpasar		during COVID-19.
20	*Resistance to the Adoption of Online Travel Agencies in Indonesia after Covid-19*	Oktavia & Abner, 2023	To analyze consumer resistance to adopting online travel agencies (OTAs) in post-Covid-19 Indonesia.
21	*Revitalizing Business Tourism in the European Union: Strategies for Growth*	Carvalho, 2023	To understand the determinants of business tourism spending, helping shape economic and marketing policies in the post-pandemic period.
22	*The Digital Platform Experience of a Leading Country in Wine Tourism: From COVID-19 to the New Era*	Marino & Pariso, 2022	To understand strategies for enhancing digital platform experiences for tourism destinations after COVID-19.
23	*The Impact of Eatmarna Application Usability on Improving Performance Expectancy, Facilitating the Practice of Rituals and Improving Spirituality Feelings during Umrah Amid the COVID-19 Outbreak*	Hassan, Salem & Refaat, 2022	To study the usability of mobile applications in enhancing tourist experiences.
24	*Variability of mobile phone network logins in the Białowieza National Park during the 2019 and 2020 summer holiday periods in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic*	Zbucki, 2022	To analyse visitor patterns in a park in a Polish city using mobile data, monitoring the movement and concentration of people via network connections.
25	*Social content as a key factor for the efficiency of digital tourism systems*	Mobini et al., 2024	To analyse the relationships between the factors affecting the efficiency of digital tourism systems.
26	*Web 2.0 Education Tools as Support in Digital Marketing: Tungurahua Case Study*	Armas-Arias et al., 2022	To measure the use of digital, technological, and communication tools and strategies employed by tourism businesses.
27	*System based on mixed reality for the tourist promotion of the Municipal Palace of Lima*	Vargas-Cuentas et al., 2021	To evaluate the tourist experience through a mixed reality (MR) system for promoting the Lima Municipal Palace.
28	*A policy proposal to deal with excessive cultural tourism*	Frey & Briviba, 2021	To propose the creation of "digital replicas" of cultural tourist attractions to enhance visitor experiences.
29	*Building Trust toward Sharing Economy Platforms beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic*	Dabija et al., 2022	To analyse the attitudes and behaviors of users of sharing economy platforms, such as Airbnb.
30	*Drivers of Growth and Catch-up in the Tourism Sector of Industrialized Economies*	Vu & Hartley 2022	To analyse investments and policies that drove tourism during the pandemic, with a view to identifying strategies applicable in the post-pandemic period.
31	*Implementation of an expanded decision-making technique to comment on Sweden readiness for digital tourism*	Sorooshian, 2021	To analyze which types of tourism are most likely to contribute to the recovery of tourism activities post-Covid-19, considering technological readiness.
32	*eLearning Courses for Tourism and Heritage during a Pandemic: The Case of 'Tourism Management at UNESCO World Heritage Sites*	Rosani et al., 2023	To analyse e-learning as a tool for developing a skilled workforce in the tourism sector.
33	*Live streaming in tourism and hospitality*	Lin, Fong & Law, 2022	To understand the use of live streaming in tourism and its potential impact on the industry.
34	*Artificial intelligence in hospitality and tourism and future research avenues*	Nannelli, Capone & Lazzeretti, 2023	To understand the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics in tourism and highlight their role in the industry, especially due to social distancing during the pandemic.

35	*COVID19 and Airbnb – Disrupting the Disruptor*	Dolnicar & Zare 2020	To reflect on the impact of the pandemic on Airbnb and other short-term rental platforms.

Source: Scopus, 2024

CONCLUSIONS

Long before the Covid-19 pandemic, consumer behavior in tourism had already been undergoing changes due to innovations, new technologies, and increased access to these developments, all of which contributed to certain shifts. This research identifies how factors related to the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of tourism, driving the adoption of new technologies across various sectors of the tourism industry, and even facilitating the creation of new business models.

The analysis of the studies reveals that ICTs have become essential for the competitiveness and resilience of tourist destinations, enabling businesses and localities to adapt to the demands and restrictions imposed by the health crisis. The research successfully achieved its aim of identifying, in more detail, how academia has monitored and reflected, through its publications, on the changes in the use of technologies following the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was observed that the debate has significantly expanded, as evidenced by the increasing number of publications and the substantial investments by companies in new technologies to enable and enhance tourist experiences.

Thus, this study highlighted the importance of the digital transformation of tourism by focusing on research related to the adoption of information and communication technologies as tools for improving and enhancing the competitiveness and resilience of destinations, including businesses in the sector. This has been achieved through the adoption of new tools, social media, or existing technologies, as well as the development of customized applications specific to the industry, such as apps designed to solve issues within the tourism sector.

Additionally, the study emphasized the significance of technological infrastructure, with research on 5G and mobile technology and their various applications in tourism. It also shed light on emerging changes that may impact the sector, such as digital nomadism, remote work, and teleworking, which are transforming how and when people travel and explore new destinations.

Moreover, it is believed that the combination of technological and non-technological solutions is the best option to achieve higher levels of competitiveness and efficiency in both national and international tourism after facing the adverse impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic (Guamán et al., 2023). Therefore, it is necessary to develop new avenues of academic research that explore the relationship between tourism and technology, considering the impacts of digitalization on business management and their digital maturity.

This includes investigating the relationship between technology adoption, tourist experience, and satisfaction, as well as exploring new sources of influence on tourists' consumption decisions, arising from the consolidation of new communication tools.

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IMPACT OF CRISES ON TOURIST FLOWS: BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: *Tourism is of high importance among economic sectors worldwide. The sector is also highly vulnerable to crises of any nature. The last global crisis that hit the planet was the COVID-19 pandemic. The extraordinary measures imposed by the governments all over the world resulted in unprecedented decrease in tourist arrivals and travel expenditures. The impact of crises on tourist flows is an important research topic as it helps describe the fluctuations and create models that could be used to predict the changes in the tourist flows in the context of future crises. The current paper presents a bibliometric analysis of publications about the impact of crises on tourist flows for the period 1998-August 2024 from Scopus database using VOSviewer software.*

KEYWORDS: *crises impact, tourist flows, bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer, Scopus*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a very important economic sector and many countries depend on it for their development and growth. It is an industry highly susceptible to external factors. Crises, no matter of their origin, have their impact on tourist behaviour. The most serious of them hit the sector in 2020 with the spread of COVID-19 virus. Unprecedented measures were imposed on travel, hospitality and restaurant business, tourist sites, cultural and sport events, which affected tour operators, travel agents, tours guides and all supporting activities as well. According to UNWTO the pandemic caused 74% drop in international arrivals in 2020, together with USD 1.3 trillion loss in international tourism receipts and over 100 million direct tourism jobs put at risk. This is why studying the crises and their impact on tourist flows is a very important topic. The current paper aims to perform a detailed bibliometric analysis of the scientific publications in this area in Scopus database.

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METHODOLOGY

The current paper uses the 6-steps bibliometric analysis model of Varadzhakova and Raykova (2024) which includes software selection, database selection, keywords selection, content analysis of the results, other analyses (year, author, source title, citation, co-citation, co-authorship, bibliographic coupling, etc.) and bibliometric mapping realization.

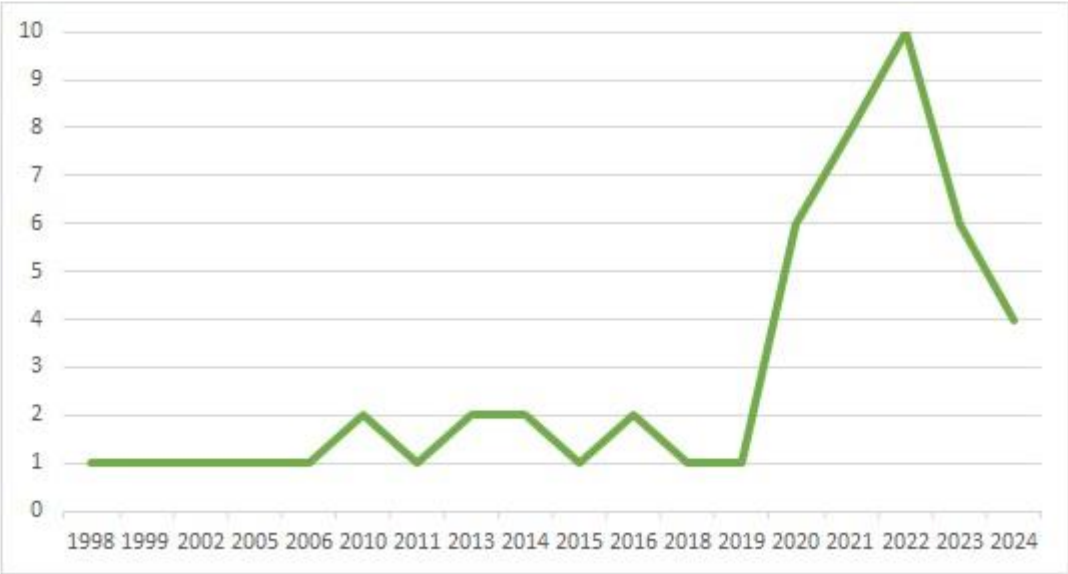
For the purposes of the present research the VOSviewer was chosen. It is a freely available computer program which is useful for displaying large bibliometric maps in an easy-to-interpret way (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). Scopus database was selected as one of the biggest databases for scientific publications, abstracts and citations worldwide which covers 330 disciplines (Elsevier, 2024).

The keywords were chosen according to the paper title: "cris*s impact" and "touris* flows". The symbols * were used in order for the search engine to give results for the word "crisis" in singular and plural, as well for tourist, tourism, touristic, etc. After that a manual content analysis of the results was made in order to include only the ones with proper content in further research. Finally, the analysis of the publications by different criteria and the bibliometric mapping were executed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The search using the selected keywords "cris*s impact" and "touris* flows" showed 104 results. After the content analysis 51 were chosen to be part of the current research. They were published between 1998 and August 2024. The highest scientific interest on the topic is shown in 2022 with 10 publications which can be explained with the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 there were 8 researches published, followed by 2020 (6) and 2023 (6). As the current research has been executed in September 2024 the results for the current year (4 published documents) are not complete. Figure 1 shows the publication distribution by years. The years with no researches published are omitted from the diagram.

Figure 1. Publication distribution by years

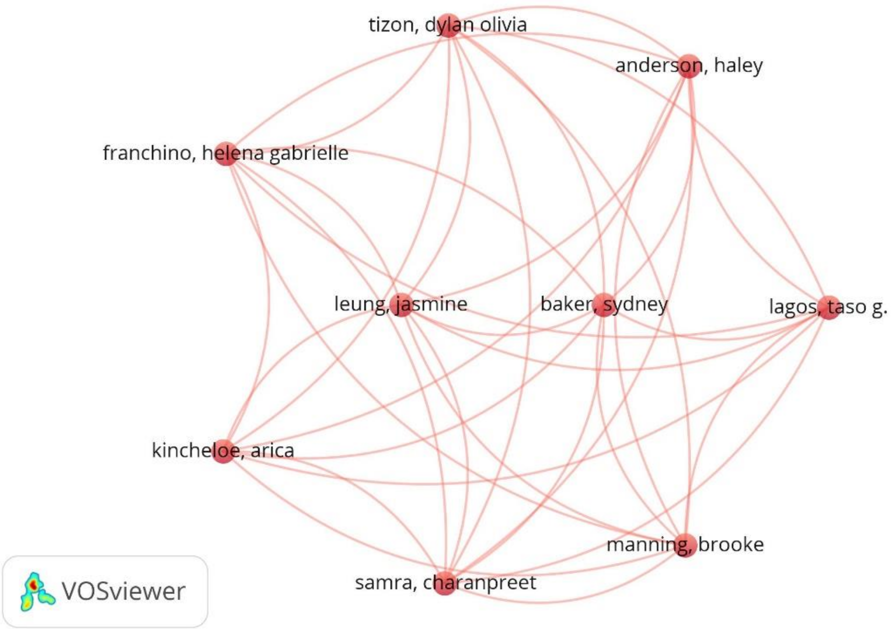


The results included in the research are published in 41 journals. The largest number of publications are in Tourism Management (4), followed by Journal of Travel Research (3), Sustainability (Switzerland) (3), Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (3) and Tourism Economics (2). According to Scimago Journal & Country Rank for 2023 the journal Tourism Management is in Q1in subject category Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Management. Journal of Travel Research is in Q1 in categories Geography, Planning and Development and Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Management. Sustainability (Switzerland) is in Q1 in Geography, Planning and Development. Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes is ranked in Q3 in Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Management and Tourism Economics with Q1 in categories Geography, Planning and Development and Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Management. 19 of the 51 results included in the current research have different level of open access.

Published documents included in the current paper are discussed in 13 subject areas. The largest number of researches are in Social Sciences (33), Business Management (32), Economics, Econometrics and Finance (11) and Environmental Science (10). The other areas have between 1 and 4 researches published in them. The number exceeds the total numbers of publications included in the current research because the journals are indexed in several areas at once.

The co-authorship by authors showed 129 researchers in 50 clusters. The largest one includes 9 authors. The total link strength in it is 8 (Figure 2). The analysis was made using the limitation of maximum number of authors per document set to 10.

Figure 2. Co-authorship by authors

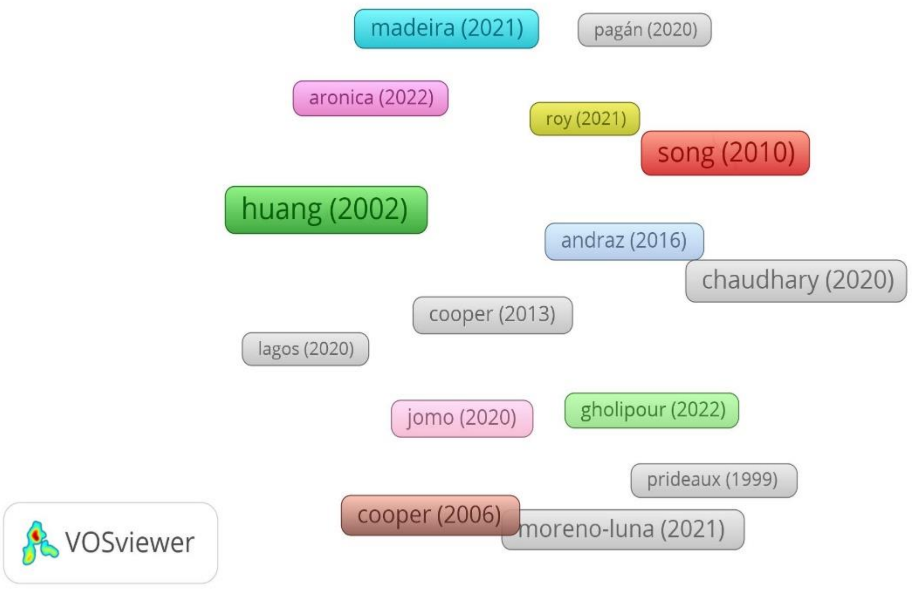


As per the co-authorship by organization there are 106 organizations included in the research. The largest cluster includes 7 organizations: Griffith University, Australia; I-Shou University, Taiwan; Swinburne University of Technology, Australia; University of Copenhagen, Denmark; University of Johannesburg, South Africa; University of Mauritius, Mauritius and Western Sidney University, Australia. The total link strength in this cluster is 6. VOSviewer arranged the other organizations in 48 smaller clusters.

The co-authorship by country was executed among 35 countries. They were sorted in 18 clusters. The largest ones are 2 and include 5 countries each; The first one includes Australia, Finland, Iran, Macao and Malaysia and the second one – Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, Malta and Montenegro. Australia is the leader with total link strength of 12 and 9 documents, followed by Italy with 6 documents and total link strength of 4 and China with 5 documents and total link strength of 3. 10 countries have total link strength of 0. The total link strength of all the countries is 34.

The citation analysis showed that the most cited documents are Earthquake Devastation and Recovery in Tourism: The Taiwan Case by Huang, J.H. and Min, J.C.H. (2002) with 241 citations, followed by Impacts of the financial and economic crisis on tourism in Asia published by Song, H. and Lin, S. (2010) with 170 citations. They are presented on Figure 3 with the largest letters.

Figure 3. Citation analysis by documents



The highest number of citations has Taiwan – 271 from 3 documents, Australia -239 (9 documents) and Hong Kong – 175 (2 documents).

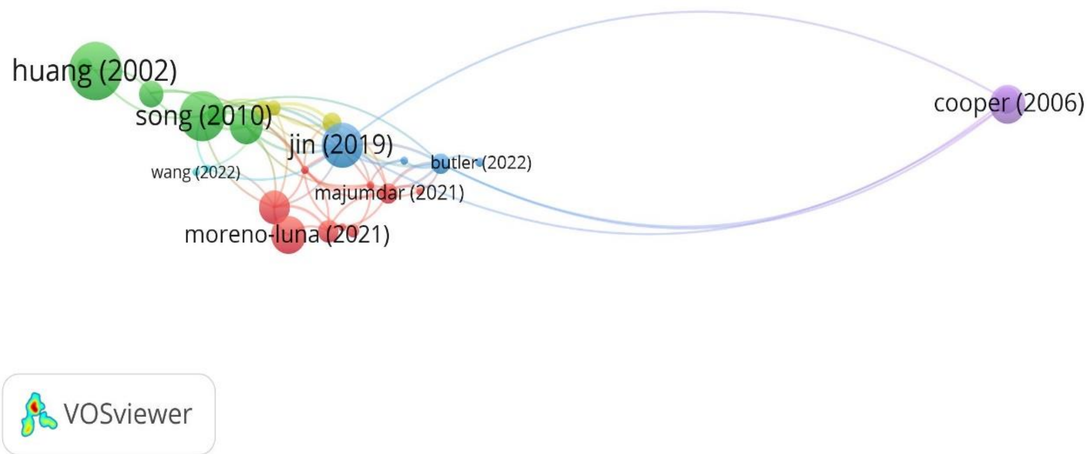
The co-citation analysis executed among 2096 authors showed that the cited references with the highest total link strength are The Effects of Natural Disasters on International Tourism: A Global Analysis, authored by Rossello et al. (2020) in Tourism Management with total link strength of 222, followed by The Role of Business Model Innovation in the Hospitality Industry during the COVID-19 Crisis, published by Breier et all. (2021) in International Journal of Hospitality Management and COVID-19 Impact on the Hospitality Industry: Exploratory Study of Financial-Slack-Driven Risk Preparedness by Wieczorek-Kosmala (2021) in International Journal of Hospitality Management, both with total link strength of 205.

A co-citation analysis by authors was also performed among 3189 authors. The results showed that C.M. Hall has the highest total link strength of 3335, followed by H. Song with total link strength of 3280.

The bibliographic coupling analysis was executed among 41 publications that met the limitation of at least one citation of a document. The highest total link strength of 29 have the papers of Cooper (2013, 2006) with one and the same title Japanese tourism and the SARS epidemic of 2003, published, respectively, as a book chapter in Tourism Crises: Management Responses and Theoretical Insight and as an article in Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing.

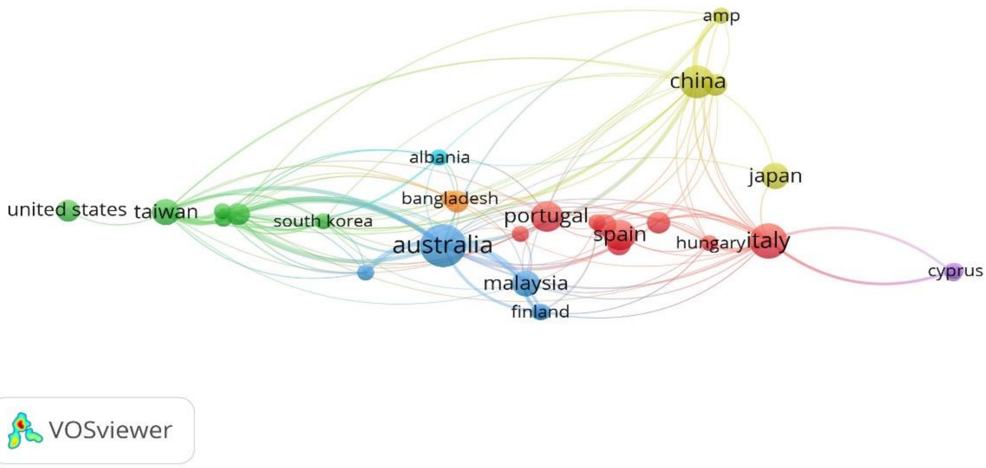
Figure 4 represents the clustering of the bibliographic coupling. VOSviewer have created 6 clusters of documents. Cluster one (the red one) includes 9 items and is led by Tourism and sustainability in times of covid-19: The case of Spain, published by Moreno-Luna et al. (2021) with total link strength of 3. Cluster 2 (the green one) includes 6 items and the leading publication with total link strength of 4 is Earthquake devastation and recovery in tourism: The Taiwan case, authored by J.H. Huang and J.C.H. Min. Cluster 3 (the blue one) and cluster 4 (the yellow one) consist of 3 items each, while cluster 5 (the purple one) and cluster 6 (the electric blue one) consist of 2 items each.

Figure 4. Bibliographic coupling by documents



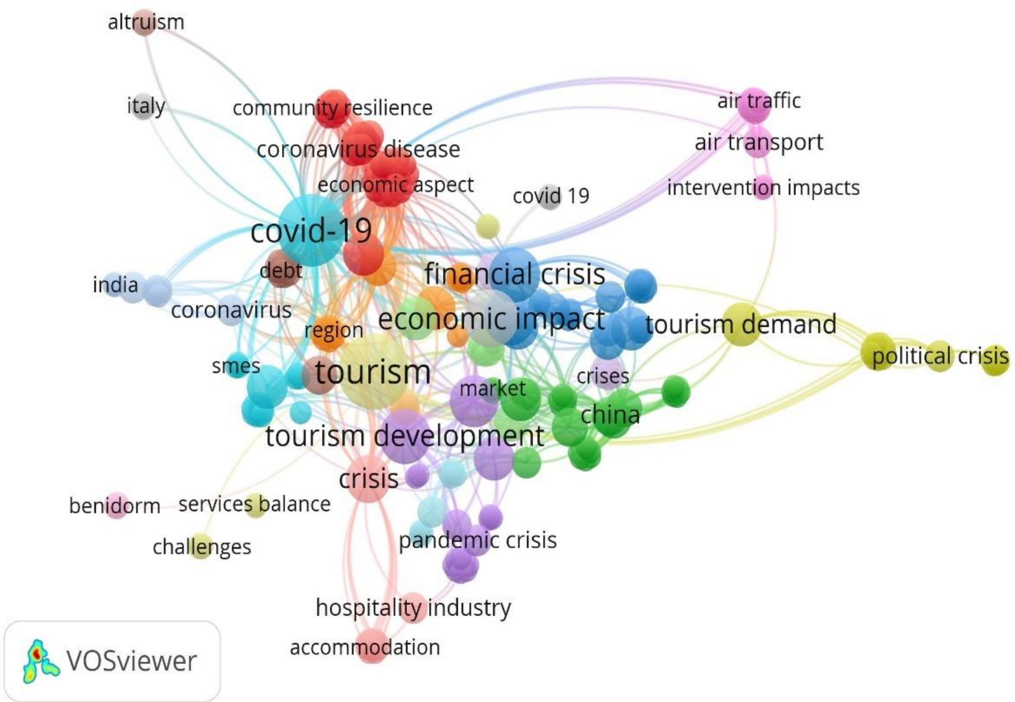
The bibliographic coupling analysis by country (35 in total) resulted in Australia having the highest total link strength of 608 with 239 citations in 9 documents, followed by China with total link strength of 318 and South Africa with total link strength of 288. Figure 5 presents the clustering of the results grouped in 7 clusters. The largest cluster is the red one with 9 items (Italy, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom, India, Russian Federation, Turkey, Hungary and Switzerland.

Figure 5. Bibliographic coupling by country



The co-occurrence analysis was performed among 314 keywords using the full counting method. The keywords with highest total link strength are "tourism" (154), "covid-19" (149), "tourism management" (99), "financial crisis" (90) and "tourism economics" (89). VOSviewer grouped the keywords in 20 clusters, the largest of which (in red) contain 36 items (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Co-occurrence analysis



CONCLUSIONS

The obtained results show that since the beginning of the COVID-19 health crisis there is a significant increase in the scientific publications on the topic of the current paper. The largest number of researches are published in reputable journals indexed in high quartiles in the Scopus database. It is very important for this interest to continue and the further studying of the crises impact on tourist flows to help develop new scientific models for predicting and overcoming the crises that affect the tourism industry. Understanding crises and disasters, their life cycle and potential impacts can help develop strategies for countries and organizations to deal with such phenomena and stop or reduce the burden of their impact on business and society, despite their complexity (Ritchie, 2004).

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Veliko Tarnovo/Sofia, Bulgaria, 3-4 October 2024

GENERATIVE AI, SUSTAINABLE TOURISM, AND GLOBAL ENGLISH: TRANSFORMING THE WAY THE WORLD TRAVELS

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ABSTRACT: *This study builds upon previous research that examined the integration of big data analytics (BDA) and artificial intelligence (AI) in the tourism industry (TI). The current research aims to highlight the remarkable potential of Generative AI and the Metaverse in enhancing the creation and customization of a new concept of sustainable tourism. By leveraging these advanced technologies, the tourism industry can offer more personalized and eco-friendly travel experiences, thereby promoting sustainability.*

Furthermore, this study explores the role of Global English in the context of AI-driven tourism and addresses the challenges that AI poses to language learning, preservation, and heritage. As AI continues to evolve rapidly, it has the potential to replace certain analytical and decision-making capabilities of human beings, enabling the development of innovative services and the intelligent processing of large amounts of data. Despite its widespread recognition, AI is still not extensively utilized in the tourism industry.

Expanding upon the insights from the previous study, this research delves deeper into the implications of AI on language and culture. It emphasizes the importance of balancing technological advancements with the preservation of linguistic diversity. By exploring these dimensions, the study aims to provide valuable insights into how Generative AI, sustainable tourism, and Global English can collectively transform the way the world travels.

KEYWORDS: *Generative-AI, Metaverse, sustainable tourism, nlp, Global English*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the tourism industry has witnessed a rapid transformation driven by advancements in technology. Among these, Generative AI has emerged as a game-changer, reshaping the way we perceive and experience travel. Remarkably, within a short span of about a year, our predictions in the previous paper, "Artificial Intelligence and Global English: An

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Ongoing Challenge for Sustainable Tourism" (Santorelli and Catullo, 2023), about the potential impact of Generative AI on tourism are becoming a reality.

This paper delves into the evolving landscape of tourism and explores how these technological innovations are revolutionizing the industry. Building upon previous research that examined the integration of big data analytics (BDA) and artificial intelligence (AI) in the tourism industry, this study highlights the remarkable potential of Generative AI and the Metaverse in enhancing the creation and customization of sustainable tourism. By leveraging these advanced technologies, the tourism industry can offer more personalized and eco-friendly travel experiences, thereby promoting sustainability.

Furthermore, this research explores the role of Global English in the context of AI-driven tourism and addresses the challenges that AI poses to language learning, preservation, and heritage. Expanding upon the insights from previous studies, this research delves deeper into the implications of AI on language and culture. It emphasizes the importance of balancing technological advancements with the preservation of linguistic diversity.

As AI continues to evolve rapidly, it has the potential to replace certain analytical and decision-making capabilities of human beings, enabling the development of innovative services and the intelligent processing of large amounts of data. Despite its widespread recognition, AI is still not extensively utilized in the tourism industry.

By exploring these dimensions, the study aims to provide valuable insights into how Generative AI, sustainable tourism, and Global English can collectively transform the way the world travels.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comprehensive approach to analyze the impact of Generative AI on sustainable tourism and the role of Global English. The research methodology is divided into two main phases:

Literature Review: A review of existing literature on the application of big data analytics (BDA) and artificial intelligence (AI) in the tourism industry was conducted. This includes examining previous studies, industry reports, and academic papers to establish a theoretical framework and identify key trends and challenges.

Data Analysis: The study involved analyzing previous research and data from company reports. Additionally, practical applications of Generative AI and the Metaverse were explored by testing chatbots and other AI services currently available to tourists. This provided valuable insights into how these technologies create personalized and sustainable travel experiences, as well as their implications for language learning, preservation, and heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics (BDA) has revolutionized the tourism industry, offering innovative solutions for enhancing customer experiences, optimizing operations, and promoting sustainable practices. Building on our previous study (Santorelli and Catullo, 2023), this literature review delves deeper into how the research and scenarios have evolved, shedding light on the current trends and future opportunities in the field. The study by Benaddi et al. (2024) provides a detailed overview of the types and evolutionary process of chatbots in the tourism industry, along with their classification and functions. According to the authors, chatbots are extremely effective in improving customer service and facilitating operations across industries. Similarly, Dukic (2024) studies the tuning of AI chatbots to cultural environments, highlighting the complexities and tactics in making chatbots individually personalized for culture-specific user preferences and anticipations worldwide. In a similar vein, Goel et al. (2022) address the transformative role of AI in tourism, providing that AI technologies disrupt the sector by enhancing customer experience, optimizing operational activities, and enabling new business models during integration with Society 5.0. Sharma et al. (2023) explore how AI services are revolutionizing hotel business performance. Their findings reveal that AI not only enhances hotel operations but also significantly improves customer satisfaction and drives business growth. Dalipi, Kastrati, and Öberg (2023) provide a systematic mapping review on AI's impact on sustainable tourism. Their research suggests that AI can play a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism practices by optimizing resource use, reducing waste, and boosting overall efficiency. Xu and Li (2020) contribute to this discussion by developing an evaluation model for ecotourism service quality based on artificial neural networks. Their insights highlight how AI can be leveraged to assess and enhance the quality of ecotourism services. The construction of intelligent tourism platforms is explored by Du and Zhao (2023), who use Wudang Mountain as a case study to demonstrate how AI can create smart tourism platforms that enhance visitor experiences through personalized recommendations and real-time information. Xu (2023) investigates the development of smart tourism systems based on AI, highlighting the potential of AI to create intelligent systems that enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of tourism operations. Yang et al. (2023) discuss the design and optimization of tourism information systems using AI and machine learning, demonstrating how AI can improve the accuracy and relevance of information provided to tourists. Yu and Wang (2023) present a smart tourism route planning system based on machine learning algorithms, showing how AI can optimize travel routes and enhance the overall travel experience for tourists.

Similarly, Huang, Liu, and Peng (2024) present a recommendation system for tourist attractions based on AI algorithms, demonstrating how AI can provide personalized recommendations to tourists, thereby improving their travel experiences and satisfaction. Sun (2024) conducts a systematic study on the application of big data and AI in tourism social media, showing how AI can analyze social media data, identify trends, and provide valuable insights for tourism marketing. Xin (2023) evaluates the satisfaction and optimization of tourism e-commerce users based on AI technology, illustrating how AI can enhance the user experience in tourism e-commerce platforms by providing personalized recommendations and improving service quality.

The integration of AI-powered personalization and emotional intelligence in service marketing for transformative tourism experiences is explored by Semwal et al. (2024). Their research highlights the potential of AI to create highly personalized and emotionally engaging travel experiences, enhancing the overall satisfaction of tourists.

Our research focused also on how multilingualism and communication are also critical aspects of AI in tourism. Henry and MacIntyre (2024) investigate the role of multilingualism and willingness to communicate in community contexts, underscoring the importance of language skills and communication in enhancing tourist interactions and experiences. Ziegler (2013) addresses the challenges of multilingualism and language education in tourism, emphasizing the importance of language skills in promoting cultural understanding. Zhu (2020) explores the application of AI in foreign language teaching, highlighting the potential of AI to improve language learning outcomes, which is relevant to the tourism sector as it can enhance communication between tourists and service providers.

Finally, future trends and predictions in the tourism sector are discussed by analyzing a report by Booking.com (2023), which outlines seven predictions for the creative reimagination of travel in 2023. The report discusses trends such as sustainable travel, the rise of remote work, and the increasing use of AI in personalizing travel experiences.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal the transformative impact of Generative AI on the travel and tourism industry, highlighting its potential to address key challenges and enhance the overall travel experience.

The Role of Generative AI in Transforming Travel and Tourism. Generative AI is giving the travel industry a facelift by addressing challenges such as time-consuming booking systems, limited customer support, and the need for personalized travel experiences. By leveraging AI, the travel industry can offer more efficient, engaging, and sustainable travel solutions. Here eight key use cases of Generative AI in travel and tourism:

- *Maximize Bookings and Revenue*: Generative AI uses machine learning algorithms to analyze vast amounts of customer data, such as past bookings, demographics, and browsing behaviour. This allows travel companies to provide tailored travel suggestions, increasing bookings and revenue (Sun, 2024).

- *Streamline Planning with AI-Powered Personalized Itineraries*: AI can create personalized travel itineraries based on individual preferences and interests. This helps travelers plan their trips more efficiently and enjoy customized experiences (Xin, 2023).

- *Enhance Customer Engagement and Boost Sales via 24/7 Virtual Travel Assistants:* Generative AI enables the development of virtual travel assistants that provide customer support around the clock. These assistants can answer questions, resolve issues, and offer travel recommendations, enhancing customer engagement and satisfaction (Yang et al., 2023).

- *Increase Customer Base with Targeted Offers and Marketing Campaigns*: AI-driven marketing campaigns can target specific customer segments with relevant offers and promotions. This increases the effectiveness of marketing efforts and helps attract more customers (Semwal et al. 2024).

- *Overcome Language Barriers with Instant Translations:* Generative AI can provide real-time translations, making it easier for travelers to communicate and navigate in foreign countries.

- *Boost Profits with Dynamic Pricing Strategies:* AI can optimize pricing packages dynamically based on demand, competition, and other factors. This ensures that travel companies can meet customer expectations while maximizing profits (Sharma et al., 2023).

- *Enhance Traveler Interaction through AI-Driven Content:* Generative AI can create engaging and informative content, such as travel guides and promotional materials. This enhances traveler interaction and travel offerings (Du and Zhao (2023).

- *Provide Immersive Holiday Experiences with Virtual Tours:* AI-generated virtual tours provide immersive holiday experiences, allowing travelers to explore destinations virtually before making a booking. This serves as a powerful marketing tool for travel companies. Saudi Arabia used VR technology to let digital tourists explore Hengra, its first UNESCO World Heritage Site (Royal Commission for AlUla, 2023). Generative AI helps travel companies create detailed virtual tours, showcasing their offerings, building trust, reducing booking hesitations, and boosting satisfaction. Customized tours can enhance personal connections to destinations.

McKinsey reports that businesses investing in AI tools experience a revenue uplift of 3% to 15%, offering a positive outlook for the travel industry amidst economic turbulence. There is increased enthusiasm for in-destination activities, a growing interest in offbeat locales, and a significant return of baby boomer travelers, all contributing to positive travel trends. To drive sales, travel businesses can experiment with innovative marketing strategies such as VR tours, dynamic pricing, and AI-powered content (Intuz, 2023).

Technologies such as AI, robotics, virtual reality (VR), chatbots, and language translators have significantly enhanced the tourism experience by improving efficiency, convenience, and customer satisfaction in India. Indeed, with its rich history and growing tourism sector, India stands to benefit immensely from these technologies. AI can help streamline processes like booking, transport, and accommodation, making tourism more attractive and efficient (Goel et al., 2022). AI will play a central role in revolutionizing the tourism industry, driving economic growth and improving tourist experiences.

Reimagining Tourism: The New Traveler's Perspective. In 2023 Booking.com, a leading digital travel platform, conducted extensive research with over 24,000 travelers across 32 countries and territories to understand how travel will be re-imagined (Booking.com, 2023). People around the world felt significantly more optimistic about traveling compared to 2022. Despite global instability, nearly three-quarters (72%) of travelers believed that traveling will always be worth it. The mood has shifted from hopeful uncertainty to bold adaptability. While 2022 marked the triumphant return of travel, 2023 was about creatively reimagining travel amidst the chaos. Travelers were exploring all possibilities to find the right balance in a world full of contradictions. In a time of general upheaval, characterized by war, increased societal polarization, rising inflation, and urgent concerns about climate change, people are experiencing a multi-directional tug-of-war. They are working to reconcile what is important to them with the demands of everyday life. The 2023 travel predictions reflected this sentiment, showing that travelers' needs are moving in various directions to adapt to changing times.

This research revealed seven emerging travel predictions (Booking.com, 2023):

Preppers in Paradise: Travelers are increasingly seeking off-grid vacations to escape reality and learn survival skills. This trend is driven by a desire to disconnect from modern comforts and prepare for potential future crises. Nearly half of global travelers want their travel experiences to have a more back-to-basics feel, with many looking for off-grid style vacations to escape from reality and switch off from modern life.

Delight in the Discomfort Zone: People are looking to push their boundaries and experience travel outside their comfort zones. This includes niche experiences and extreme adventures that allow travelers to explore new aspects of themselves. Travelers are seeking out destinations and activities that challenge them and provide a sense of accomplishment.

Saving to Splurge: Despite economic uncertainties, travelers are prioritizing holidays and are willing to save money in other areas to splurge on travel experiences that matter most to them. This trend reflects a shift in consumer behavior where people are more focused on creating memorable experiences rather than material possessions.

Glamorizing the Good ol' Days: Nostalgia is playing a significant role in travel choices, with people seeking experiences that remind them of simpler times. This includes retro-themed vacations and activities that evoke a sense of the past. Travelers are looking to reconnect with their roots and relive cherished memories.

Virtual Voyages: The rise of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) is transforming how people experience travel. These technologies allow travelers to explore destinations virtually before committing to a trip, enhancing their overall travel planning process. Virtual voyages provide an immersive experience that can help travelers make informed decisions about their trips.

Travel as Self-Care: Travel is increasingly being seen as a form of self-care, with people seeking destinations and experiences that promote wellness and mental health. This includes wellness retreats, nature escapes, and activities that foster relaxation and rejuvenation. Travelers are prioritizing their well-being and looking for ways to recharge and reset.

Eco-Conscious Escapes: Sustainability continues to be a major focus for travelers, with a growing interest in eco-friendly accommodations and experiences. Travelers are looking for ways to minimize their environmental impact while still enjoying meaningful travel experiences. This trend reflects a broader awareness of environmental issues and a desire to make responsible travel choices.

These predictions reflect the evolving needs and desires of travelers as they navigate a world of contradictions and chaos. Booking.com report highlights how people are creatively reimagining travel to adapt to changing times and find balance in their lives. The analysis of the survey results carried out by travel agencies and other relevant boards, revealed several key findings regarding the impact of Generative AI on sustainable tourism and the role of Global English:

Enhanced Personalization: The data indicated that Generative AI significantly enhances the personalization of travel experiences. Travelers reported higher satisfaction levels when their itineraries were based on their preferences and interests. AI-driven recommendations were found to be more accurate and relevant compared to traditional methods (Xin, Y., 2023).

Increased Interest in Sustainable Tourism: There was a notable increase in interest in sustainable tourism options among travelers. Generative AI's ability to suggest eco-friendly accommodations, transportation, and activities played a crucial role in promoting sustainable travel practices. Respondents expressed a willingness to choose sustainable options when they were easily accessible and well-promoted.

Improved Customer Support: The implementation of AI-powered virtual travel assistants was positively received by travelers. These assistants provided 24/7 support, answered queries, and resolved issues promptly, leading to improved customer satisfaction. The convenience and efficiency of AI-driven support were highlighted as major benefits.

Language and Cultural Preservation: The study found that while AI-driven tourism offers numerous advantages, it also poses challenges to language learning and cultural preservation. There is a risk of linguistic homogenization as Global English becomes more dominant. However, respondents emphasized the importance of balancing technological advancements with efforts to preserve linguistic diversity and cultural heritage.

Economic Impact: The integration of Generative AI in the tourism industry has the potential to boost economic growth by attracting more tourists and increasing spending. The data showed that AI-driven marketing campaigns and personalized travel experiences contributed to higher booking rates and increased revenue for travel agencies.

*Challenges and Concerns***:** Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges and concerns were identified. These include data privacy issues, the need for continuous technological updates, and the potential loss of human touch in customer interactions. Addressing these challenges is essential for the successful implementation of AI in the tourism industry.

Overall, the results demonstrate that Generative AI is transforming the tourism industry by enhancing personalization, promoting sustainability, and improving customer support. However, it is crucial to address the challenges and ensure a balanced approach to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity.

DISCUSSION

Handling multilingual interactions with AI-powered travel chatbots. AI-powered travel chatbots are virtual assistants designed to enhance the travel experience by providing continuous support and personalized recommendations. Here are some key features and benefits:

1. *24/7 Availability*: Travel chatbots are available around the clock, offering assistance whenever needed. This is crucial in the travel industry, where unexpected challenges can arise at any time1.
2. *Personalized Services*: These chatbots can provide tailored recommendations based on user preferences and travel history, making the experience more relevant and enjoyable2.
3. *Booking Assistance*: They help with booking flights, hotels, and other travel-related services, streamlining the process and saving time for travelers.
4. *Real-Time Information*: Travel chatbots offer up-to-date information on destinations, activities, and accommodations, ensuring travelers have the latest details readily available.
5. *Human-Like Conversations*: They engage users in natural, human-like text conversations, making interactions more pleasant and effective.
6. *Integration with Platforms*: These chatbots can be integrated into various platforms such as websites, mobile apps, and social media channels, making them easily accessible to users.

Research on chatbots in tourism is relatively new, particularly in Asian countries like Indonesia, Korea, and India, reflecting growing interest in AI integration in the sector. AI technology is expected to grow significantly, with a nearly 10% rise in adoption by 2023, and the travel and tourism industry will benefit the most (Benaddi et al., 2024).

AI is becoming essential to tourism, enhancing productivity, efficiency, and customer satisfaction. As the sector moves towards full automation, especially in emerging nations like India, AI offers great potential for sustainable growth and economic expansion in tourism.

Travel chatbots handle multilingual interactions by leveraging advanced natural language processing (NLP) and machine translation technologies. Here are some key aspects:

1. *Language Detection*: Chatbots can automatically detect the user's language based on their input and switch to that language seamlessly.
2. *Machine Translation*: They use machine translation services to translate messages in real-time, ensuring smooth communication between the user and the chatbot.
3. *Pre-Trained Language Models:* These chatbots are often equipped with pre-trained language models that understand and respond in multiple languages.
4. *Contextual Understanding*: Advanced NLP allows chatbots to understand the context of the conversation, even when switching between languages.
5. *Seamless Handoffs:* If the chatbot encounters a complex query, it can seamlessly transfer the conversation to a human agent who speaks the user's language.
6. *Customization*: Businesses can customize chatbots to support specific languages relevant to their customer base, enhancing user experience.

By incorporating these features, travel chatbots can effectively manage multilingual interactions, providing a more inclusive and satisfying experience for users worldwide.

However, handling multilingual interactions can be quite challenging. Here are some key challenges:

1. *Language Proficiency:* Ensuring that the chatbot accurately understands and responds in multiple languages can be difficult, especially with languages that have complex grammar and syntax (Ziegler, 2013).
2. *Cultural Nuances*: Different languages come with unique cultural contexts and idiomatic expressions. Capturing these nuances is essential for effective communication but can be challenging (Henry and MacIntyre, 2024).
3. *Consistency*: Maintaining consistency in responses across different languages can be tough, especially when updates or changes need to be implemented.
4. *Technical Limitations*: Machine translation and NLP technologies are constantly improving, but they still have limitations, particularly with less common languages (Henry and MacIntyre, 2024).
5. *Integration*: Integrating multilingual capabilities into existing systems and ensuring seamless handoffs between languages can be complex (Ziegler, 2013).
6. *User Expectations*: Users expect high quality, accurate interactions in their preferred language. Meeting these expectations consistently can be challenging.

Addressing these challenges requires continuous improvement in AI technologies, thorough testing, and a deep understanding of linguistic and cultural differences.

AI chatbots can handle cultural nuances in customer interactions by leveraging several strategies and technologies:

1. *Localization:* Beyond simple translation, localization involves adapting the chatbot to understand regional dialects, slang, and idiomatic expressions. This ensures that the chatbot communicates in a way that feels natural to the user.

2. *Cultural Sensitivity:* Chatbots can be programmed to recognize and respect cultural norms and etiquette. For example, they can adjust their tone and formality based on the cultural context of the user.

3. *Continuous Learning*: Implementing continuous learning algorithms allows chatbots to adapt to user interactions and feedback over time. This helps them stay updated with evolving cultural trends and preferences.

4. *Collaboration with local experts*: Working with native speakers and cultural experts can help ensure that the chatbot's responses are culturally appropriate and sensitive.

5. *Extensive Testing:* Conducting thorough testing with local users before full deployment can help identify and resolve any cultural missteps. This ensures that the chatbot is well-received by the target audience.

6. *Customizable Responses:* Allowing users to select their preferred language and cultural context can enhance the chatbot's effectiveness in handling cultural nuances.

By incorporating these strategies, AI chatbots can provide more personalized and culturally aware interactions, leading to better customer satisfaction and engagement.

One notable case study is Microsoft's Xiaoice, which has been highly successful in China. Xiaoice is an AI chatbot that engages users in casual, friendly conversations and even writes poetry, aligning well with Chinese social media culture (Dukic, 2024)

Xiaoice is designed to effectively engage with Chinese users by understanding their unique communication styles and cultural nuances. It can detect and respond to the emotional tone of conversations, making interactions feel more personal. Additionally, Xiaoice continuously learns from user interactions, allowing it to stay updated with evolving cultural trends and preferences. This approach has helped Xiaoice build a strong user base and maintain high levels of engagement. This case study highlights the importance of cultural adaptation in creating effective and engaging AI chatbots.

Global English or multilingual chatbots? Multilingual chatbots that converse and support people in their native language are more likely to be accepted by the local population than those that do not. However, chatbots tend to work better when using Global English for several reasons:

Wider Audience Reach: Global English is a simplified version of English that is widely understood by non-native speakers. Using it allows chatbots to communicate effectively with a broader audience.

Clarity and Simplicity: Global English emphasizes clear and simple language, reducing the chances of misunderstandings. This is particularly important for chatbots, which rely on precise language to interpret and respond accurately.

Consistency: Using a standardized form of English helps maintain consistency in chatbot responses, making interactions more predictable and reliable for users.

Ease of Implementation: Developing and maintaining a chatbot in Global English is often easier than supporting multiple languages, especially for businesses with limited resources.

Reduced Ambiguity: Global English avoids idiomatic expressions and complex grammar, which can be challenging for chatbots to interpret correctly. This reduces ambiguity and improves the accuracy of responses.

While the integration of Global English in AI-driven tourism facilitates communication and accessibility, it also raises concerns about linguistic homogenization and cultural erosion. The dominance of English as a global language may overshadow local languages and cultural nuances. It is imperative to strike a balance between leveraging Global English for convenience and preserving linguistic diversity. Efforts should be made to incorporate multilingual support in AI systems to cater to a diverse traveler base and promote cultural heritage.

Chatbots for All-Inclusive Travel: An Emerging Innovation. The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of Generative AI in the tourism industry, particularly in the realms of personalization, sustainability, and customer support. The partial realization of predictions made in the previous paper, "Artificial Intelligence and Global English: An Ongoing Challenge for Sustainable Tourism" (Santorelli and Catullo, 2023), highlights the dynamic nature of technological advancements and their immediate impact on the tourism sector. In our previous study, we envisioned a chatbot capable of organizing an international trip by providing date, budget, and other relevant information. To date, the full personalization and all-inclusive service that covers travel, accommodation, itineraries, and other specific requests have not yet been fully realized. Integrating data from multiple sources, such as flights, hotels, and local attractions, remains a complex task. Many services rely on specific databases, which can limit the comprehensiveness of the information provided. Personalization requires advanced algorithms and extensive data to create trips tailored to individual preferences, including dietary restrictions and niche interests. Additionally, providing real-time updates on flight availability, hotel bookings, and local events requires constant data synchronization and reliable sources. Handling multiple languages and cultural nuances adds another layer of complexity, ensuring accurate translations and culturally appropriate responses for global usability. Building trust with users is vital, as they need to feel confident that the chatbot can handle their requests accurately and securely, especially when dealing with personal information and payment details. Current AI and NLP technologies still have limitations in understanding and processing complex queries, which can lead to misunderstandings and less effective interactions. Ensuring compliance with various regulations, such as data privacy laws, across different countries can also be challenging for global services. Despite these challenges, companies like Google, Expedia, Airbnb, and Kayak are investing in AI-powered trip planners to enhance customer experience and move towards a more comprehensive service (The Verge, 2024).

For example, Google's Gemini is introducing new trip planning capabilities. It can now research publicly available information alongside specific details like flight times and hotel bookings to create custom, multiday vacation itineraries almost instantly—tasks that would otherwise take days or weeks of manual planning. However, this technology is still in development, as our study found that flight availability was limited to Google Flights, which may restrict the service's overall scope.

The example provided illustrates how technology is paving the way for a new era of travel, reshaping the traditional role of travel agencies. To achieve a seamless, all-encompassing travel service, further advancements in AI and data processing are needed.

CONCLUSIONS

Generative AI has proven to be a powerful tool in creating tailored travel itineraries that cater to individual preferences, thereby increasing traveler satisfaction. Its ability to promote sustainable tourism by suggesting eco-friendly options aligns with the global movement towards responsible travel. The economic benefits of AI in tourism are evident, with increased booking rates and revenue growth for travel agencies. Nonetheless, challenges such as data privacy, the need for continuous technological updates, and the potential loss of human touch in customer interactions must be addressed to fully harness the potential of AI.

Future research should focus on developing AI systems that are ethically sound, culturally sensitive, and capable of preserving the linguistic diversity and richness of our global heritage. Collaboration between AI developers, tourism professionals, and policymakers is crucial to creating a sustainable and inclusive tourism ecosystem. By addressing these challenges and leveraging the potential of Generative AI, the tourism industry can continue to innovate and transform the way the world travels.

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FOOD DELIVERY AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC – BENEFITS AND HARMS

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ABSTRACT: *The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about many changes in people's lives and has had a negative effect on many sectors of the economy, including tourism. The new reality has led to an increase in demand for online services and supplies, such as food delivery, catering and groceries. Food delivery services have grown to a point of popularity where restaurants prefer to close and only do delivery. This is due to the worldwide spread of the pandemic, which has forced restaurants and establishments to periodically close and turn to online food delivery. If we have to summarize the benefits of this phenomenon: it is a drastic increase in supplies, and the harms: it is reduced jobs, flight of certain professions and shortage of personnel in tourism.*

KEYWORDS: *Food Delivery, COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a collapse in the restaurant business. Restaurants, bars, and fast food outlets were forced to close multiple times, increasing the distance between diners in restaurants while reducing seating for diners. This led to a number of changes at all levels: international, national, local, company. In response to the newly created situation, restaurants and establishments that offer food delivery to the home or office have increased. The COVID-19 pandemic has only confirmed the crucial role that food delivery platforms play in our daily lives as consumers.

As the food supply has increased, so has the awareness of protecting the environment and the need to adapt to more sustainable behavior, and this has led to some changes in many restaurants, for example diversifying offers and service methods, using more and more environmentally friendly, biodegradable packaging.

When we talk about sustainability, we mean not only environmental protection, but also social and economic sustainability. As the final goal to fulfill this mission, it refers to transforming service that produces waste, pollution in many cases, unhealthy working conditions for workers to service that generally has a positive impact on nature, restaurants and people.

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It is generally believed that the transition to more sustainable activities and behaviors is costly. In fact, by optimizing resources and focusing on waste reduction, restaurateurs can reap economic benefits. In fact, according to the Restaurant Industry Sustainability Annual Report presented by The Fork (Anon., n.d.), amid rising inflation rates and energy costs, the decision to turn to more sustainable solutions has, for about 40% of restaurateurs, a positive impact on their businesses, leading 60% of them to save between about 10 and 30% on operating costs.

The report aims to present the main statements related to the benefits and harms of this increase in home and office food deliveries, a comparison will be made of how these deliveries have increased globally and in Bulgaria, what can be improved with the use of "green packaging" for sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

According to data from the National Statistical Institute in Bulgaria, deliveries from restaurants, fast food chains, catering show a significant increase after 2019.

Table 1. Food delivery from restaurants, fast food chains, catering in Bulgaria

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023
Increase in deliveries from restaurants, fast food chains, catering in %	15.9	18.9	26.5	26.9

Source: https://www.nsi.bg/bg/

If we have to compare how things are in the world, it is obvious that this tendency to increase food supply is everywhere.

Table 2. Worldwide food delivery

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023
Increase in food deliveries in %	25	32	35	39

Source: Statista Market Insights. July 2024; https://www.statista.com

If we can form an opinion about sustainability, we need to cover several aspects: environmental, social and economic sustainability.

In order to understand whether the given organization, in our case a restaurant or a fast food establishment, meets the requirements for sustainability, we must answer the following questions for the individual areas of sustainability:

Environmental sustainability

1. Do you have a Packaging Recycling Program?
2. Are you ready to switch from disposable to reusable packaging?
3. Does your delivery service use electric or low emission vehicles?
4. Have you implemented eco-friendly packaging materials and practices?
5. Do you have a plan on how you will reduce the overall harmful impact on the environment?
6. Are you monitor and striving to reduce water usage?
7. Do you use seasonal and local fruits and vegetables?
8. Do you purchase meat from intensive farms?
9. Do you buy imported products?
10. Do you buy products wrapped in plastic?

Social sustainability

1. Are you providing wages and benefits to your delivery service staff?
2. Are you committed to safe and secure working conditions for your workers?
3. Do you actively support local societies and charitable organizations?
4. Are you involved in any local initiatives?
5. Do you promote ethical and responsible practices in your partnerships?
6. Do you have a social responsibility plan and any positive social impact goals for the future?

Economic sustainability

1. Are you actively looking for cost-effective and efficient delivery solutions?
2. Do you have transparency in your pricing and fee structures for clients and partners?
3. Do you actively measure and manage your economic impact on the community you serve?
4. Have you established a reserve fund for economic stability in time of crises?
5. Do you support local businesses and suppliers in your operations?
6. Do you have a long-term plan for economic stability, including financial growth and stability goals?

Having all this information, we can claim that the given restaurant or fast food establishment is sustainable.

RESULTS

Trends in the restaurant business, as in any other business, usually emerge during times of crisis. The period after the onset of the COVID pandemic was difficult, marked by restrictive measures, safety measures, reduction of staff, limited number of customers, loss of business, unemployment, even bankruptcies. But this business has shown flexibility by overcoming difficulties and adopting some more modern solutions in the industry by offering new attractive services to its customers. Restaurateurs have found some excellent solutions by developing online ordering and delivery, digital menus, QR codes and many more practical websites and mobile applications have appeared. Some interesting modern trends in the restaurant business have taken shape in the years since the onset of the COVID pandemic.

• **Food delivery from a restaurant**, bakery or pizzeria has become a very current trend in recent years. Orders are not only made by phone, but tablets and laptops with special software are used to receive order notifications. With delivery automation, couriers are controlled and revenue from delivery orders is visible.

• **Finding and retaining staff** is becoming one of the main problems in the catering market. Therefore, more and more restaurants are developing automation trends - using new technologies to optimize service speed and save labor costs. Restaurants and fast food outlets use tablet and desktop ordering systems, self-service kiosks, and automated restaurant programs. This is a good trend that is safer during a pandemic because it minimizes physical contact with service staff.

• **Omnichannel** in catering is also a combination of online and offline sales. Most offline establishments that have already adopted this effectively use their resources to increase sales by inviting customers not only to visit the establishment, but also to order food at home or order and collect it themselves.

• **Healthy food** - this is the other curious trend - small and unpretentious restaurants focusing on freshly prepared healthy food. Even some establishments do not have seating, but offer what was missing during the quarantine - a warm menu and homemade feasts cooked on the day.

• **Using regional drinks and dishes** - this is not only a modern phenomenon, but also a creative approach to reduce costs. The result is brilliant, because there are now not only new breweries on the market, but also craft brandies, gins and liqueurs. Restaurants turned to local cuisine to optimize their costs. Customers also gravitated towards the more familiar and more accessible traditional menu. According to some analysts, the effect is purely psychological and is related to people's desire to surround themselves with familiar things, which gives them security in the crisis.

• **The use of QR codes** - orders and payments with QR are one of the latest trends in Bulgarian establishments. The QR menu is convenient to use because it contains all the necessary information that the customer needs: menu, delivery conditions, restaurant history or loyalty card details. The great advantage of the QR code is that it does not need any additional equipment. Customers just scan it and get all the information and access to the menu.

• **From farmer to table** – this is an important trend in foodservice. This reduces the price of the products, as the cost of delivery is saved. Customers want quality local products. They are interested in where and how they are grown, how they are transported and how they all affect the environment. Against the backdrop of these changes in consumer behavior, markets have emerged that connect farmers and restaurants.

DISCUSSION

The online food delivery market is becoming increasingly popular globally, with more and more consumers choosing to order their meals online.

This increase in food supply depends increasingly on the following factors:

Customer Preferences: The convenience of ordering food online has led to a significant increase in the number of consumers using online food delivery services. Customers appreciate the ease of ordering, the availability of a wide range of cuisines and the ability to track their orders in real time. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online food delivery services as consumers look for contactless options for ordering food.

Market Trends: In the United States, the online food delivery market has seen significant growth with the rise of third-party delivery services such as Uber Eats, DoorDash, and Grubhub. These platforms are becoming increasingly popular, especially among younger users who appreciate the convenience and variety of options available. In China, the online food delivery market is dominated by two major players, Meituan and Ele.me, who have been able to use their scale to offer competitive prices and a wide range of services. In Europe, the market is more fragmented, with a mix of local and international players fighting for market share.

Local Special Circumstances: In India, the online food delivery market has seen significant growth in recent years with the rise of platforms such as Swiggy and Zomato. These platforms have been able to leverage their local knowledge and relationships with restaurants to offer a wide range of options to consumers. Additionally, using cash on delivery as a payment option is a key driver of adoption in India, where many consumers do not have access to credit cards.

Key Macroeconomic Factors: The growth of the online food delivery market is driven by a range of macroeconomic factors, including the rise of the gig economy, the growing popularity of mobile devices, and changing consumer preferences. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online food delivery services as consumers look for safe and convenient ways to order food. However, the market remains highly competitive, with many players fighting for market share and profitability remains a challenge for many companies.

CONCLUSIONS

The food delivery sector has seen explosive growth over the past five years, but it is with the COVID-19 pandemic that the sector is seeing a huge increase in demand.

The new needs of the food delivery sector to the home or office shows an innovative and environmentally sustainable way promoting the reduction of the environmental impact associated with food delivery.

If we have to answer the question: Which is better?, we have to consider the benefits and harms of this increase in food delivery to the home or office.

As **benefits** of this trend we can point out:

• Increasing Internet services in the world;

• Increasing the supply of food to the world;

• Increase of Internet services in Bulgaria;

• Increasing the supply of food in Bulgaria;

• Switching to biodegradable packaging.

As **harms** from this trend we can point out:

• Reducing the profits of restaurants, bars and fast food establishments in the world;

• Reduction in the revenues of restaurants, bars and fast food establishments in Bulgaria;

• A reduction in the number of employees employed in these establishments as a whole worldwide;

• Reduction of staff in restaurants, bars and fast food establishments in Bulgaria.

We can form the following **comparative advantages**, what a good manager of such an establishment should do:

• Responsible choice of products;

• Sustainable nutrition;

• Waste control;

• Use of sustainable energy;

• Ecological packaging;

• Educational initiatives.

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POST-PANDEMIC TRAVEL TRENDS – TOURISTS AND TRAVEL AGENCIES

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ABSTRACT**:** *COVID-19 brought tourism to a halt. It caused numerous consequences—mostly negative, excluding the environmental ones. In the tourism sector, for example, it led to a significant outflow of workers to other sectors. Many establishments around the world remain closed because they cannot find enough staff. Based on available data and various sources, we are trying to determine what will happen to tourism in the future. What travel trends will shape the tourism sector in the coming years? Although such predictions are difficult to make, we are attempting to forecast—based on current observations and considering other social, political, and climate changes—what might happen in the future.*

KEYWORDS**:** *travel, tourism, tourists, travel agencies, travel trends*

1. INTRODUCTION

The world after the COVID-19 pandemic will never be the same as it was before. The pandemic caused significant social change, with its effects felt across all facets of society. It also left a lasting impact on tourism, from the complete halt of movement and the collapse of many tourism businesses to the subsequent resurgence of the industry. This resurgence, however, is bringing new developments. The geopolitical landscape has shifted, logistical connections have changed, some companies have thrived while others have gone out of business. Overall, this year, the world is expected to return to pre-pandemic levels. However, many places are already reporting overtourism—Venice, Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona, and other destinations. Climate change, sustainable development, and social responsibility are now even more in the spotlight.

Tourism has been very negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis. In a dynamic world where a significant part of the service sector economy is based on tourism, the spread of the pandemic constitutes the biggest challenge not only because of the associated hygiene measures and travel restrictions but also because of its very adverse financial implications. In a few weeks and following the imposition of travel and other restrictions the hotel industry started collapsing and many hotels closed until further notice. The national authorities' role is crucial as there is currently wide uncertainty about peoples' future travel behaviours and the impact of the

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pandemic on services related to air transport, cruising, hotels, and other types of accommodation.

International tourism reached 97% of pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2024. The Middle East continued to see the strongest relative growth in arrivals, while Africa and Europe exceeded pre-pandemic levels. International arrivals (overnight visitors) reached 97% of 2019 levels in the first quarter of 2024, reflecting an almost complete recovery of pre-pandemic numbers (UNWTO, 2024).

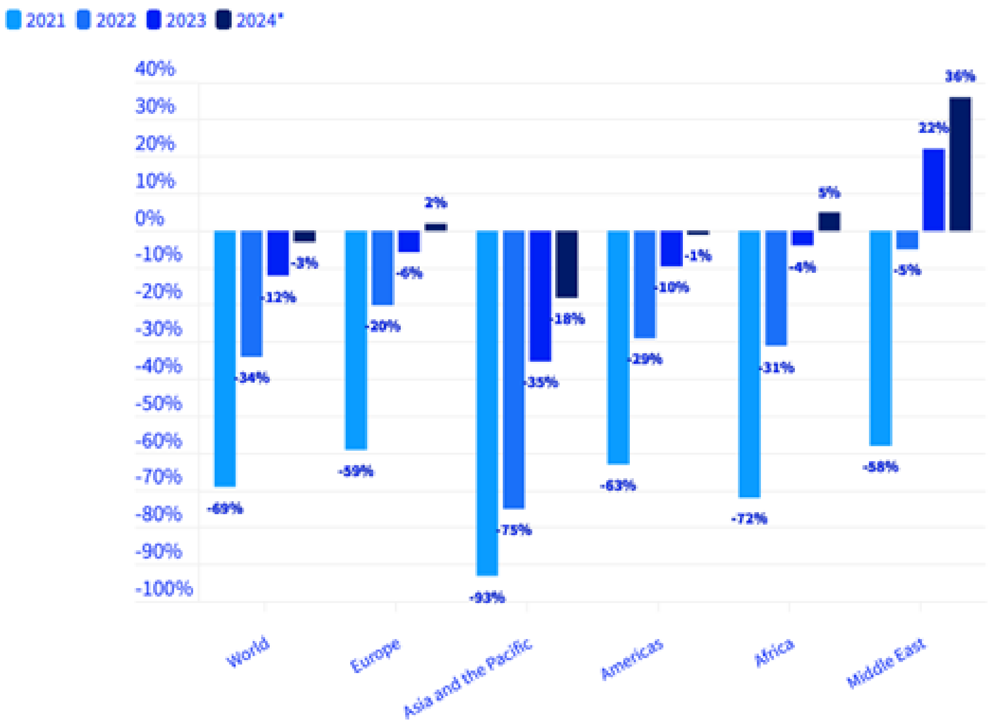

Figure 1: International Tourist Arrivals, World and Regions – change over 2019

Source: UN Tourism Barometer - https://www.unwto.org/un-tourism-world-tourism-barometer-data

In fact, and as tourism is characterized by a high degree of linkages with other sectors of the economy, the consequences of COVID-19 were fatal not only for the industry itself but for the local markets too. The pandemic caused high-pitched falls in the GDP of countries, considered as tourism destinations. By recognizing tourism as a contributor for the spread of the disease, the financial result of the sector for 2020 seems dramatically negative in comparison with previous years. Closure of borders, travel restrictions and other measures imposed in the hospitality industry resulted in substantial damages.

2. COMPLEXITY OF TOURISM AND CONSEQUENCES OF SUDDEN CRISIS EVENTS

Tourism, despite the support of new technologies (apps, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, big data. . .), constitutes a complex and therefore fragile system, as it depends on multiple factors such as human well-being and the environment, mutual trust, international solidarity, security, peace and health. Looking at the future, in this scenario, local communities should be considered as important partners for the restart of tourism in each territory. They must be particularly involved in designing authentic and engaging types of experiences for travellers interested in discovering local beauties. An innovative solution could be to create networks amongst the public sector, private tourist companies and local communities, so as to work synergistically for the territorial revaluation and development of a new form of tourism, in line with the new needs expressed by the tourist demand (Corbisiero and Monaco, 2024).

The behaviour of local communities, which can encourage a different form of tourism, and the new choices of tourists, adapted to the new social, historical and health contingencies, may seem ambiguous. But it is precisely in this ambiguity that we can clearly see that traveling is a social need: even if on the one hand it frightens people, on the other hand it is perceived as a necessity.

This scenario represents an opportunity for local areas to identify new and more sustainable ways of welcoming and managing tourist flows. In other words, starting from the current situation of undertourism, cities have the opportunity to reformulate their range of tourist offerings according to a sustainable perspective.

Also, the hospitality sector, including museums, galleries and attractions, has to imagine a structural change in the tourist offer. Most likely not all businesses will survive the crisis. Companies that intend to endure should act immediately to identify the most suitable strategies to reassure the new tourist demand, responding to the needs of travellers in an appropriate manner.

As the recovery of international tourism is likely to be slow, the hospitality sector could benefit from domestic demand, as residents currently prefer to forego overseas holidays for domestic holidays. However, even in response to the economic crisis that has affected many workers, the hospitality sector should be not only more attractive, but also economically viable and competitive.

3. TOURISTS TODAY, SOCIAL MEDIA AND INNOVATIONS

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the role of SMIs[1] in consumer–brand engagement. Research has identified key factors that impact customers' reactions to content shared by SMIs, including their level of trust in brand-sponsored and non-sponsored content and the influencer's expressed attitude with regard to endorsing a brand, which attracts both positive and negative reactions from different customers. Existing studies have demonstrated that SMIs' ability to build an online status and a large network of followers has caused them to be perceived as being similar to celebrity endorsers. Conversely, a growing body of research has identified that SMIs, despite having characteristics similar to celebrities' and professional experts', potentially have a different impact on customers' perceptions compared to other types of endorsers (Ozuem et al., 2023).

SMIs build their online social status by generating awareness of brand products and services upon which their credibility and popularity increase as they gradually build collective relationships with their followers. As customers are able to share service failure experiences without restrictions, it is vitally important for brands to deliver a virtual presence through social media. Virtual presence can enhance the effects of recovery success, and the involvement of experts in the recovery process in these environments can contribute to maintaining customers' confidence in the firm. Some organisations choose to offer refunds or discounts on future orders instead of apologies, in an effort to encourage customers to use the service again.

Today's tourists are more experienced and flexible than tourists in the past. Their lifestyles and holiday patterns support the need for innovation, and responding efficiently to increased tourism demand is an opportunity for tourism companies. This demand is a powerful generator of growing competition in the global tourism market; therefore, innovation is a key factor in tourism development and success. Customers (i.e. tourists) are fundamentally necessary for tourism sector innovation. To be successful, tourism firms have to continuously adapt to demand-side changes. Mature tourism firms and destinations are obliged to innovate and to offer new or renewed products/services to remain competitive. Innovation in tourism is particularly beneficial in creating an advantage for tourism destinations in competition with other destinations.

With the constant and rapid technological development, almost every facet of human development is being digitalized. However, the phenomenon of digitalizing the tourism industry was developed. Namely, the term "Smart Tourism" where particular products, tools

[1] Social media influencers

and services are used to add value by focusing on building connective, personalized, interactive and co-creative experiences between tourists. Smart tourism is an "ICT-integrated tourism platform," such as the internet of things, artificial intelligence and cloud computing. ICT-based solutions help the tourists in their decision-making process, travel activities and enhances their visiting experience. Similarly, the advantages of smart tourism, including its role in reducing seasonality, increasing reservations and sales since tourists will be capable of comparing prices, communicating with suppliers and getting the best price offered and decide on a travel destination, tourists will also be able to easily access accurate information (Madi et al, 2024).

4. PROBLEMS WITH NATURE, SOCIETY, ENERGY AND SOLUTIONS

1. Despite efforts to develop alternative sources of energy, oil consumption is still rising rapidly. Most of the hospitality and travel industry will find energy costs rise gradually to peak in the mid-2020s, then remain stable or decline slightly through 2040. Two segments will see costs rising until oil is replaced by some equally portable energy-dense fuel: air travel and cruise lines. Contrary to popular belief, the world is not running out of oil (Cetron et al., 2020).

2. Destinations supplying their own renewable energy to well-insulated buildings will have a modest cost advantage over competitors that do not, in addition to attracting guests concerned with the environment. By 2030, this advantage will fade as renewables and energy-efficient construction evolve into business as usual.

3. New photovoltaic technologies will continue to raise the efficiency and reduce the cost of solar panels, reducing the space destinations need to generate electricity and making small-scale solar installations as cheap as today's utility-scale power plants. This will make it even more practical for many hotels and resorts to compete as environmentally friendly.

4. Declining reliance on oil eventually could help to reduce air and water pollution, at least in the developed world. By 2060, a costly but pollution-free hydrogen economy may at last become practical.

5. People around the world are becoming increasingly sensitive to environmental issues such as air pollution, as the consequences of neglect, indifference and ignorance become ever more apparent.

6. Environmental policies will provoke a political backlash wherever they conflict with entrenched interest. The cost of not protecting the environment is too obvious to be ignored. Throughout most of the world, polluters and private beneficiaries of public assets will

increasingly confront restrictive regulations designed to serve the interests of the community at large.

7. Water shortages will be a continuing problem for much of the world. Water usage is causing other problems as well. Pollution further reduces the supply of safe drinking water. Water quality is a growing problem even in the developed lands. Impurities in water will become an even greater problem as the global population ages and becomes more susceptible to infectious diseases.

8. The effects of climate change, already making themselves felt, are growing quickly. Sunday, July 21 2024, was the hottest day ever recorded[1], according to preliminary data from the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service, which has tracked such global weather patterns since 1940 (Dickie, 2024).

9. Natural tourist attractions like the Great Barrier Reef seem likely to disappear within this century, some of them within the working lives of today's hospitality students. Small, low-lying ski resorts already are going bankrupt because they lack snow. They are only the first victims of what may be a long, difficult trend in the industry.

10. Species extinction and loss of biodiversity will be a growing worry for decades to come. Species loss has a powerful negative impact on human well-being. Destinations specializing in wildlife tours and diving are likely to lose much or all of their business as significant species disappear.

11. Continuing urbanization will improve the world's economic efficiency, but at the cost of aggravating most environmental and social problems: loneliness of people, depriving surrounding areas of water, airborne dust particles etc.

12. Workers are retiring later as life expectancy stretches. Better health gives today's seniors more options late in life. Travel and hospitality will find courteous, conscientious post-retirement workers well suited to guest-service roles.

13. Employment mobility is growing, with multiple careers becoming common, as more people make midlife changes in occupation.

14. Growing stress increasingly erodes quality of life. As real buying power shrinks for the middle and lower economic classes, money is the most important stressor. Stress-related problems affecting employee morale and wellness will continue to grow. Companies must help

[1] At the time this paper was written. The global average surface air temperature on Sunday reached 17.09 degrees Celsius.

employees balance their time at work with their family lives and need for leisure. This may reduce short-term profits but will aid profitability in the long run.

15. Time pressure offers new opportunities for hospitality companies to provide more weekend getaways, three-day cruises, "staycation" attractions, and similar products. Those including travel to the destination will be particularly attractive.

5. POST-PANDEMIC TRAVEL TRENDS IN TOURISM

1. Bleisure Travel. This trend combines business trips with vacations, allowing workers to explore tourist destinations while working at the same time (Azzahra, 2023).

2. Personalization. Tourism business offers flexible travel or stay experiences tailored to customers' needs stands a better chance of satisfying customers, leading to repeat purchases or visits,

3. Active Ecotourism. It combines the passion for travel with direct involvement in conservation or local environment support activities. Many travellers believe this trend is a way to help the hospitality and tourism industry become more sustainable in the long term!

4. Wellness Travel. This trend primarily focuses on achieving, promoting, or maintaining the best health and life balance through activities such as spa and yoga retreats.

5. Staycation. Example of Staycation activity is taking day trips to explore local attractions, which is suitable for those who want to break from their routines briefly while still avoiding post-pandemic regulations!

6. Transformative Travel. Transformative travel aims to create a difference in the lives of both oneself and others by engaging in significant activities that add purpose to the trip. Some examples of transformative travel include volunteering trips, apprenticeship retreats, and more.

7. Tech-Empowered Travel. As the pandemic ends, tech innovations are expected to continue bringing ease to the travel experience in the future, with top advancements including mobile apps, automation, NFC, and digital payments.

8. Experience Tourism. Many travellers have grown bored with ordinary vacations, leading to the rise of the experience tourism trend. This trend focuses on providing an emotional connection with cultures and nature through once-in-a-lifetime travel experiences, offering travellers an authentic encounter in their destinations!

9. Sustainable Tourism and Conscious Travel. The UNWTO Secretary-General has warned that climate change is a greater threat than the previous pandemic. The good news is

that more travellers and hospitality businesses have become aware of this crisis, thus beginning to adopt a mindset to save the planet. Actions taken to address this trend can be seen in the emergence of sustainable hotels and eco-friendly travel! The travel sector can proactively pioneer sustainable new products and services.

10. Revenge Travel. "Revenge travel" is a term that was passed around soon after the COVID-19 travel restrictions began to lift. For those unfamiliar, "revenge travel" is seemingly taking a trip that hasn't been able to happen due to the pandemic. It can mean several things, including taking an ultra-exotic vacation, staying at a wellness centre, revisiting a favourite city, or as simple as finally staying with friends and family a few hours away. Ultimately, "revenge travel" is about payback and taking that trip that was lost due to the global pandemic.

11. Coolcation. »Coolcation« is one of the newest travel trends, where tourists seek cooler climates. With high summer temperatures of well above 30ºC, more and more tourists from central and southern Europe are travelling to northern countries.

6. FUTURE OF TRAVEL INDUSTRY

Travel is a collective story, with destinations as the backdrop. Travelers both want to hear other travellers' stories and share their own. McKinsey & Company reports that ninety-two percent of younger travellers were inspired by social media in some shape or form for their last trip (2024).

The bulk of travel spending is close to home. Stakeholders should make sure they capture the full potential of domestic travellers before turning their attention abroad.

Unexpected destinations are finding new ways to lure travellers and establish themselves alongside enduring favourites.

For travel companies, the task now is to rethink how they interact with customers, develop products and services, and manage operations in the age of AI. Industry players down to individual travellers are using advances in generative AI (gen AI), machine learning, and deep learning to reimagine what it means to plan, book, and experience travel.

Tourism stakeholders can collectively look for better ways to handle visitor flows before they become overwhelming. Destinations should remain alert to early warning signs about high tourism concentration and work to maximize the benefits of tourism, while minimizing its negative impacts.

7. CONCLUSION

Tourism, despite the support of new technologies, is still a fragile system, as it depends on multiple factors such as human well-being and the environment, climate changes, politics, security, peace and health.

Today's tourists are more experienced and flexible than tourists in the past. Their lifestyles and holiday patterns support the need for innovation, and responding efficiently to increased tourism demand is an opportunity for tourism companies. This demand is a powerful generator of growing competition in the global tourism market; therefore, innovation is a key factor in tourism development and success.

Travel is a collective story, with destinations as the backdrop. For travel companies, the task now is to rethink how they interact with customers, develop products and services, and manage operations in the age of AI. Tourism stakeholders can collectively look for better ways to handle visitor flows before they become overwhelming. Destinations should remain alert to early warning signs about high tourism concentration and work to maximize the benefits of tourism, while minimizing its negative impacts.

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SLOVENIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION AND A POWERFUL BRAND

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ABSTRACT**:** *In the competitive tourism business environment, destinations are exposed to relentless market competition. Destinations aim to maximize their earnings from tourism, which has become a significant factor in the GDP of many countries. In Slovenia, where the abandonment of socialism led to the collapse of industry, tourism has become a vital part of the national economy. Therefore, it was necessary to take a serious approach to developing a destination brand that would become recognizable and strong. The country, through the enactment of a special law and the establishment of a dedicated Destination Management Organization, sought to systematically and strategically shape the tourism sector into a successful component of the economic system. All of this led to the creation of a distinct destination brand, along with its philosophy, core, and identity. Slovenia presents itself at home and abroad with its country brand "I feel Slovenia". The brand was developed with a view to increasing Slovenia's competitiveness in various areas.*

KEYWORDS**:** *brand, destination brand, brand's identity, tourism, Slovenia*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive tourism business environment, it is crucial to position a tourist destination effectively. This means positioning it as a quality, attractive destination that draws tourists with high personal spending and, in our case, a significant number of overnight stays. Slovenia is marketed as a green, boutique destination for discerning guests. However, as a small country that is just over 30 years old, we still face challenges with global recognition, which is quite the opposite of what a strong and recognizable brand should be.

Current trends in tourism dictate the creation of offerings that prioritize safety and health. An increasingly important role is played by a sustainable approach, with an emphasis on active leisure and local cuisine. Climate change poses unique challenges to the tourism industry, and key to improving tourism services are digitalization and the use of artificial intelligence.

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2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESTINATION AND TOURISTS

Each day, tourists all over the world interact with destinations. Some visit a destination for the first time, and others visit their favorite place for the one-hundredth time. And, each day, these tourists develop relationships with the destinations they visit and, often, the place brands that represent them. Some, will fall in love with the destination they visited and dream of returning. Others may develop negative feelings and never return. Every visitor to a tourism destination presents an opportunity for those charged with managing it and its brand, as part of the overall destination management process, to facilitate an experience that results in an avid fan of the destination who returns and promotes it passionately to his or her friends.

Components of tourism product could be more tangible and more intangible. More intangible elements include representations and images of tourism products, as well as the cultural and symbolic meanings that tourists associate with these products. Interestingly, these elements are highly important because tourists are more interested in the experiences, sensations, lifestyles, etc (Perović et al., 2018).

Due to the intangible-dominant character of most services in tourism industry, they could not be experienced prior to being consumed. The modern tourism service is more complex and heterogeneous, with more and more tangible and intangible elements, to achieve better tourist satisfaction, both elements should be considered. In the context of tangible elements, services and goods that add value to the core product and help differentiate it from the competition, play greater role in the provision of superior satisfaction for tourists. On the other side, the intangible elements of tourism product may offer a competitive advantage, only if they are properly planned and implemented.

Personal security and politeness of local people are also parts of tourism product and greatly determine the level of customer satisfaction. Interaction with tourists in a tourist destination cannot be avoided, so the communication with local people is necessary, although it cannot be always completely planned and controlled.

Thanks to technology we can create »Smart tourism destinations« seek to enhance visitor experiences and doing so requires combining ICTs with the real world. Smart tourism destinations as locations that use ICTs to improve visitor experiences and organizational performance through increased co-creation of value. The fundamental goal of smart tourism destinations is to enhance visitor experiences by utilizing cutting-edge smart devices and ICTs.

Theoretically, this may be accomplished by creating a central technological interface that connects all the stakeholders, incorporates required data from many sources, and facilitates real-time and dynamic information exchange. This would increase productivity, facilitate decision-making, and improve visitor experiences in a context in which destinations must foster deeper relationships and smarter knowledge sharing among stakeholders to stay innovative and competitive. However, in places that promote smart tourism, general technical improvements must be tailored to specific smart technologies, which are specialized tools made for predetermined goals that offer value to the tourism industry by encouraging greater participation, experience personalization, and co-creation (Lasisi et all, 2023).

Satisfaction manifests itself in (re)purchase behavior (loyalty), a willingness to pay higher prices, increased brand equity, etc. Satisfaction is an essential element for maintaining long-term relationships with customers. It not only affects immediate repeat purchases but also reputation Enhanced tourist satisfaction may lead to increased revenues and profits for service providers. Thus, recognizing and understanding the cognitive and behavioral consequences of satisfaction has important implications for destination management. A key consequence of satisfaction is loyalty. Tourist dissatisfaction may, on the other hand, lead to negative behavior, such as customer complaining behavior which (ultimately) affects retention rates and repeat visits to the destination. Loyalty in fact is connect with the power of the brand.

So, country brands help countries increase tourist visits, attract more direct foreign investment and enhance economic integration, foster closer cultural cooperation, and, in particular, increase their reputation in the world. And there is more to a country's brand – it is something for its residents to feel and show their sense of belonging to the country.

3. CREATING OF DESTINATION BRAND SLOVENIA

Slovenia has recognised the importance of tourism to the national economy since it gained independence in 1991 and began to promote itself as westward-looking independent state. Since this period, Slovenia has established itself as a member of the European Union, adopted the Euro, and Ljubljana has become a popular tourism city for European markets. Slovenia's core tourism product can be broken down into four "clusters": tourism linked to the Alps and winter sports; health resorts; coastal tourism and urban tourism.

In 2006, the Slovenian Tourist Board launched a marketing campaign entitled "I Feel Slovenia," emphasizing the word "love" in the word "Slovenia." This slogan has been used constantly since it was first launched and was also expanded to market other aspects of the country such as the economy, arts and culture, science and sport.

According to the "I Feel Slovenia" brand book, Slovenia cannot be presented with a simple image, but rather claims that one needs to feel and sense the country with words, sounds, colors, touch, actions and experience. The brand's guidelines suggest that the sensual components of "I Feel Slovenia" include the smell of cut grass, the sound of a wind-swept forest, the touch of a soft wood and the taste of a variety of flavors. An additional component evident in Slovenia's marketing is "feel," matching Slovenia's slogan of feeling love and the brand book's emphasis on "pleasant excitement" (Slovenia Communication Office, 2024).

Directly relating to these two components, the Slovenia Tourist Board is building its tourism brand on experience marketing of "sense" and "feel" experiences, aiming to establish an emotional connection to the tourist of today. »Slovenia will encourage you to finally do what you always wanted and to feel a pleasant excitement. You will do something for yourself. The harmony of the senses, with which you experience the Slovenian green, will give you drive and calm you down at the same time, even once your holiday ends. A holiday in Slovenia will bring back balance in your life, because in Slovenia you are always in touch with something elementary – whether that is water, the fragrance of the forests or the authentic flavours of the food« (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2024).

This project represents the first serious step towards developing the Slovenia brand since Slovenia's independence. The content of the project deals with building the basic foundations of the new Slovenia brand from the perspective of all internal stakeholders that constitute the country of Slovenia, while its outcome highlights the key identity elements of the Slovenia brand and offers suggestions for further management and marketing on their basis. The development of I feel Slovenia brand was approached from an internal perspective of the country brand or the so-called identity concept, which is, according to the latest findings, essential in implementing integrated and strategic country brand strategy. Identity concept represents the initial step in a two-dimensional approach to country branding. Brand equity perspective, which reflects the views of external brand stakeholders, were also considered as an important perspective in final brand building. The approach to developing the I feel Slovenia brand was of a holistic nature, as relevant areas (i.e. commerce, tourism, culture, science, sport) and related key stakeholders that affect and co-create the Slovenia brand identity had been determined in advance (Konečnik, 2012).

4. CREATING A POWERFUL BRAND

Slovenia has a brand with a meaningful message – I feel Slovenia. The Slovenia brand combines all areas of Slovenia, including tourism, and a mix of emotions, sensibility, and the Slovenian green colour are at its core and identity.

The Government Communication Office acts as the Slovenia brand manager, and an inter-ministerial group helps it to carry out and implement the Slovenia brand. The Slovenia brand is carried forward and developed by everyone who is a part of Slovenia.

Figure 1: I feel Slovenia brand

Source: Slovenia Communication Office - https://www.gov.si/teme/znamka-slovenije-i-feel-slovenia

The Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) sees an opportunity for Slovenia in the recovery of global tourism. As a safe, green, and sustainably oriented destination, Slovenia can successfully appeal to potential tourists who are seeking these kinds of experiences.

According to STO observations, interesting novel trends in tourism have crystallized, significantly impacting the industry and reflecting changing preferences and technological advancements. New trends emphasize personalized experiences, a focus on safety and health, and the creation of products that are based on a connection with nature. Sustainability is becoming increasingly important, and tourists are also choosing destinations based on weather conditions. Digitalization and digital transformation, as well as the use of artificial intelligence in tourism, are of key importance.

The STO notes that more and more people are opting for sustainable accommodation, travel with a lower carbon footprint, and gastronomy that is based on locally sourced and seasonal ingredients. As a leading destination in systematic promotion of sustainable development at the national level, Slovenia is further enhancing and digitalizing its Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism and participating in a range of other projects in this area.

Figure 2: Brand communication

Source: Slovenian Tourist Board - https://www.slovenia.info/en/stories/slovenia-it-s-all-in-our-nature

Demand for active leisure is on the rise, making Slovenia, with its diverse and rich natural environment, ideal for further developing active experiences such as hiking, cycling, and water sports. This highlights the importance of culinary experiences and encourages destinations to offer authentic and high-quality gastronomic experiences, according to the STO. In recent years, Slovenia has positioned itself on the global culinary map as one of the most desirable gastronomic destinations, thanks in part to the most influential culinary guides, such as Michelin and Gault&Millau. The Tourist Association of Slovenia has played a key role in the protection and promotion of Slovene culture and culinary heritage through the organization of wine festivals and a large number of culinary innovations as reflected in the Gastronomic Strategy of Slovenia, which lists 23 gastronomic regions and 170 representative dishes of the country's cuisine. Gastronomy contributes to enhancing the visibility of Slovenia as a tourism destination.

There is also a growing trend towards closer-to-home travel and a desire to discover less crowded tourist destinations. Slovenia can capitalize on this trend by continuing to promote itself in the nearby source markets as an attractive close-by and non-mass destination, according to the STO. They also highlight the importance of digitalization in tourism, as more and more travellers seek information and make reservations through digital platforms. Integrating artificial intelligence into travel planning and enhancing the digital presence of Slovenian tourism providers will further increase their visibility and accessibility.

Responsible, inclusive, and fair tourism is increasingly coming to the fore, as is the offer tailored to the individual. Among the most sought-after products are nature retreats and city breaks, and there is also a growing concern for health, personal well-being, and regeneration, as well as a desire for pampering. Tourists are willing to pay more for unique, top-notch experiences that exceed expectations, and safety is an important element in choosing target destinations. The STO sees particularly good opportunities for promoting and developing Slovenian tourism within these trends.

"I feel Slovenia" expresses the identity of Slovenia and Slovenians. The strength of a brand increases in proportion with the scope of its use, and it is important that its management is coordinated so that it ensures a comprehensive impact of all actors. The Government Communication Office performs the function of the brand's manager and guardian on behalf of the Republic of Slovenia.

The choice of the brand's slogan was by no means accidental: Slovenia cannot be encapsulated only in an image; it must be felt and experienced – through words, sounds, colours, touch and action. "I feel Slovenia" expresses emotions, and this sets it apart from the brands of other countries.

5. THE CORE OF THE BRAND AND THE BRAND'S IDENTITY[1]

What is the "I feel Slovenia" brand?

- It presents Slovenia at home and abroad
- It stands for everything good in Slovenia and from Slovenia.
- It's a slogan turned brand.
- It proclaims Slovenian origin.
- It's a friendlier version of "Made in Slovenia".

Why Slovenia needs a (strong) brand?

In our globalised world, countries are facing increasing competition and various impacts of global society. A strong national brand gives a country and the products and services originating from it additional power. Strong and successful country brands are those that are well received by their users, first by the country's residents and then by visitors, tourists, investors, media and so on. The success of a brand is inextricably linked to the image and credibility of the country at home and abroad. Slovenia also uses its country brand to strengthen its image and reputation in the world.

A country brand can facilitate the generation of higher added value of every actor appearing on domestic and foreign markets – economic operators, agricultural producers, scientists, culture professionals, artists and athletes. Green is the basis of the "I feel Slovenia" brand. In Slovenia green is more than just a colour: the "Slovenian green" symbolises the

[1] According to Slovenia Communication Office (https://www.gov.si/en/topics/slovenias-brand-i-feel-slovenia/)

balance between the calmness of nature and the diligence of the Slovenian people. It is a key distinct element of the brand. It speaks of unspoilt nature and our determination to keep it that way by planning our development sustainably.

The choice of green is clear – it reflects Slovenia's high forest coverage (forests cover as much as two-thirds of the country) and unspoilt nature and our efforts to conserve it. It symbolises a balanced lifestyle, joining pleasant excitement in pursuing personal desires and the common vision to move forward with nature. Slovenian green also marks our focus on the elemental, on what we feel with our hands. It affirms the harmony of all senses with which we experience Slovenia.

The identity of Slovenia's brand is based on the following basic elements of its story:

- Passion for everything we love,
- Slovenia is different, and you can feel it,
- Slovenia encourages you to take up things you enjoy,
- Our vision is a green boutique country,
- Our mission is clear – to move forward with nature (sustainable development),
- Innovativeness,
- Creativity.

These elements are common to all areas. They are also the common denominator of Slovenians and Slovenia and give them a special character. By using and combining these elements, consistent stories are created and Slovenian experience built. In part we are already living this experience, which reflects our common wishes for the development of our country.

The core of the "I feel Slovenia" brand expresses the balance between the calmness of nature and the diligence of the Slovenian people. The basis of the brand is the Slovenian green, representing Slovenia's high forest coverage, its unspoilt nature and our focus on its preservation. It symbolises a balanced lifestyle, joining pleasant excitement in pursuing personal desires and the common vision to move forward with nature. The Slovenian green also describes our focus on the elemental, on what we feel with our hands. The elements of the identity of Slovenia's brand are common to all areas and are the common denominator of Slovenians and Slovenia.

6. CONCLUSIONS

A tourist destination is characterized by the complexity and multidimensionality of its tourism offering, which is based on various forms of ownership. Within a destination, there can be different connections and collaborations between private, public, and civil partnerships. The destination is also part of a broader economic and socio-cultural environment, which also contributes and co-creates the identity of the destination. One of the key characteristics or conditions is that the destination must represent a hospitable community.

The process of building a country's brand always starts with the country's identity. From a given national culture emerge a mission, vision, and goals, which the country sets at the very beginning of its (re)positioning. The way different groups of domestic and foreign stakeholders perceive the identity of a particular country is reflected in its image.

A strong national brand represents an additional, and often even more powerful, marketing and promotional tool than the country's functional characteristics alone, as it gives the country an emotional component that frames the perception of its functional characteristics, present itself at home and abroad and to strengthen its visibility, position, reputation and influence in the international arena.

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INNOVATIVE PROPOSAL FOR TOURISM: PRESENTING THE CONCEPT OF CINEMATOGRAPHIC GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

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***ABSTRACT**: In recent years, tourism has established itself as an important economic activity, generating employment and income in various locations. In this context, there is a need for diversification and innovation in the sector, with the emergence of new segments, such as cinematographic gastronomic tourism (TCG). The aim of this research is to present and analyze this new concept, which associates tourism with audiovisual productions and gastronomic experiences. The methodology adopted includes a bibliographical review with a qualitative approach, based on national and international articles, using descriptors such as "tourism", "cinematographic tourism" and "gastronomic tourism". Articles were selected from the SCOPUS, SCIELO and Periódicos CAPES databases. The results indicate that GTC is a niche that can attract tourists looking for differentiated and cultural experiences. Gastronomy, combined with audiovisual productions, becomes a decisive factor in choosing tourist destinations, offering a sensory and cultural immersion. The study also highlights the importance of film productions in promoting destinations, contributing to the appreciation of local identity and the economic development of regions. It concludes that GTC is a promising strategy for the competitiveness of tourist destinations, providing authentic and enriching experiences for visitors, while strengthening local cultural and gastronomic traditions.*

***KEYWORDS**: tourism, film tourism, gastronomic tourism, competitive advantage*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, tourism has been gaining strength and prominence in the world economy, making it an important economic activity that generates foreign exchange and direct and indirect jobs, and is an important tool in the development of a locality.

According to Beni (2004): Tourism is eminently a social phenomenon which, by giving rise to a series of activities, such as transportation, accommodation, recreation and others, causes them to generate another series of effects on the environment in which they develop and which can be of an economic, social, cultural and even ecological nature.

Faced with the increase in demand for tourism in recent times, tourist destinations have seen the opportunity to increase their investments in order to better serve people who travel, whether in search of culture, business, adventure, gastronomy, leisure, among others. These investments can be seen in the infrastructure of localities, particularly destinations that have promoted tourism as their main economic activity.

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However, there is a market need to always discover new forms of competitive advantage through new products/services in order to stand out from the competition. In this way, it is possible to observe the change in behavior in tourism as tourism segmentations emerge with the aim of serving potential consumers, valuing their needs (Lohmann & Netto, 2008). These segmentations seek to comply with new market trends, based on the acceleration of innovation, communication and consumption (Compans, 2005).

This study proposes a new concept involving tourism, cinema and gastronomy

GASTRONOMIC CINEMATOGRAPHIC TOURISM (GCT)

This study is justified by the perception that the insertion of a city as a tourist destination in a competitive market is intrinsically linked to the tourism sector, where each location defines its segmentation with the aim of attracting potential tourists. In this context, the search for competitive advantages is reflected in specific segments, such as cultural tourism, gastronomic tourism, among others related to audiovisual productions and gastronomy (Domareski-Ruiz; Gândara, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to address the issue of tourism, gastronomy and audiovisuals, presenting the need to have a dialog between them as a form of competitive advantage for tourist destinations that have been used as locations for audiovisual productions.

The research is characterized as descriptive and includes bibliographical research with a qualitative approach. It therefore began with bibliographical research, which included a literature review based on works published in national and international journals.

The survey of literature on the subject used the following words as descriptors: tourism, film tourism and gastronomic tourism.

With regard to descriptive research, which describes the characteristics of a phenomenon in as much detail as possible (Neuman, 1997), we present the main findings found in the literature.

Articles published in English and Portuguese were taken into consideration, and scientific articles were excluded if the descriptors were not highlighted in the keyword, the title of the publication or the abstract.

For the database, the CAPES Journal (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior) was selected because it is a reliable database used by educational institutions as well as SCOPUS and SCIELO.

RESULTS

The concept of film tourism refers to the practice of visiting destinations that have served as locations for audiovisual productions, including films, series, soap operas and television programs (Beeton, 2005; Duarte, Teles, Filho, 2020). According to Beeton and Cavicchi (2015) and Duarte, Teles and Filho (2020), audiovisual productions act as visual communication vehicles, capable of attracting potential tourists.

This phenomenon goes beyond simply visiting film locations. Film tourism also encompasses other practices, such as visiting celebrities' homes, guided tours based on audiovisual production scripts, attending launch events, exploring theme parks, visiting recording studios and a host of other audiovisual-related activities (Beeton, 2005; Beeton & Cavicchi, 2015; Duarte, Teles, Filho, 2020).

In this way, film tourism is a complex form of interaction between the media and tourism, where the consumption of audiovisual productions unfolds into tourist experiences, reinforcing the cultural and economic influence of film and television works on tourist destinations.

In addition, Bolan and Williams (2008) argue that long-term audiovisual productions, such as films and television series, play a significant role in shaping images that can influence the choice of tourist destinations. These audiovisual media have the potential to attract tourists who would otherwise not be reached by the traditional promotional activities established by destinations. In line with this perspective, Li and Liu (2020) reinforce that audiovisual productions create a powerful communicative relationship with potential tourists, inducing them to visit the destinations portrayed in the films.

This phenomenon highlights the power of audiovisual productions to shape the perceptions and aspirations of viewers, transforming them into tourists motivated by the visual and emotional narrative of cinematographic and television works. Thus, films and series act as indirect marketing vehicles, promoting tourist destinations and influencing travel decisions in a subtle but effective way.

The target audience for film tourism is mostly made up of Millennials, a generation recognized for its affinity with technology (Sheaffer, 2009) and a continuous search for memorable and unconventional experiences (Veiga, 2017). Millennials' intrinsic inclination for innovative and differentiated experiences makes them especially likely to actively seek out experiences that break with the usual. Consequently, this trend contributes to the growth of film tourism, as these travelers look for destinations that provide them with emotional and cultural connections mediated by audiovisual productions. Film tourism is thus consolidating itself as an expanding niche market, driven by the search for authenticity and innovation during travel experiences.

Gastronomic tourism, on the other hand, is an activity that focuses on the experience of tasting quality food and drink while traveling (Londoño, 2015).

According to Oliveira (2011) and Meladze (2015), gastronomic tourism has been consolidated as one of the new tourism products in expansion, gaining prominence in recent years and attracting attention in social media, by stimulating motivation to travel in search of gastronomy and its local particularities.

"Gastronomic tourism can be identified as a powerful tool for regional development, employability, maintaining the cultures and habits of a certain people, and the scope of action transcends the place of eating, involving the entire route" (Ribeiro - Martins & Silveira-Martins, 2018).

Gastronomy is emerging as an element of the tourist experience. Local cuisine not only complements a destination's tourism offer, but also acts as an important attraction, capable of influencing tourists' choice of destinations. Gastronomy, with its unique traditions and flavors, offers a direct connection with the culture and identity of a region, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the environment they are visiting. According to Hjalager and Richards (2002), the gastronomic experience can be a determining factor in tourist satisfaction, in many cases becoming the main motivation for the trip.

As part of cultural tourism, gastronomic tourism exploits the potential of local cuisine to attract visitors seeking authentic and enriching experiences. This type of tourism not only contributes to the appreciation and preservation of culinary traditions, but also promotes local economic development by encouraging the production and consumption of regional foods (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). Thus, gastronomy plays a crucial role in strengthening a destination's cultural identity, while at the same time boosting tourism and generating economic and social benefits for host communities.

The importance of gastronomy in tourism is seen as a strategic tool for sustainable tourism development and the promotion of cultural authenticity. By integrating gastronomy into the tourism offer, destinations can differentiate themselves in the global market, attract a more diverse audience and provide unique experiences that translate into lasting memories for tourists. Therefore, the relationship between gastronomy and tourism is intrinsic and mutually beneficial, reflecting the growing demand for travel experiences that go beyond simple travel, offering an immersion in the cultural and sensory aspects of each destination.

Typical dishes and unique culinary experiences can be a decisive factor when choosing a tourist destination. Local cuisine not only offers an opportunity for visitors to explore new flavors, but is also a means of promoting local traditions and customs.

DISCUSSION

"Cinematographic Gastronomic Tourism." This concept can be understood as a type of tourism that refers to visiting destinations associated with audiovisual productions (such as films, TV series, documentaries and others) with the aim of exploring and experiencing the gastronomy featured in these productions.

Cinematic gastronomic tourism also includes restaurants and bars that adopt movie themes, offering menus inspired by the food portrayed in these productions. Although these films were not necessarily shot in these establishments or in their regions, these places strive to capture the magic and atmosphere of the films, providing customers with a unique experience that combines elements of the cinematic narrative with gastronomy.

A relevant example is the Fascino Medieval restaurant, located in João Pessoa, which stands out for its theme inspired by the Harry Potter saga. The establishment has achieved great success, especially among fans of the series and enthusiasts of the magical universe, by providing an immersive experience that combines gastronomy and iconic elements of the work, as well as offering a menu that induces the magic of the films, such as Butterbeer and Harry Potter cake, among others.

The concept arises from the intersection between gastronomy and tourism, amplified by audiovisual media, reinforcing the importance of both elements as fundamental pillars in the construction of the contemporary tourist experience.

The insertion of a city as a tourist destination in a competitive market is intrinsically linked to the tourism sector, where each location defines its segmentation with the aim of attracting potential tourists. In this context, the search for competitive advantages is reflected in specific segments, such as cultural tourism, gastronomic tourism, among others related to audiovisual productions and gastronomy (Domareski-Ruiz; Gândara, 2013).

The relationship between travel and gastronomy is a phenomenon that dates back much earlier than the popularization of audiovisual productions on the subject (Mira & Oliveira, 2024). Historically, it is important to note that both gastronomy and tourism have their origins in the aristocratic strata of society. As Mees (2013) points out, during the 18th century, the Grand Tour established itself as the classic travel circuit and was especially popular with the British. However, it wasn't until the 19th century that tourism began to emerge as a widely recognized and widespread leisure practice.

With the advance of time and technologies, gastronomy has also come to occupy a prominent place, especially with the growing popularity of cooking and travel programs shown on linear television and streaming platforms (Mira & Oliveira, 2024). These programs not only reflect the cultural importance of gastronomy, but also its strong connection with tourism, by inspiring and influencing viewers to explore destinations that offer unique culinary experiences. Audiovisual productions, by representing sensory experiences through images, have become an increasingly used means of motivating tourists to explore destinations and consume tourism products (Cardoso & Marques, 2015). They are therefore recognized as a strategic tool for both economic development and destination marketing. They play a fundamental role in increasing the visibility of places and improving the image of tourist destinations, as highlighted by Hudson and Ritchie (2006).

The representation of gastronomy in audiovisual productions goes beyond simply showing dishes and recipes; it serves as a powerful tool for cultural communication, capable of transmitting values, traditions and identities in an accessible and engaging way. When gastronomy is represented in films and series, it contributes to the creation of a "gastronomic imagination", in which viewers develop an emotional relationship with the cuisine and, consequently, with the destinations where these culinary practices are rooted. This affective relationship can stimulate interest in visiting these places, transforming the desire to taste a specific dish into a real motivation to travel.

The intersection between gastronomy and audiovisual productions has the potential to influence food trends and consumer behavior on a global scale. Documentaries such as "Chef's Table" and films like "Julie & Julia" exemplify how culinary-centric stories can popularize certain ingredients, preparation methods and even entire diets. As a result, destinations associated with these culinary practices can experience an increase in the flow of tourists, who seek not only the gastronomic experience, but also the cultural authenticity promoted through audiovisual storytelling.

Thus, the representation of gastronomy in films can play a crucial role in building the image of a tourist destination. An example of this is the movie "Ratatouille", which highlights Paris as a gastronomic destination, promoting the city as an icon of refined and sophisticated cuisine.

The representation of gastronomy on screen not only enriches the cultural narrative, but also plays a crucial role in promoting tourism, making the flavors and aromas shown in fiction become a reality desired by tourists.

Therefore, this type of tourism not only explores geographical locations, but also the restaurants, markets and kitchens that have gained notoriety through the productions. In this context, gastronomy is not just a complement to the trip, but the main attraction that motivates tourists to seek out these experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that this form of tourism combines tourists' curiosity about film and series scenarios with the appreciation of typical dishes and local cuisine, promoting a complete cultural immersion. Audiovisual productions therefore act as a showcase for a region's gastronomic culture, transforming local dishes and drinks into cultural icons. Films and series can highlight specific dishes, ways of preparing them and culinary traditions, arousing viewers' interest and encouraging them to visit these destinations to try the featured food, creating a deeper emotional connection between tourists and the destination, making the experience more memorable and meaningful.

Thus, since both audiovisual film production and gastronomy are recognized as Creative Cities categories by UNESCO, this study proposes a new market niche that could potentially benefit from audiovisual productions: "Cinematic Gastronomic Tourism."

Boosting cinematic gastronomic tourism in a tourist destination can bring a series of economic, social and cultural benefits, as well as contributing significantly to the appreciation and promotion of the place. Such as:

- Attracting New Audiences and Diversifying Tourism: Cinematic gastronomic tourism attracts not only movie lovers, but also food enthusiasts, creating a diversified target audience and expanding the possibilities of attracting tourists.

- Encouraging the Creation of New Enterprises: the demand for authentic and differentiated experiences can encourage the emergence of new enterprises, such as bars, themed restaurants, hotels inspired by audiovisual productions, and tourist attractions that recreate scenes from films or series.
- Enhancing Cultural and Gastronomic Identity: highlighting culture and gastronomy in a unique way, associating these characteristics with recognized audiovisual productions. This not only strengthens the destination's cultural identity, but also promotes the recognition of its traditions and gastronomic specialties on a global stage.
- Economic Movement and Local Development: this type of tourism can be an important economic driver for destinations, generating income through restaurants, food markets and gastronomic events. It also promotes local development by highlighting regional products and ingredients, strengthening the local production chain and encouraging sustainable practices.
- Intersection between Culture and Gastronomy: cinematic gastronomic tourism explores the intersection between culture and gastronomy, where dishes and drinks become part of the popular imagination through their representation in the media. This includes both traditional cuisine and the creation of new recipes inspired by audiovisual productions, which can become tourist attractions in their own right.
- Experiential and Participatory Tourism: visitors can take part in gastronomic activities such as cooking classes, dish tastings and visits to local markets. This active participation enriches the tourist experience, providing learning and entertainment.

However, although gastronomic film tourism presents numerous opportunities for the development of a tourist destination, it also brings with it challenges that need to be carefully managed to ensure the success and sustainability of this strategy. The following are some of the main challenges that a destination may face when encouraging gastronomic film tourism:

- **Tourist flow management**
- **Preserving Cultural Authenticity**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Long-term planning**
- **Workforce Education and Training**
- **Intellectual Property Management and Image Rights**

Therefore, tackling these challenges requires strategic planning, collaboration between all the sectors involved and a balanced approach that considers both the benefits and the risks associated with gastronomic film tourism.

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EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGERS IN ITALIAN TOURISM COMPANIES: SALIENT ASPECTS AND SOME PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT: *Tourism is a mainstay of the Italian economy, significantly impacting Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment. With the increasing dynamism of the global market and rapid technological innovations, the preparation of management personnel in the tourism sector emerges as a strategic priority to ensure effectiveness, innovation and service excellence. This contribution examines the Italian educational system dedicated to training future tourism leaders, analysing the structures of training programmes, current difficulties and potential for development. The article explores the impact of educational reforms, the interactions between educational institutions and companies, and the skills required by the sector. We identify critical issues and propose solutions to improve the alignment of education with the needs of the modern market. Finally, we offer perspectives on how the education system's evolution can enhance the Italian tourism industry's global competitiveness and sustainability.*

KEYWORDS: *tourism, training, educational reforms, skills, competitiveness.*

INTRODUCTION

The Italian tourism sector is one of the fundamental pillars of the national economy, contributing significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generating millions of jobs (Bank of Italy, 2020; ISTAT, 2022). Italy, with its unique cultural, artistic and natural heritage, is one of the most sought-after tourist destinations globally, attracting visitors from every corner of the globe. In this context of increasing globalisation and international competition, the ability of Italian tourism companies to innovate and offer high-quality services has become a strategic priority (Migliaccio et al., 2024). Therefore, training administrative managers in tourism companies is crucial in ensuring operational efficiency and service quality and guiding the sector towards more sustainable and innovation-oriented management (Forlani, 2018). Tourism managers' managerial and strategic skills need to be constantly updated in a constantly evolving sector characterised by technological advancement and changes in consumer preferences. The ability to adapt to changing market needs and to implement innovative strategies is closely

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linked to the quality of the training received. Adequate training must prepare future administrators not only to face daily operational challenges but also to understand global economic dynamics new digital technologies, and to promote a corporate culture oriented towards sustainability and internationalisation (Simtur, 2023). This contribution proposes to analyse the educational system that prepares the future administrative managers of Italian tourism companies, examining its historical evolution, current structure and how it responds to modern challenges. Through an analysis of educational reforms, training paths and initiatives related to the integration between school and the world of work, the salient aspects and existing criticalities will be highlighted. Finally, some future perspectives will be suggested to improve training effectiveness in the tourism sector, ensuring that new generations of professionals can contribute significantly to the sustainable and competitive growth of the Italian tourism industry.

Italy stands out for its excellence in the tourism and education sector. The education system contributes considerably to the socio-economic growth of a country since it aims to provide students with the necessary theoretical knowledge and practical skills that prepare them for the labour market (OECD, 2019a). In Italy, the education system is structured in such a way as to guarantee complete and diversified training, capable of responding to the needs of specific sectors, such as tourism (MIUR[1], 2014; ISFOL, 2014). This sector, in particular, requires a specific preparation for administrative managers, who must be equipped with a solid knowledge base in economics, business management, marketing and foreign languages, supplemented by a deep understanding of the dynamics of tourism at a local and global level (Bank of Italy, 2020).

One of the main objectives of the Italian education system is to foster the development of transversal skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking and digital competence, which are now essential in an increasingly globalised and technologically advanced world (European Commission, 2020). This objective is pursued through a didactic approach that promotes interdisciplinarity and the practical application of knowledge, particularly emphasised in technical and professional institutes dedicated to the tourism sector (MIUR, 2013).

Another universally recognised value of the education system is inclusiveness, reflected in the accessibility of education to all social strata and the promotion of equality of opportunity (ISTAT, 2021).

[1] MIUR, (in Italian: Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca); in English: Ministry of Education, University and Research.

In the field of tourism, this inclusiveness translates into the training of professionals able to operate in multicultural contexts and to manage with sensitivity and competence the cultural diversities that characterise international tourism (UNWTO, 2018).

Finally, internationalisation represents another critical aspect of the Italian school system, which aligns with global trends (MIUR, 2024).

The openness towards cultural exchanges, international mobility programmes and collaborations with foreign educational institutions is fundamental to preparing future administrative cadres to operate in an intrinsically global sector such as tourism (OECD, 2019a). In the light of these premises, the question arises:

RQ1: what training paths are provided in Italy to prepare administrative cadres of tourism companies?

In order to answer this question, current legislation, existing literature on the subject, and some documented training experiences in the sector will be analysed.

METHODOLOGY

The article adopts a qualitative methodology to examine the Italian educational system for training administrative managers in the tourism sector. The contribution is mainly based on a critical analysis of the existing literature, supplemented with a documentary examination of current technical and professional education regulations and tourism-related educational policies.

The method is based on reviewing academic and institutional sources, including public reports produced by bodies such as ISTAT and the Bank of Italy and official documents from the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR). Contributions from tourism and educational sector experts are also considered to contextualise the evolution of the Italian education system and its impact on the tourism labour market. This approach makes it possible to identify the main criticalities of the training system, with particular attention to the gap between the theoretical skills offered by educational institutions and the practical ones required by tourism enterprises. A significant methodological element is represented by the analysis of training experiences, such as the Percorso per le Competenze Trasversali e per l'Orientamento (PTSO), which allows students to apply the knowledge acquired in real work contexts. The article explores how such practical training initiatives are integrated into school curricula and evaluates their effectiveness by comparing them with previous studies and feedback from tourism companies involved.

Finally, the methodology includes a comparative analysis of the educational reforms implemented in recent decades, specifically focusing on the introduction of digital tools and the internationalisation of school curricula. This analysis makes it possible to highlight emerging trends and prospects in training administrative managers in the tourism sector. In this way, the study provides insight into the education system while suggesting concrete recommendations to better align education with the needs of a constantly evolving tourism market.

EVOLUTION OF THE ITALIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Italian school system has evolved significantly since its origins, reflecting the country's social, economic and political changes. The Gentile reform of 1923 represents a milestone in the history of Italian education, establishing the single secondary school system and consolidating a school structure that, although strongly influenced by the fascist ideology of the time, laid the foundations for the modern organisation of education (Rolli et al., 2023). After the Second World War, the Italian education system underwent significant reforms to democratise access to education and modernise curricula. In the 1960s, the 1962 Middle School Reform introduced the concept of a single middle school, aimed at guaranteeing a uniform and accessible education for all young people, reducing social inequalities and promoting a more complete education (Elia, 2015). The 1999 Berlinguer Reform introduced additional changes, establishing the upper secondary education cycle and enhancing school autonomy, aiming to adapt the education system to the needs of a rapidly evolving society (MIUR, 2000). In 2003, the Moratti reform introduced the module system for secondary schools, emphasising flexibility and personalisation of educational pathways. However, the Gelmini Reform 2010 represented a significant turning point, aiming to simplify and rationalise the education system, focusing on efficiency and cost reduction (MIUR, 2010). This reform also introduced significant changes to the school curriculum and student assessment methods. Recently, the Italian education system has continued to adapt to the challenges of globalisation and the digital era. Law 107 of 2015, known as the Buona Scuola, sought to respond to the needs of the labour market and technological transformation by enhancing didactic innovation and continuous training for teachers (MIUR, 2015a).

Moreover, the National Digital School Plan, launched in 2015, aimed to integrate digital technologies into the educational process to better prepare students for future challenges (MIUR, 2015b). Numerous studies have explored the evolution of the Italian school system, analysing its distinctive features and the impact of the various reforms. For example, authors such as Malizia et al. (2010) and Ricci (2024) have highlighted the modernisation of education brought about by the reforms, thanks to introducing flexibility and personalisation of educational pathways. In addition, the emphasis on digital competence and foreign language learning reflects the adaptation of the education system to the challenges of globalisation (Rolli et al., 2023; Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 2011). However, despite the wealth of existing literature, there is a significant lack of specific studies on training processes in the tourism sector. Most of the research focuses on general aspects of technical and vocational education without adequately investigating the training paths intended for the future administrative managers of tourism companies. This gap in the literature is particularly evident when considering the economic and cultural importance of tourism in Italy, a sector that requires highly specialised skills and targeted training (Marasco et al., 2023; Garibaldi, 2015).

ORGANISATION OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ITALY

Currently, the Italian school system is divided into different levels and grades, offering a wide range of educational pathways that respond to the needs of an ever-changing society. After pre-school (3 to 6 years old) and primary school (6 to 11 years old), students enter secondary school (three years, from 11 to 14 years old) and then secondary school (five years, from 14 to 19 years old). This educational pathway guarantees a complete and diversified education, preparing students for further studies or entry into the world of work (MIUR, 2013). At the end of lower secondary school, students can choose between different courses of study, each of which is designed to meet specific educational and professional needs:

- Licei offers a general education with a strong orientation towards humanistic, scientific, linguistic, artistic or humanities subjects. This route is ideal for students intending to attend university, as it provides a solid cultural and methodological foundation.

- Technical institutes prepare specialised technicians in specific production sectors, including tourism. Within this route, the Technical Institute for Tourism is particularly relevant, as it provides theoretical and practical training in the economic, linguistic, geographical and legal disciplines necessary to operate effectively in the tourism sector. In five years, students acquire skills in areas such as tourism business management, tourism marketing, territory promotion and event planning, making them ready to face the challenges of a dynamic and competitive sector (Indire[1], 2010). In addition, students participate in TSOP (Transversal Skills

[1] In Italiano: Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa; in English: In English: National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research.

and Orientation Pathways) experiences, which allow them to apply theoretical knowledge in real working contexts.

- Vocational Institutes: they provide vocational training with a solid link to the world of work. Among the courses on offer, the Professional Institute for Commercial Services, with its Food and Beverage and Hospitality Services subdivision, is particularly relevant for training tourism operators. This route focuses on practical and operational skills, preparing students to become chefs, maîtres, receptionists and other key figures in the hospitality and catering sector. Integrating internships and apprenticeships in hospitality and catering establishments is a critical element of the training, allowing students to gain first-hand experience and develop the skills required by the labour market. Furthermore, it is essential to note that training tourism operators does not end with secondary education. Continuing vocational education and training (IFTS and ITS), specific degree courses in tourism and hospitality, and master's and specialisation courses offer further opportunities for growth and updating for those wishing to embark on or consolidate a career in the sector. These advanced training courses are designed to provide specialised skills, both theoretical and practical, responding to the needs of a labour market that is constantly evolving and increasingly oriented towards internationalisation and technological innovation. Thus, the Italian education system offers a complete and articulated range of training courses for the tourism sector, guaranteeing a solid and diversified preparation, ranging from operational skills to managerial and strategic knowledge.

MANAGEMENT TRAINING IN THE TOURISM SECTOR: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR AN INTEGRATED AND SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

Because of tourism's increasingly central role as a driver of the global economy, it is essential to strengthen the training of the sector's administrative cadres to ensure that they are prepared and able to adapt to the challenges of the market. Several studies have highlighted the main problems and possible solutions for effective improvement.

The lack of coordination between academia and the tourism sector is one of the most significant challenges. According to Page & Connell (2006), there is a considerable gap between the skills required by the tourism industry and those offered by educational programmes. This gap is attributed to curricula that are not always aligned with the needs of the labour market, which requires practical and up-to-date skills. Creating collaborative platforms that foster ongoing dialogue among universities, training institutions, and tourism enterprises is imperative to surmount this challenge. Creating regular forums, workshops, and joint conferences is a strategy suggested by Kim et al. (2022), who emphasise the importance of closer coordination between the educational and vocational sectors. In addition, establishing advisory committees composed of industry experts within educational institutions will help to keep programmes up-to-date and relevant, as highlighted by Wakelin-Theron (2019). Rapidly changing technologies and new tourist preferences require continuous updating of skills. Smaniotto et al. (2023) emphasise integrating advanced technologies into educational curricula, such as tourism management software and data analysis tools, to prepare students for modern industry challenges. Implementing continuing education modules and regular updates will help keep course content abreast of the latest trends and innovations, as suggested by Nikolova et al. (2014a), who points out that a learning climate within organisations can improve business performance and foster professional development. In addition, an integrated approach should promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Establishing partnerships with government agencies, industry associations, and non-governmental organisations is crucial to developing educational programmes that reflect public policy and sustainability initiatives. Joint projects and internship programmes can provide meaningful, practical experiences for students, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Kim et al. (2022) highlight the importance of such practical experiences to prepare students for the real challenges of the tourism industry. Finally, to ensure that future generations of tourism professionals are adequately prepared, mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating educational programmes need to be implemented. Regular feedback from employers and alums can guide curriculum improvements (Mungai et al., 2021). Adopting a flexible and innovative approach to curriculum design will allow rapid adaptability to market changes and new teaching methodologies. It is possible only through close collaboration between educators, students, companies and governments to effectively respond to the sector's needs and promote sustainable tourism development, as Gössling & Hall (2019) suggested. In order to optimise the training of managers in the Italian tourism sector as well, it is crucial to adopt an integrated approach that involves all stakeholders: educators, students, companies and governments. Only through close collaboration and constant updating of curricula will it be possible to respond adequately to market needs and promote sustainable tourism development. This synergy is crucial to prepare future generations of tourism professionals to face the sector's challenges and contribute to its lasting growth.

THE PATHWAY FOR TRANSVERSAL SKILLS AND ORIENTATION (PTSO) IN THE TOURISM SECTOR: A BRIDGE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND THE LABOUR MARKET

The PTSO (Pathway for Transversal Skills and Orientation) represents a fundamental part of the Italian educational system, as it integrates the school curriculum with practical experiences in the world of work. Introduced with Law 107/2015, the PTSO aims to facilitate students' entry into the labour market and to provide them with practical skills that complement the theoretical training received at school (MIUR, 2015a). The PTSO is developed through a series of experiences and activities that vary by sector and educational institution but generally include internships, work placements and collaborative projects with companies and organisations. These experiences are designed to give students a practical insight into their future professions and to help them develop soft skills, such as problem-solving, communication and teamwork. In the context of the tourism sector, the PTSO is delivered in various ways. Students can be involved in internships at accommodation facilities, travel agencies, tourism promotion boards and other organisations in the sector. During these placements, students gain hands-on experience managing day-to-day operations, customer relations, and event planning and promotion. These practical experiences are crucial for understanding an ever-changing industry's dynamics and applying theoretical knowledge in a real-world context. In addition, PTSO projects may include activities such as event creation and management, tourism marketing, and the design of promotional strategies. Students are often involved in work teams, collaborating with industry experts to develop and implement concrete projects, such as advertising campaigns or local heritage initiatives. Another critical element of PTSO is the opportunity for students to receive feedback and evaluation from business and school mentors. This feedback is essential for learning and professional growth, guiding students on improving and which skills to develop further (Indire, 2017). The PTSO facilitates students' transition from school to work and helps bridge the gap between theory and practice. Students can deal with the real needs and challenges of the labour market, improving their preparation and increasing their employability. In this way, the PTSO represents an essential resource for training competent professionals ready to face the challenges of the tourism sector and other work environments (Inapp[1], 2018).

[1] In Italian: Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche; In English: National Institute for Public Policy Analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the Italian school system for training administrative managers in the tourism sector highlights the need for an integrated and dynamic approach capable of responding to the emerging challenges of the global market. The literature has highlighted several critical issues, including the gap between the skills required by tourism companies and those developed in training courses (Mungai et al., 2021). The growing complexity of the sector, characterised by rapid technological progress and a constantly evolving demand for tourism, requires the continuous updating of curricula and the integration of advanced technologies to guarantee the competitiveness of future professionals (Smaniotto et al., 2023). Adopting innovative strategies to improve the training system is crucial. A central proposal could introduce a 'flexible and modular' training programme that allows students to customise their learning paths according to market needs and competencies. Such an approach could include specific modules on new digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence for tourism data management or virtual and augmented reality, to enhance the customer experience (Milton, 2023). Simulation labs could be set up in schools where students can handle complex tourism situations in virtual environments, thus improving their real-time decision-making and operational skills (Buckley, 2019). A further step towards innovation would be to promote strategic partnerships between educational institutions and technology start-ups in the tourism sector, encouraging the establishment of school incubators where students can collaborate directly with entrepreneurs and innovators in the sector. This type of hands-on experience would give students a direct insight into business dynamics, providing them with applicable skills and a significant influence in the market (Scuotto et al., 2021). The internationalisation of the Italian school system is already a strength, but it could be further developed through virtual educational exchanges with tourism schools in other countries and the creation of online courses open to students from all over the world. This interaction would help foster a more global mindset while improving future executives' language and intercultural skills (OECD, 2019b). Another critical innovation could be the creation of mentorship networks, where tourism professionals can follow students during their training, offering practical advice and sharing professional experiences. When combined with well-structured internships and continuous education based on the 'long-life learning' model, these mentoring paths can effectively enhance professional development; these paths can guarantee up-to-date training adapted to new market demands (Gessler & Howe, 2020).

Furthermore, introducing dynamic training monitoring indicators based on real-time data collected by the main stakeholders in the sector (students, companies, training bodies and government) would allow for a constant analysis of skills needs and a rapid adaptation of training curricula. This continuous feedback would make it possible to identify gaps between training and the labour market timelier, reducing the risk of obsolete skills (Nikolova et al., 2014b). Finally, to ensure that education is aligned with the needs of the tourism sector, a sustainability dimension needs to be incorporated into training programmes. Sustainable tourism is one of the emerging trends and will be increasingly relevant for the sector's future. Educational programmes should include specific courses on natural resource management, promoting responsible tourism and integrating green practices within tourism facilities (UNWTO, 2019; 2020).

A genuinely cutting-edge tourism education can be created through a constant and innovative synergy between educational institutions, businesses, government bodies and students. The suggested proposals would not only fill current gaps but also prepare future administrative frameworks to face the challenges of a rapidly changing global market while guaranteeing the sustainable and competitive growth of the Italian tourism sector (Smaniotto et al., 2023).

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