

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS ON TOURISM AND ITS RECOVER POSSIBILITIES

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Abstract

The Covid Crisis - 19 meant for each of us an experience that we have never lived before and that we saw as a form of isolation from all that means socially, the negative impact on the economy being at the same time an undisputed one. And yet, can't it be the beginning of a new path? Can't it also have positive effects on our lives and on the entire planet? Doesn't it mean sustainability, doesn't it mean reinvention and the beginning of a new road, more modest, more relaxed, less aggressive with the environment? In this paper we aimed to analyze how the Covid - 19 crisis has influenced the tourism industry and how this could contribute to its reinvention, to the promotion of a sustainable tourism, to the finding of new ways to practice tourism. The study is based on the analysis of different bibliographic sources, on the analysis of statistical data, on the experience of some creators of sustainable forms of tourism that could be extended and that could contribute to the good of the planet and ours.

Key words: tourism, sustainability, Covid-19, solutions

INTRODUCTION

It is true that the Covid-19 crisis had a negative impact on tourism, as well as on the entire economy. It is true that tourism was one of the sectors most affected by the Covid-19 crisis, that the losses in this sector were huge and that talking about reinventing tourism is a controversial topic, but tourists have sought and are looking for solutions that will allow them to still travel, but in risk-free places, to ensure the safety and peace they need. But this is a direction the world is already heading, because the way we spend our free time, vacations, the way we travel, has changed a lot in recent years with the awareness that the resources we benefit are limited and the lack of Reaction from us, the inhabitants of this planet, could have irreparable consequences. At this great moment, some of us are much more educated, more responsible, much more concerned with environmental protection, sustainability, how we can contribute to our own health, but also to the health of the planet. Children grew up in a responsible environment, received a more

responsible education, which turned them into young people and adults involved in volunteer activities aimed at the sustainability of the environment in which we live.

And then, maybe in tourism, the time has come to restart, to find solutions to create a quality tourism, a sustainable tourism, a tourism that no longer negatively affects the tourist localities, that no longer creates discomfort, their inhabitants,

The relationship of tourism with the environment is a direct one, the practice of tourism being influenced by the existence of the infrastructure, of the tourist facilities, all these being able to contribute to the destruction of the environment [1]. On the other hand, the incomes obtained from tourism can contribute to the awareness of the practice of an ecological tourism, to the protection of the protected areas or to the financing of some environmental protection projects.

Finding a balance between increasing tourism revenues, creating responsible tourism and respecting the environment is a challenge, but it certainly has solutions [4].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this paper, the working methodology included two stages, the first in which a review of the literature on "sustainability in tourism" was carried out, different specialized sites were analyzed that presented information on the effects of the Covid crisis. on tourism, and a second stage which involved analyzes of statistical data provided by Eurostat, UNWTO, INSSE on how the indicators analyzed in the period 2015-2019 have evolved, as well as on their forecasts for the period 2020-2025.

The analyzed indicators referred to: the number of arrivals in international tourism; the share of the labor force in tourism, the share occupied by tourism in the GDP, The situation of world destinations, in relation to travel restrictions. Based on their interpretation, conclusions have been drawn and proposals have been made on how

tourism can be restarted, at national and global level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As we show, tourism is an important source of income for millions of people, in many countries it contributes to ensure 20% of GDP and representing in 2019, 7% of global trade [3]. At the level of 2019, tourism represents 11.8% of GDP in Spain, 8.6% of GDP in Iceland and Mexico, 8.0% of GDP in Portugal, 7.4% of GDP in France and 6.8% of GDP in Greece.

According to Eurostat (2020) [3], the direct tourism contribution to Romania's GDP in 2019 was 2.7%. Its contribution to GDP, in the period 2015-2019, as well as the estimates made for the period 2020-2025 are presented in Fig. 1, highlighting both the decrease in 2020 and the optimistic scenario regarding its recovery after the medical crisis started at the end of 2019, as mentioned by OECD [6].

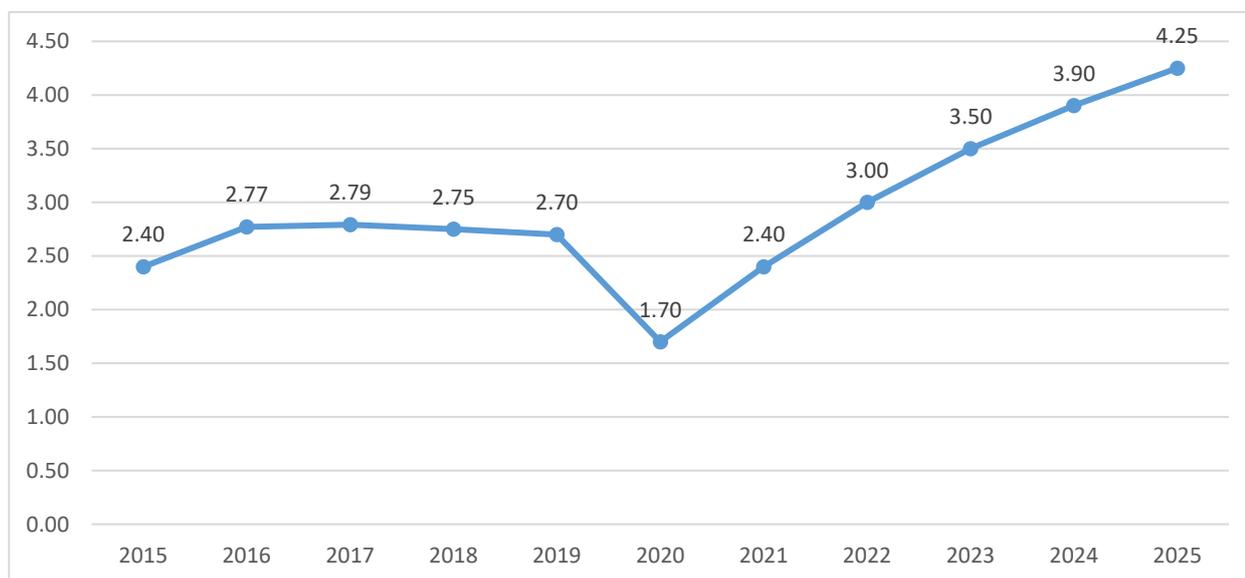


Fig. 1. The contribution of tourism to GDP in Romania (%)
Source: own processing based on Eurostat data [3].

Tourism also occupies an important place in terms of employment, along with economic, social or environmental aspects [8, 9]. Regarding the number of people working in tourism, Eurostat data show that in 2019, a significant share of the workforce is employed in tourism. In the first 10 places at European level are countries such as Greece (26%),

Croatia (23%), Portugal and Cyprus (22%), Malta (17%), Austria (16%), Spain, Italy and Estonia (15 %) and Slovenia (13%). Romania has a share of 6% of the labor force in tourism, which places it among the last countries in the European Union, on the same place as Iceland, on the last place being Lithuania and Poland with 5%.

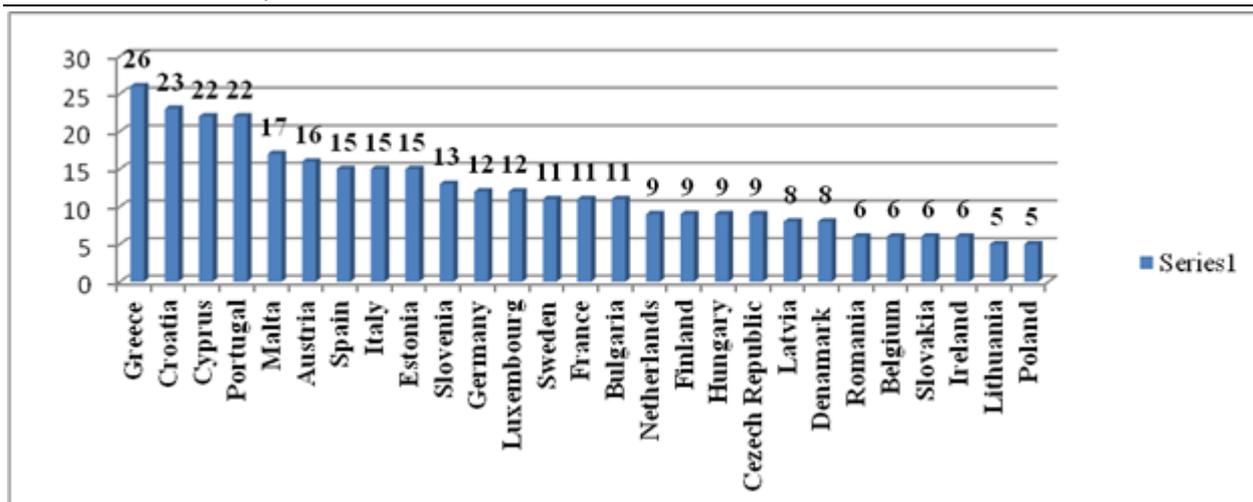


Fig. 2. The share of the labour force employed in tourism in the U.E. in 2019 (%)
 Source: own processing based on Eurostat data [3].

In China, in 2019, over 80 million people worked in tourism, of which 35% were directly involved in tourism, and 65% in tourism-related activities. Also, in Thailand, about 4.5 million people worked in tourism, in almost 12% of the workforce of this country. Based on these data, we can measure the impact that the reduction or cessation of tourism-related activities has affected the population, as a result of the Covid crisis, which comes to demonstrate the limits of globalization [2].

The Covid crisis - 19 determined in the first 9 months of 2020 a decrease in tourist arrivals

worldwide of 57%, decreases that by the end of the year could reach over 70%, which would determine a decrease in spending by tourists of \$ 1.5 trillion and the loss of 100 million jobs directly related to tourism [11]. This is all the more serious as many of these jobs are filled by vulnerable people, which will lead to increased poverty and social inequality. Moreover, the loss of tourism revenues will contribute to the destruction of biodiversity in areas where there are no alternative resources to ensure the existence of inhabitants, in those poor and vulnerable areas [5].

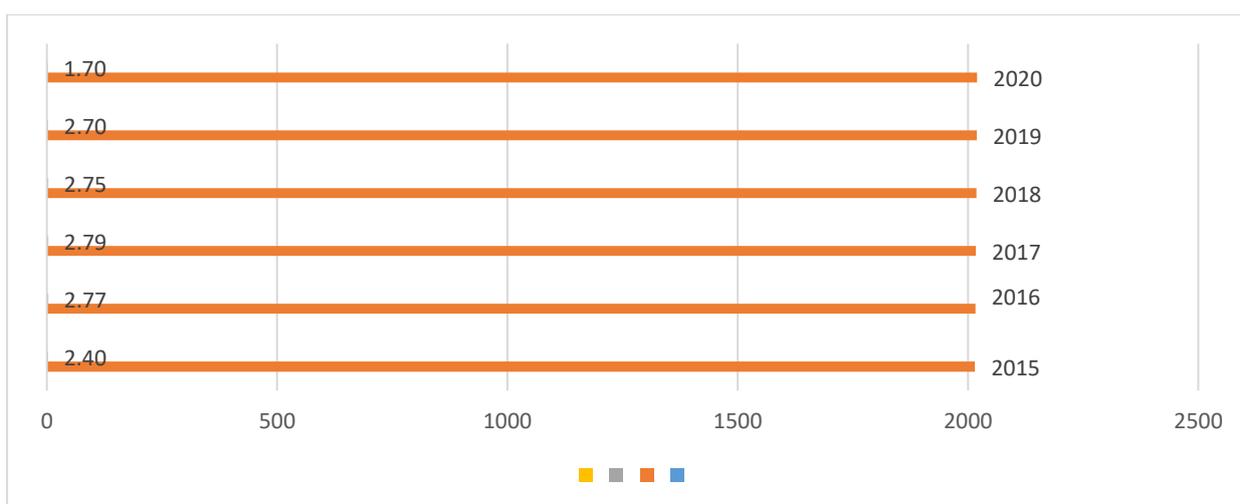


Fig. 3. International tourist arrivals situation in 2020 (%)
 Source: own processing after World Tourism Organization [13].

The decrease of the number of tourists had as general cause the Covid crisis in the conditions in which in the previous year there

were increases of the tourist arrivals with a catch between 2-7%.

These decreases were due to the imposition of total, partial restrictions, high restrictions or other categories of measures related to traffic in general, as a result of the Covid crisis - 19. These restrictions were imposed

progressively, influencing the tourist traffic, as affirmed by UNWTO, giving examples for Italy, Spain, Austria, Malta and Portugal (Fig.4).

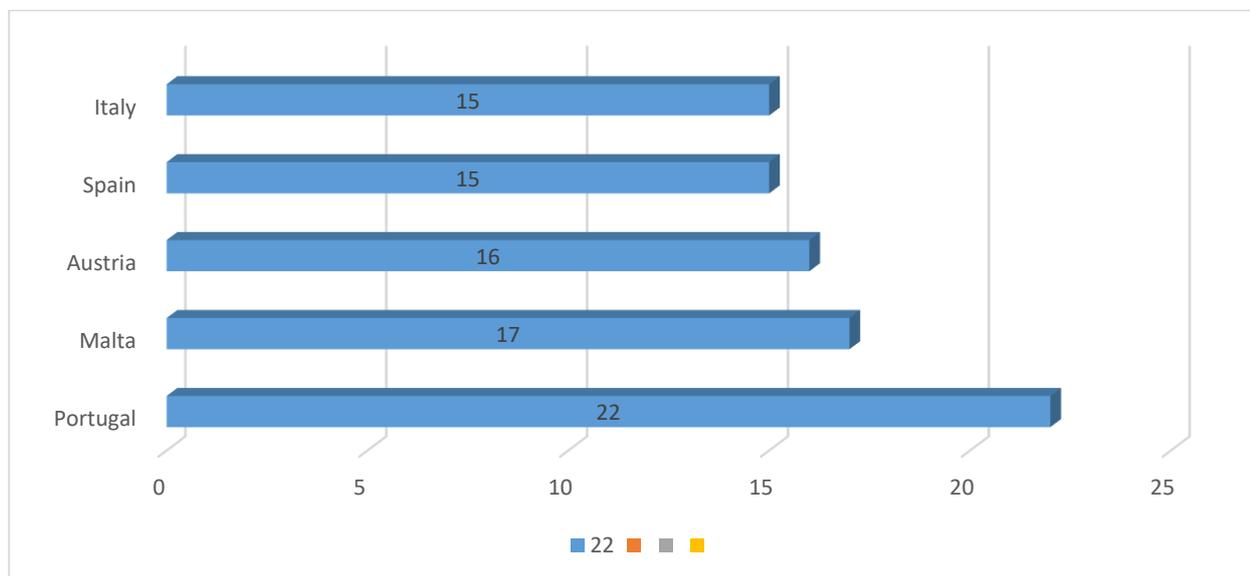


Fig. 4. The situation of world destinations, in relation to travel restrictions
Source: own processing after World Tourism Organization [11].

In the first quarter of 2020, international tourist arrivals had a decrease of 22 % what they were in 2019. In March 2020, arrivals went down by 57%, meaning a loss of 67 million international arrivals and about USD 80 billion in receipts.

The scenarios made by UNWTO [13] in March 2020 reflected "three possible patterns of monthly change in arrivals from April to December 2020 supposing that travel restrictions start to be lifted and national borders opened in early July (Scenario 1: -58%), in early September (Scenario 2: -70%) or in early December (Scenario 3: -78%).

If the urban tourism was catastrophically affected by Covid-19, the rural tourism did not suffered too much, on the contrary, tourists thought that for spending their vacations mainly in summer season it could be less risky to travel in destinations in the middle of nature, and rural, agrotourism, ecotourism have been a safer alternative. In the country side, where the population density is the smallest, it was a good opportunity to benefit if fresh air, admiring the beauty of the landscapes, enjoying visiting the local

attractions and tasting the traditional gastronomy. However, even in case of rural tourism, the number of guests was not as high in the previous year [12].

Lifting the measures could mean, as it was mentioned earlier, a new beginning, a way of rethinking tourism, its orientation towards a more environmentally friendly tourism, but also friendly with tourists and city dwellers. People will want to be able to enjoy travel, nature, freedom as much as possible when they can return to a normal life, so that tourism will have to be prepared to respond to these challenges.

The criteria that tourists will take into account when choosing a destination for spending the holidays will be related to their health safety, the choice of unoccupied areas, the quality of services provided, sustainability. The place of vacations spent in traditional, crowded places, began to be taken by the vacations spent in boarding houses and smaller hotels.

Among the measures that could be taken we mention:

- Practicing a quality niche tourism that brings the same incomes, and replacing the mass one

because a larger number of tourists does not mean a sustainable tourism

- Supporting local producers that can contribute to tourism development and revenue growth, precisely because the Covid - 19 crisis has shown that dependence on world markets can bring shortcomings related to supply, transport, etc.

- The development of creativity was one of the positive effects of the Covid crisis, the appeal to the online environment, to the realization of new ways of promotion and business development. The use of mobile data in optimizing visitor flows, using the virtual world, etc. are ways that can in turn contribute to sustainable tourism.

- Awareness of the role that sustainable tourism has not only on the environment, but also on our health, can influence our decisions, so that we move from classic tourism to sustainable tourism. This could also influence tourism policies, which should move towards strategies to promote environmentally friendly tourism, reduce pollution to the detriment of consumer marketing policies.

- Tourism should mean a business model in which people come first, in which local culture is promoted, in which the environment is protected, and all measures should be taken to support these values.

- Assuring tourists about their safety, which requires the use of procedures and safety standards

- Promoting domestic tourism, because it will last until people have the courage and opportunity to make international trips

- Introducing traffic through the use of environmentally friendly means of transport (bicycles, electric scooters) that could also contribute to reducing carbon and other gas emissions from burning fuel

- Expanding pedestrian streets that will both help reduce pollution but help tourists explore the less accessible tourist attractions

- Promoting local products and cuisine, which in addition to authentic experiences offered to visitors can contribute to community development [10]

- Sustainable tourism also means luxury tourism, wellness, but practiced in a responsible and sustainable way

- Staff training, and primarily the training of young people working in tourism, can contribute to the creation of sustainable jobs and the promotion of regional tourism [7].

CONCLUSIONS

The Covid crisis has severely affected the tourism sector, both in terms of business and in terms of tourism workers.

At this moment, it is important that each of the actors involved in tourism activities be aware of the vulnerability of this sector and be prepared to take measures to reduce the shocks of future events that disrupt not only this sector, but the entire economy.

However, this crisis is also a way to rethink tourism management, to promote local resources, to ensure local incomes, to develop quality, sustainable and well-developed services.

Measures have been taken in all countries of the world to support sectors of the economy, including tourism. The use of these funds towards the development of a sustainable tourism could represent a first step in rethinking and relaunching tourism.

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