

International Tourism Regionalization

Major Trends and Shock Disruption

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Introduction

REGIONALIZATION, AS a process of preferential trade openness and internationalization of economic, political, socio-cultural processes among several states, usually situated in geographical proximity, is a major characteristic of international relations, with a tendency to intensify and accelerate in the last decades. It manifests itself as a process that is both synergistic and in opposition to globalization, at least in the first stages of regionalization, in a wide variety of areas and patterns of territorial integration, enhanced by the 350 regional trade agreements existing globally in 2021,¹ many of these being initiated in the second half of the last century and having a history of several decades already. In 2020, half of world trade took place between the countries of various regional agreements, on a general trend of liberalization, especially on a preferential basis, with a high level of regional concentration. About 3/4 of the flows were in Europe (36.4%), East Asia (24.8%), and North America (13.2%).² Obviously, the level of regionalization differs depending on the degree of economic integration. For example, benefiting from the impact of the European Union's single internal market, Europe has the strongest intra-regional trade flow, 66.8% (67.9% of total exports and 65.8% of total imports), followed at a distance by South-East Asia (22.2%), North America (21.9%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (17.2%), respectively. At the opposite pole are the South Asia (6.4%) and Oceania (1.3%). At the level of regional agreements, we find the highest share in the European Union (57.8%), followed by the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (ex-NAFTA), USMCA (28.6%) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) (22.3%).

Therefore, despite a broad process of globalization, international business and relations tend to have a strong regional character, an essential role being played by the institutional frameworks of regional agreements that create favorable conditions for regionalization processes (reduction or elimination of customs duties and some other similar trade policy measures with equivalent effect, legislative harmonization, technological cooperation, intensification of capital flows, creation of regional value chains, etc.).

International tourism reflects the same geographical pattern. The main tourist region of the world is Europe, which holds about 50% of total international arrivals (fig. 1),

followed by Asia-Pacific (24.6%) and the Americas, with 14.9%. In all the three regions, the main tourist flow is intra-regional, representing 80% in Europe (in 2018), 79% in Asia-Pacific and 73% in the Americas (fig. 4). Also, the world's top 10 destinations (among which France, Spain, the United States of America, China, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom) received 40% of global arrivals and almost 50% of total tourism receipts (2019). However, the top 10 destinations concentrated 60% of the total arrivals in 1990, 65% in 1970 and 88% in 1950.³ With the exception of China, which has entered the top regarding arrivals, receipts and departures starting with 2000, the countries mentioned above have been in the top 10 since the 1950s, contributing essentially to maintaining a strong regional dimension of international tourism.

At the same time, however, the share of the top 10 global tourist destinations decreases steadily, and the share of the top two tourist regions that dominated the inbound tourism in the last century, Europe and the Americas, is steadily declining, with average international arrival rates lower than the global growth rates of international tourism for several decades now. As a major flow of international trade (tourism representing approximately 25% of the international trade in services), tourism thus becomes a vector of spatial dispersion/diffusion of the international economy. The process is also enhanced by the increasing growth of the share of developing and less developed countries in the total numbers of arrivals and receipts in international tourism, with the appearance of new poles of tourist attractiveness.

However, the evolution of regional and global tourism is not smooth and uneventful, its dynamics being strongly influenced by very diverse types of shocks. From global shocks, such as the 2008–2009 economic crisis or the current COVID-19 pandemic, to locally or nationally localized shocks, such as terrorist attacks, floods or volcanic eruptions, numerous events interfere with the tourism market and generate changes in the geography of tourism from different perspectives. Overall, tourism is one of the most dynamic industries, with a growth rate above the average of the global economic growth. For example, between 2011 and 2019, tourism grew by 3.5% per year, while the global economy grew by 2.5%,⁴ contributing significantly to the recovery of the global economy after the crisis of 2008–2009. In fact, for more than half a century, tourism has been considered a driver of economic growth and development, especially for countries and regions struggling to find other opportunities to create comparative advantages and integration into the international economy, with a relatively high capacity of economic multiplication and dynamism.⁵ Furthermore, it was observed that in the event of shocks, the tourism sector is very sensitive, having a low resistance, but returns faster to pre-crisis growth rates than other economic sectors, showing a high capacity for recovery.⁶ Thus, tourism introduces a function of stability in economic growth, strengthening the resilience performance of countries and regions through its own dynamics, resilience and linkages with other sectors.⁷

Considering all the aforementioned aspects, in this paper the main aim was to analyze the processes of regionalization of international tourism as a key dimension of this leading sector of the international economy. Subordinated to this aim, we defined two specific objectives: (i) to identify and discuss the major trends in the geographical re-structuration of the tourism landscape on a global scale and (ii) to analyze the impact

of different crises on these trends, considering the widespread opinion in the literature regarding the high resilience of the tourism sector. The paper therefore includes, in addition to the Introduction, a section of Data and Methodology (being an interdisciplinary paper based on a large volume of secondary data), a section on the dynamic and comparative analysis of regionalization processes, a section that presents the key debates on the tourism resilience, as approached in the literature, and a section focused on the analysis of the impact of certain shocks on tourism, selected by the authors in such a way as to capture the diversity of events that can generate significant changes in international tourism and allow us to understand the resilience of the tourism sector from multiple perspectives. A section of Conclusions is added to underline the main results and implications of this study.

Data and Methodology

THE PAPER is based on statistical data provided by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Bank statistics and EUROSTAT. The period analyzed was 1980–2019, a period long enough in order to identify the main global trends in the dynamics and reorganization of international tourist flows (and a period for which the data that have been used for comparative aims could be found), but also to capture transformations generated by various shocks. The year 2020 was analyzed separately, as a critical disruption moment. The region concept was used from a pragmatic perspective, respectively that of data availability for the entire analyzed period. Thus, the UNWTO division system was used, with the division into 5 major tourist regions: Europe, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Middle-East and Africa, with the related sub-regions.⁸ For trade regionalization data, the SIC system was used, as we mentioned before.

It is important to mention that the analysis is based on international tourist flows, due to reasons related to availability of data. As such, the fact that unlike domestic tourist arrivals, the international arrivals data are available for most countries, allowed as to provide an image as close to reality as possible for each region at least from this point of view. However, we admit the absence of domestic tourism in this analysis as a limitation of the study, since it is clear that the regionalization of tourism is much more obvious if domestic tourism is included. For example, UNWTO estimated for 2018 a volume of 9 billion tourist trips, respectively six times higher than international arrivals.⁹ The relevance of domestic tourism is not only given by the volume of travel but also by the fact that domestic tourism is different in terms of resilience, compared to external flows. However, domestic tourism can be estimated with a very high margin of error and not for all countries, limiting the relevance of dynamic and comparative analyses.

Descriptive statistics and cartographic representations have also been used in order to best emphasize the tourism dynamics between regions in the analyzed period by using international tourist arrivals (ITA) and international tourist receipts (ITR) data. The

graphical representations highlight either the evolution of international tourism over the analyzed period at the level of each region, or the changes that appeared between the regions in the context of certain crises, in terms of each region's share in global tourism.

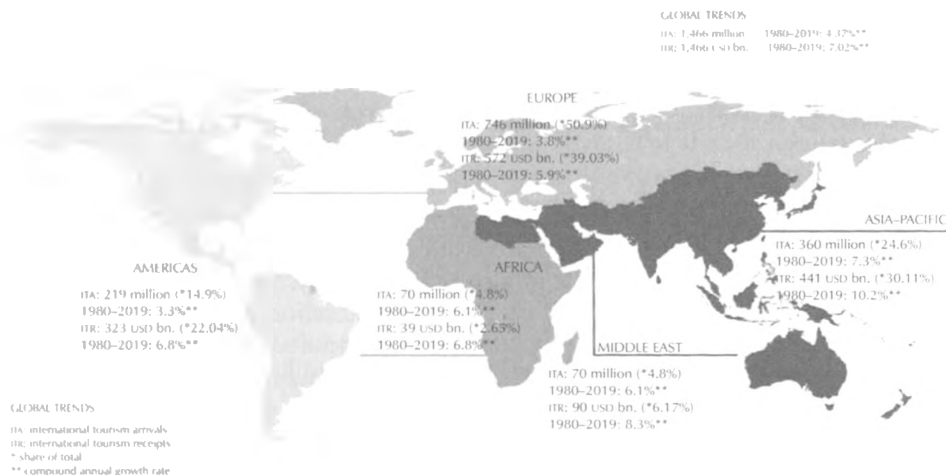
Regional Landscape of International Tourism Dynamics

BOTH GLOBALIZATION and regionalization represent key features of the world economy today, although their dynamic is complex and sometimes controversial, as in the case of the European Union perceived as a 'fortress.' They are, however, compatible processes, with regional trade groups being a limited form of globalization and a way of creating a multilateral global system. Regionalization, on the other hand, has sometimes been a counter-reaction to globalization, by reinforcing cultural identity and the rise of regionalist movements, yet regionalism has the same purpose of economic welfare as globalization and represents a building block of the other.

Regions have their own internal dynamics, and from this point of view we can talk about regions on various levels: the national level—regions within the borders of a state, the continental level—regions that bring together areas of different states and globally—regions that bring together several states from the same geographical area. International tourism has divided the world into geographical regions, following the distribution of tourism throughout the different areas, explaining the spatial patterns of tourist activity and development on a regional, national and international level. These world regions, on which this paper will focus, are as follows: Europe, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Africa.

Fig. 1 is representative for the tourism performance of each world region in 2019, but also for tourism dynamics for the four decades between the 1980s and 2019, where IIA stands for international tourism arrivals and ITR stands for international tourism receipts. Europe stands out as the region with the highest share of global IIA, and also of global ITR, as it received approximately 50% of all tourists, with a revenue of 572 billion dollars. It is followed by the Asia-Pacific region with 360 million tourist arrivals and receipts of 441 billion dollars. Next comes the Americas region, with 219 million tourists—14.9% of the total IIA—and an income of 232 billion dollars, whereas the Middle Eastern and African regions both stand at 4.8% (70 million tourist arrivals); however, if the Middle East has international tourism receipts of 90 billion dollars, for the same numbers of tourists, Africa registered almost three times less with only 39 billion dollars. The Middle East was considered the fastest-developing region for international tourism arrivals in 2019 by WTTC, "growing at almost double the global average (+8%)."¹⁰ Asia and the Pacific are also growing for several years, yet at a slower pace than the Middle East, with 5% more tourist inflows than in 2018. Europe saw an increase of only 4% in 2019 compared to the previous year, but still accounts for 51% of the global tourism market. The Americas, up by just 2% compared to 2018, offer "a mixed picture as many island destinations in the Caribbean consolidated their recovery after the 2017 hurricanes while arrivals fell in South America due partly to ongoing social and political turmoil."

FIG. 1. TOURISM PERFORMANCE AND DYNAMICS BY WORLD REGION (1980–2019)



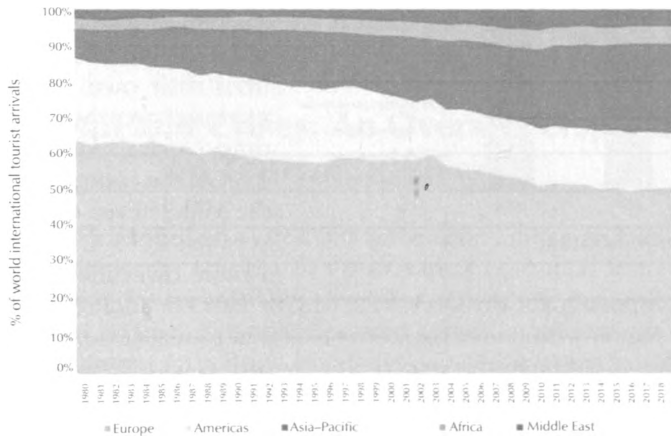
SOURCE: authors' representation.

The hierarchy previously indicated is also reflected in the evolution of each region's share in the total number of ITA for 1980–2019. The hierarchy is mostly stable over the time period (fig. 2), although changes occur inside each region. One main shift is noticed between regions, respectively the fact that after 2000, Asia and the Pacific occupies the second position, overtaking the Americas. In general, the emerging tourist destinations such as Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East, or Africa are markets belonging to developing economies, which steadily improve their economic potential, focusing on attractive natural and cultural resources, on a certain exoticism and adventure appeal—especially where the tourist infrastructure allows for a good accessibility and a sufficiently high level of comfort and quality of accommodation. Most often, the development of the tourist function in these destinations is the result of active policies to promote tourism as a factor of economic dynamics and integration in international trade.

Europe has long been a top tourist destination but has been slowly yet clearly declining in favor of other destinations of the world. This is due to changes in the tourists' profile and habits. The youth is no longer attracted to European destinations, not in the way it used to be. Furthermore, Europe itself represents a great pool of tourists, yet they prefer to visit other regions and the emerging countries now show more tourists inbounds than Europe, despite visa requirements. Also, European tourism has not kept up with the changing of times: the environmentally protective tourism is increasingly important; tourists are much more independent and use the internet to book their own vacations; the sharing economy and rural tourism are gaining momentum; digitization is advancing rapidly in tourism, and so on. The European Commission is constantly looking for strategies that will maintain Europe in the top of global tourist destina-

tions and invests time and money in this respect; the European Parliament is also trying to help with tourism issues by adopting helpful legislative acts and by consulting the public; the EU's Committee on Transport and Tourism is researching methods of promoting the industry of tourism. Yet, tourism in Europe is gradually declining, while the other four international regions become more attractive for tourists.

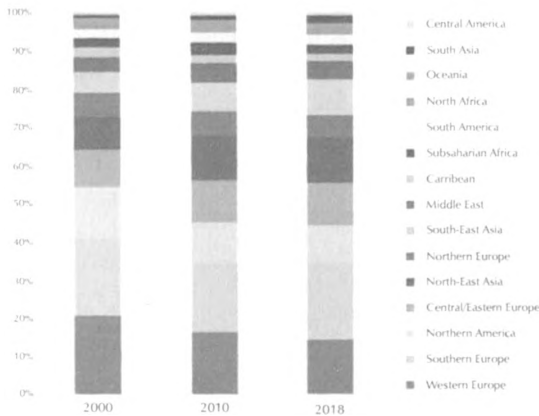
FIG. 2. SHARE OF INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS BY WORLD REGION



SOURCE: authors' representation.

A better understanding of each region's performance can be grasped through a look at how IFA are distributed across the subregions of each region (fig. 3). More precisely, analyzing the share of each subregion of the world in the global number of IFA, provides a detailed image of those areas with strongest appeal to tourists on an international level and can indicate how uniformly distributed or concentrated the IFA are inside each of the five regions. The most popular holiday destinations are by far in Europe, with high percentages for all its regions—Western Europe being the best represented, together with North America and, thirdly some of Asia's subregions, respectively North-East Asia, followed by South-East Asia. Inside the European region, Western and Southern Europe rank higher than Eastern Europe, due to better infrastructure, more evolved local policies and tourism marketing, and, above all, due to a longer tradition in tourism. The predominance of IFA in North America, as compared to South America, the Caribbean and Central America is mostly associated with its level of economic development, as well as with its global popularity. This figure illustrates the image of an unequal world regarding tourism and all it brings to a region's economy. Despite a global dispersion process reflected in a slight decline of the share of the 'classic' tourist destinations like Western and Southern Europe and North America over the period 2000–2018, the degree of concentration of tourist flows in these areas remains high.

FIG. 3. EVOLUTION OF ITA BY SUBREGIONS OF THE WORLD

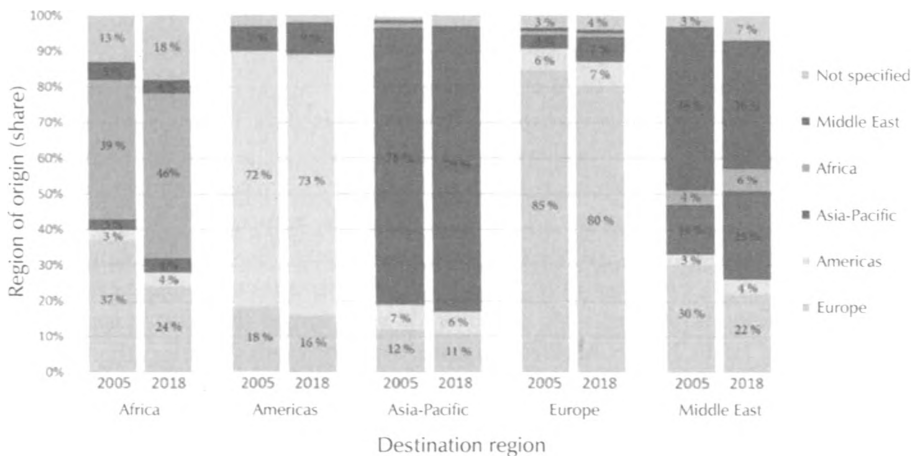


SOURCE: authors' representation.

by their origin, especially for the case of the Middle East. In addition, the Middle East was already the region with one of the lowest shares of tourists from the same region in 2005, with 46%, surpassed in this regard only by Africa, with 39% of its international tourists in 2005 originating from its countries. Most significant inter-regional tourist flows are those from Europe to other regions, especially to Africa and the Middle East, or those from Asia-Pacific to the Middle East.

An analysis of tourism regionalization requires particular attention to the flows of tourists between world regions (fig. 4). It is important to emphasize how, without exception, the highest share of tourist arrivals in each region is represented by tourists from the same region. Also, it is noticeable that for three cases, the share of tourists visiting countries from their own region has slightly increased over the analyzed period of time (Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific). On the contrary, for Europe and the Middle East, this share decreased between 2005 and 2018, leading to a more diversified range of tourists

FIG. 4. EVOLUTION OF TOURISTS' PREFERENCES BY WORLD REGION



SOURCE: authors' representation.

DATA SOURCE: United Nations World Tourism Organization.

It is, therefore, obvious, that the high share of the first three regions—Europe, Americas and Asia-Pacific—in the global hierarchy is mainly maintained through high numbers of tourists from these same regions. Factors for this tendency are the easier accessibility to countries from the same region, tourists preferring to visit areas/countries similar to some extent to those they live in, or the economic characteristics of these regions. On the other hand, the lower share of intra-regional tourist flows in Africa might have to do with the generally lower predisposition of people from African countries to travel, on financial or socio-cultural grounds, along with a growing interest of people from other parts of the world for visiting Africa.

Tourism and Crises: An Overall Perspective on Tourism Resilience

B EING HIGHLY depended on wages, but at the same time on feelings of security and safety, tourism is very sensitive to a wide variety of shocks. Tourists need to have strong motivations for travelling, free time and money, but at the same time the destinations have to be free of natural disasters, crimes, wars, terrorist acts, violations of human rights, illnesses, or political instability,¹¹ or of any other factors related to the negative perceptions of the tourists about destinations. However, the tourism mobility at regional, national or international levels is impacted by many crises and disrupting trends, which change the preferences, motivations, industry and management crisis practices or tourism policies, but also the geography of tourism. In addition, the complex challenges for both markets and policy makers stem from the fact that the impact of crises is not characterized by a spatial dimension. The high level of market integration and the linkages of tourism with many industries determines for a local crisis to have a relevant regional and/or international impact determinism.¹² From this perspective the question about tourism as a factor of growth and of sustainable development¹³ arises.

However, the literature highlights in many cases a high capacity of tourism to recover fast and easily after crises.¹⁴ In relation to the higher rates of the rise of tourism compared to other sectors and to the average of global growth, tourism can thus be considered an acceleration factor of economic recovery, including from the perspective of the evolutionary theory, focused on the transformative dimension,¹⁵ aspects considered in the resilience theories.

With a history of almost half a century, resilience thinking is currently integrated in various sciences, from various perspectives, shock resistance and responsiveness being common and central topics in the literature on resilience.¹⁶ Covering different aspects, at different scales or for different communities, resilience is still an evolving concept.¹⁷ One of the most integrative and cited definitions in literature is provided by Martin and Sunley:¹⁸ resilience is

the capacity . . . to withstand or recover from . . . shock to its developmental growth path, if necessary by undergoing adaptive changes to its economic structures and its social and

*institutional arrangements, so as to maintain or restore its previous developmental path, or transit to a new sustainable path characterized by a fuller and more productive use of its physical, human and environmental resources.*¹⁹

We observe that reference is made to overall shocks, to various dimensions of resilience, to capacity and performance, drivers, and method (the evolutionary approach).

The transfer of these components towards resilience-based policies, integrating the resilience approach in all policies and to all levels is one of the new trends in governance, and the identification of the key resilience drivers has been and has remained a priority research direction in resilience literature. The results essentially depend on the field and spatial area under investigation as well as on the complexity of the methodology applied, but some of the most relevant drivers are: the industrial and business structure, labor market conditions, financial arrangements, agency and decision-making;²⁰ specialization in 'new economy' or in growth-leading sectors;²¹ 'related variety';²² agglomerations, accessibility market, territoriality, urbanization and infrastructure;²³ the structural and business subsystem, the labor subsystem, the financial subsystem and the governance subsystem;²⁴ the dynamic growth of the region, the structure of the economy, export orientation and specialization of the region, human capital, innovation rate, business and corporate culture, region location and institutional arrangement in the region.²⁵ Other relevant drivers are also often mentioned: socio-demographic factors, social capital, good governance, human capital, innovation and R&D sector development, quality of institutions, active citizens' networks, local governance.²⁶

Considering the complexity of the economic, social, environmental, institutional linkages in the destinations, tourism is connected to all these drivers, and integrating the tourism in the resilience-based policies can boost and accelerate the recovery. The key condition is that tourism has to be itself resilient. Consequently, literature has focused over the last years on tourism resilience. Overall, the vulnerability of the tourism destination to various crises is widely recognized,²⁷ and the COVID-19 crisis indicated that the destinations where tourism has an important contribution to GDP and to employment were strongly affected. At the same time, the tourism industry is recovering quicker than other sectors and more often than not, the annual growth rates are, after the recovery, higher on the short-term than the rates before the crisis, which reflects a low resistance, but a high recovery rate.²⁸

The demand for tourism is strongly conditioned by stability and also by the economic situation of the outbound regions. In periods of crisis, world tourism increases at a lower rate, and even decreases, especially if combined with factors of political uncertainty and insecurity. Instead, the rate of tourist inflows and revenues increases significantly in times of economic expansion. In many countries, especially in emerging economies, the international tourist arrivals indicate a growth rate even higher than the GDP rate. If during the relaunch of the economy tourism registers a more accentuated dynamic, a slowdown of growth does not necessarily lead to a correspondent reduction of tourism. This situation is mainly explained through the fact that tourism is considered an essential part of well-being; in numerous regions and countries there are conditions created for integrating tourism in the usual consumption habits and tourism is stimulated through

public policy, being considered a key driver for growth, sustainable development, international integration and competitiveness, economic, social and territorial convergence. This indicates that tourism could represent a factor of stability and economic development, even in relatively critical periods, and building the tourism resilience became in policies a way towards economic recovery after crises and transformation through more sustainable development patterns. However, it is expected that the differences of the crises' territorial consequences and of the tourism resilience performance will impact in different ways the economic systems of the destinations and will change the tourism geography both at global and intra-regional levels. The next section includes the analysis of tourism resilience based on a series of case studies, looking in particular at the spatial restructuring of the tourism landscape at global and regional levels.

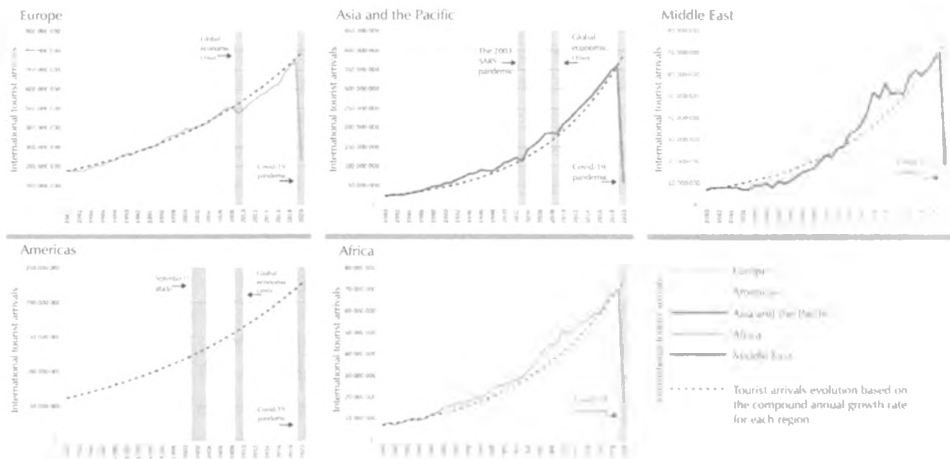
International Tourism Under the Influence of Crises

IT IS impossible to approach the matter of international tourism dynamics without considering the disruptive events that have had an impact during the last decades on tourism's evolution, especially since the shocks that tourist destinations can be exposed to are extremely diverse in terms of their nature and intensity.²⁹ While tourism is generally regarded as a rather resilient sector capable to recover rapidly after being affected by a certain crisis,³⁰ it is undeniable that crises at the global level, such as the economic crisis of 2008–2009 or the currently ongoing COVID-19 pandemic had significant effects on the trends of tourism activity. Besides these global shocks, other major disruptive events can be mentioned which, although manifested mainly at a regional or local level, have also had implications on a larger scale, sometimes even with effects on the global tendencies of tourism. It is the case of the September 11 terrorist attacks from 2001, the outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome from 2003 or various environmental shocks, such as volcano eruptions (the Eyjafjallajökull eruption in 2010) or hurricanes (hurricane Katrina in 2005).

The impact of all these disruptive events is differentiated between regions and sub-regions of the world, regardless of them being global crises or more localized ones. Fig. 5 provides an overview of the evolution of each world region in terms of international tourist arrivals, focusing on the moments of decline, respectively the crises that affected tourism in each region. One main event, the COVID-19 pandemic, appears to have impacted without exception all regions of the world, which is no surprise considering the travel restrictions, quarantine periods and closed borders that characterized most countries especially in the first weeks of the pandemic.³¹ It is notable how unlike any other crisis, this pandemic determined such a serious decline in the international tourist arrivals in 2020 that all world regions went back to the level of arrivals specific to the '90s. The global economic crisis stands out as another moment of great impact, this time only for Europe, Asia and the Pacific, the Americas and the Middle East, while Africa appears to not have been affected during this period. Although the decline has been significant worldwide, its intensity at regional level has been of short-term, with a one-year decline for each region and a general tendency of recovery starting with 2010 (tab. 1).

Among the most important shocks affecting particular regions we can mention the SARS pandemic in 2003, for the case of Asia and the Pacific, and the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, in the Americas. It is evident how for the case of the Americas, the 2001 shock had a stronger effect than the global economic crisis, both in terms of intensity of decline and in terms of years it took before reaching back the level prior to the crisis.

FIG. 5. REGIONAL TOURISM TRENDS AND CRISES DISRUPTIONS



SOURCE: authors' representation.

In what follows, a series of particular crises will be discussed, with reference to their global impact and to the manner in which regional trends of international tourism have changed during or following these disruptive events. Due to the paper's length constraints, only a limited number of case studies has been selected, the intent being to cover shocks from all of the following categories: economic crises, health crises and environmental shocks. These have been grouped into (i) global crises, including the 2008–2009 economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic and (ii) crises with regional and subregional impact, where the 2001 terrorist attacks, the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami and the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull volcano eruption were included.

Global Crises and Their Impact on Tourism Regional Trends

TOURISM IS one of the most vulnerable sectors to all types of crises and hazards,³² and the effects of these shocks are negative both through the effective damages they determine at the destination and for the potential they have, for a longer or shorter period of time, to deter tourists from visiting the destination. The global crises, among which the 2008–2009 economic crisis and COVID-19 pandemic are the most representative, are characterized by a generalized negative impact in all regions of the world

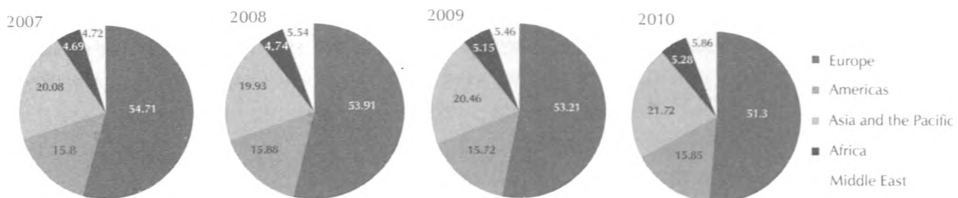
in their first stages, followed by different responses from the regions, depending on their capacity to recover and adapt to the shocks.

EFFECTS OF 2008–2009 GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS ON INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

When it comes to economic crises that affected the world and, implicitly the tourism sector, the global economic crisis of 2008–2009 is the most frequent reference point. Tourism is considered to have been one of the latest sectors to feel the impact of the global recession, with a decline in tourism arrivals and receipts only starting with the second semester of 2008.³³ Nonetheless, the negative effects have been quite severe, when regarded in the context of continuous growth that was specific prior to this moment for all world regions. In 2009, the decline of tourist arrivals in the world was of 3.8%, while an even stronger negative impact was registered at the level of tourism receipts, of 9.4%.³⁴

Each world region experienced differently the period of the global economic crisis, with their rates of decline and period of recovery depending on contextual factors. Europe and Asia-Pacific proved to be the regions with the most significant changes following the economic crisis, each of them in different ways.³⁵ These changes had been forecasted even from 2010, forecasts that indicated Europe as being at risk of a more serious decline of the tourism demand than other regions, while Asia was estimated to recover rather rapidly following the crisis.³⁶ A look at the share of each region prior to the crisis, during the crisis and immediately after it, confirms these forecasts at least in terms of changes in share of international tourist arrivals for each region (fig. 6). With a share of 54.71% of the global international arrivals in 2007, Europe gradually declined during the crisis, reaching a share of only 51.3% until 2010, which indicates a stronger negative effect of the crisis on its destinations and a slower revival after the crisis had ended. On the other hand, Asia and the Pacific, as predicted, experienced a relatively fast revival and even gained in terms of share of international tourist arrivals.

FIG. 6. SHARE OF GLOBAL INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS BY REGION DURING THE ECONOMIC GLOBAL CRISIS



SOURCE: authors' representation.

The impact of the crisis on each region is even better emphasized by regarding the growth rates for each year of the crisis (tab. 1). It stands out that there is one region that continued to grow even during the global recession, respectively Africa. While the strongest negative impact during the crisis registered for the case of the Middle East, with a decline of -5.77%, the Middle East is also the region with the highest growth

both prior to the crisis and in the year after the crisis. Therefore, it shows a great recovery capacity, with the highest growth rate of all regions for 2009–2010, of 14.29%. Europe appears to be the second most affected during the main year of the crisis, with a decline of -5.17%. What is notable is that it is also the region with the lowest growth rate immediately after the crisis, which indicates it as having lost overall the most among all regions in the context of the global recession.

TABLE 1. EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS BY WORLD REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2008/2009 ECONOMIC CRISIS

	Growth rate 2007–2008	Growth rate 2008–2009	Growth rate 2009–2010
Europe	0.6%	-5.17%	2.94%
Americas	2.78%	-4.73%	7.80%
Asia and the Pacific	1.09%	-1.08%	13.04%
Africa	2.33%	4.55%	10.87%
Middle East	20.93%	-5.77%	14.29%

DATA SOURCE: United Nations World Tourism Organization.

Therefore, it appears that the global economic crisis determined a shift in the previous regionalization trends, with the main consequence reflected in a slight decrease in Europe's share in global tourism, which translates into benefits for Asia and the Pacific and, secondly, for the Middle East and Africa.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS AN UNPRECEDENTED CASE OF HEALTH CRISIS

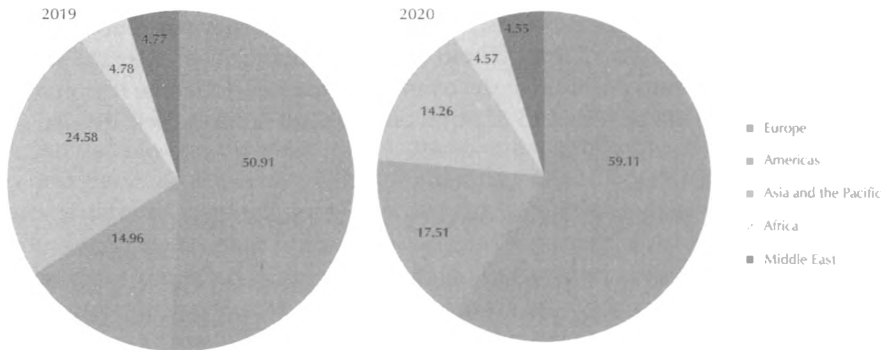
The 21st century is considered to be particularly predisposed to the pandemic threats, because of the rapid growth of the world population, as well as of its mobility, because of the continuously developing global transport networks and because of the high population concentration in ever-growing urban centers.³⁷ The impact of a pandemic event is related to various factors, such as the geographical distance from the epicenter of infection, the media attention it receives or the worldwide socioeconomic conditions, along with conditions of world conflicts.³⁸ Even without considering the current COVID-19 pandemic, the epidemic outbreaks are known to be among the most impactful crises, with a worldwide loss in the number of tourist arrivals of 57 million between 1980 and 2019.³⁹ The most relevant such shocks, prior to the 2020 pandemic, are SARS(2003), the H1N1 epidemic (2009) and the MERS epidemic (2012).

The COVID-19 pandemic is undeniably the greatest shock to which tourism sector has been exposed until now. It is often referred to as an 'unprecedented' event,⁴⁰ with reference to either its circumstances or to its impact. While all past disruptive events have been noticed to not have led to long-term decline, the COVID-19 pandemic has been considered from the start to have the potential of inducing an incomparable impact and a considerably different recovery.⁴¹ However, scholars and practitioners also regard the

COVID-19 pandemic as a time of reset, of “a next normal”⁴² for the tourism industry and as an opportunity to escape from an unsustainable global tourism path.⁴³

At the global level, Asia and the Pacific appears to be the world region that has been the most exposed to the currently ongoing pandemic, with a high decline of its share of global international tourist arrivals from 24.58% to only 14.26% (fig. 7). This reality is beyond doubt related to the fact that Asia, and more precisely China, is the place where the COVID-19 pandemic originated, indicating as previously stated that being geographically close to the epicenter of infection determines a stronger impact of a pandemic crisis.⁴⁴ Europe is the region that appears to have gained the most from this redistribution of international tourism flows between 2019 and 2020, increasing its share from 50.91% to 59.11%. To a lower extent, growth can also be noticed in the case of the Americas. However, it is important to consider that although this reorganization of tourism between world regions for the period 2019–2020 has been beneficial for some regions by increasing their share of the global international arrivals, all regions, without exception, have been strongly affected by the decline of international tourists numbers.

FIG. 7. SHARE OF GLOBAL INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS BY REGION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC



SOURCE: authors' representation.

Tab. 2 further shows the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on each region by referring to the importance of the travel and tourism sector in the economy of each region before and during the crisis. First, Asia-Pacific and Europe stand out as the two regions most dependent on tourism, with a contribution of this sector to total GDP of 9.9%, respectively 9.5% in 2019. These two regions registered the strongest negative change in the sector's contribution to the total economy, with a decline of more than 50%. Similar rates of decline are specific to the Middle East and Africa. On the other hand, the Americas differentiate themselves with the lowest change, of -42.4%, becoming in 2020 the region with the most significant contribution of the travel and tourism sector to the economy.

TABLE 2. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURISM BY WORLD REGION

	ITA growth rate 2019–2020	Contribution of travel and tourism GDP to total GDP 2019	Contribution of travel and tourism GDP to total GDP 2020
Europe	-68.36%	9.5%	4.9%
Americas	-68.04%	8.8%	5.3%
Asia and the Pacific	-83.61%	9.9%	4.6%
Africa	-74.29%	6.9%	3.7%
Middle East	-72.86%	8.9%	4.9%

DATA SOURCE: World Tourism and Travel Council.

In conclusion, the analysis presented in this section emphasizes that health crises can be particularly impactful on regionalization trends, likely to generate an unequalled decline of tourism activity and also to dictate changes in the hierarchy of the world regions. The particular case of the COVID-19 pandemic countered, for the moment, the changes induced by the global recession of 2008–2009. While the economic crisis brought advantages to Asia and the Pacific regarding its share in the total number of international tourist arrivals, at the same time with a decline of Europe's share, the pandemic not only determined a considerable decline of Asia and the Pacific's share, but it also brought it to the third position at a global level. These changes benefited the Americas the most, which occupied the second position, in the context in which it is also the region with the lowest decline of tourism arrivals and of travel and tourism contribution to total GDP.

Local Crises with a Strong Impact on Tourism

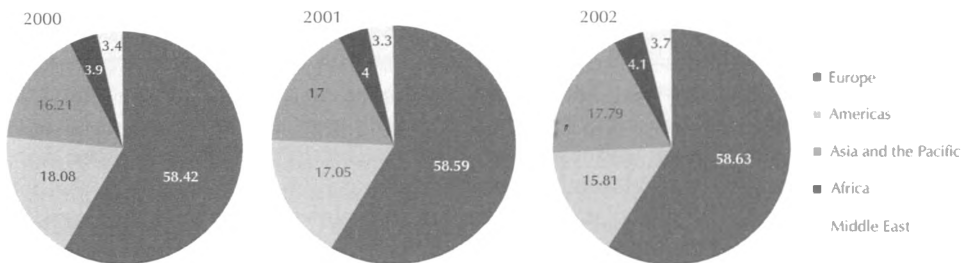
WHILE GLOBAL crises determined new tourism trends at the level of world regions and often changed hierarchies between them, the shocks that manifested themselves in a more localized manner generated important effects, but generally these effects were felt mainly by that particular region where the crisis happened. Therefore, this type of shocks mostly led to the reorganization of tourist flows between subregions of same region. However, there are cases when crises that strongly affected a particular region or country of that region, indirectly influenced the overall dynamics of tourism, either by negatively impacting other regions or, on the contrary, by bringing them advantages following the loss of the affected area. In what follows, three important crises that, among other sectors, affected tourism, will be addressed, with the purpose of illustrating the effect each crisis had on the particular region/area where it occurred, but also on the general trends of regionalization. These crises are the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami and the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland in 2010.

THE TERRORIST ATTACKS ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2001

The events of September 11 in the United States have had a worldwide resonance, with significant short- and medium-term effects on both international and domestic travel

patterns.⁴⁵ The important position of the United States on the map of global tourism, as well as “the global character of the Al-Qaeda terror network”⁴⁶ are the main reasons why these events affected tourism on a global level. For the entire tourism industry, these events led to a matter of confidence and serious concerns for the safety of travelers, the questions that were raised ranging from the choice of the safest mode of transport to the decision on whether to travel or not at all.⁴⁷

FIG. 8. SHARE OF GLOBAL INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS BY REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF 11 SEPTEMBER TERRORIST ATTACKS



SOURCE: authors' representation.

Despite it being an event that affected the entire tourism industry, two regions/areas have been predisposed the most to its negative impacts in terms of tourism: the United States and the Arab countries. While for the first one, the short-term negative consequences manifested themselves under the form of a decline in tourists numbers and falls in income and employment both in tourism and in the entire US economy,⁴⁸ for the second area it was predicted that a significant collapse of the tourism industry would take place because of the negative image associated with these countries, a collapse which after all did not happen.⁴⁹ Figure 8 reflects the changes that occurred in tourism regionalization following the September 11 events. The Americas inevitably faced a decline in their share of international arrivals, losing their second position to Asia and the Pacific, in the context in which starting with 2000s Asia, and particularly China, was already becoming an important destination on the global tourism map. The Middle East, on the other hand, was not subject to significant changes during this period, as it concerns its share of total international tourist arrivals, the explanation for its capacity to face the potential negative outcomes of these events being thought to reside in the fact that Arab and Muslim tourists spent their holidays in the region, preventing this way a collapse of the regional tourism.⁵⁰

THE INDIAN OCEAN NATURAL DISASTER IN 2004

Nowadays, the world is considered to be subjected to all types of natural disasters even more than in the past, because of the effects of climate change and also because of how complex socio-ecological systems are.⁵¹ Such an event was the earthquake followed by a tsunami in the Indian Ocean, in 2004, which is considered as one of the natural disasters

with the most catastrophic consequences in the recent history.⁵² Following this event, the Asian region faced extreme damage from the economic and social points of view,⁵³ with twelve countries affected by this disaster, among which Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, and Thailand registered the most dramatic impact in terms of lives lost and the number of missing and displaced individuals.⁵⁴ Tourism was strongly affected in this region, mainly because some of the cities hit by the disaster were popular tourist destinations, implying a considerable proportion of the victims being tourists at the moment of the tsunami, as it was the case of Thailand.⁵⁵

Despite the devastating impact these events had on tourism in Asia at the time, the global hierarchy of world regions did not change, Asia and the Pacific maintaining their second position regarding the share of international tourists even immediately after this shock, with a percentage of 19.05 in 2005, equal to that from 2004. Moreover, significant changes did not occur even inside the region, the two subregions the most affected, South Asia and South-East Asia, continuing to register a growth in the number of IIA in the years following the shock (tab. 3). Slight negative changes are noticed in the share of these two regions in the total number of IIA of Asia and the Pacific region in the first year after the disaster, changes that reflect the fact that although these two subregions continued to grow, they did not grow at the same pace as the other two subregions in Asia and the Pacific.

TABLE 3. TOURISM EVOLUTION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC SUBREGIONS DURING AND AFTER THE INDIAN OCEAN TSUNAMI

	2004		2005		2006	
	IIA	% of total IIA of Asia and the Pacific	IIA	% of total IIA of Asia and the Pacific	IIA	% of total IIA of Asia and the Pacific
North-East Asia	78,946,905	54.9	87,063,926	56.1	93,840,077	55.8
Oceania	10,513,200	7.3	10,946,100	7.1	10,973,200	6.5
South Asia	7,612,200	5.3	8,146,600	5.2	9,843,300	5.9
South-East Asia	46,771,000	32.5	49,059,000	31.6	53,598,000	31.9

DATA SOURCE: United Nations World Tourism Organization.

Therefore, the Indian Ocean tsunami from 2004 was clearly a devastating event, including important negative effects on tourism activity at the time, but the evolution of tourism arrivals in the region proved once again that tourism is a resilient sector, capable to recover fast from a shock and it can be said that, compared to other shocks, in this case the recovery was even more notable.

THE EYJAFJALLAJÖKULL ERUPTION OF 2010

The eruptions of Eyjafjallajökull volcano in April and May 2010 represented an event that unexpectedly became of European, if not global, interest. While volcano eruptions usually have an impact in their immediate vicinity, the 2010 eruptions strongly impacted the European air traffic because of the volcanic ash cloud that was generated the Icelandic volcano. At that moment, there were even claims that the negative economic impact on the air travel industry was going to be even bigger than the one on the US air traffic af-

ter 11 September 2001.⁵⁶ During the days following the eruptions, more than 100,000 flights were cancelled, leading to significant losses in revenues. The great impact of this crisis is considered to be due to the fact that the ash cloud was pushed by winds towards areas with very dense traffic flows, such as France, Benelux, southern United Kingdom and Germany.⁵⁷ However, following the moment of the eruption, there were differentiated effects between Iceland and other European states: air traffic in Iceland was affected for 13 days, while the other states felt the negative impact for around 8 days.⁵⁸ The negative effects represented flight delays, reschedules and cancellations, which automatically translated into a decline in the number of tourists, and therefore in considerable loss for the industry.

Although the crisis initially generated important negative effects on tourism, and particularly on the air travel industry, it has been concluded that these effects were short-term, and they did not determine any reorganization of the tourism flows with a potential impact on the regionalization of tourism at a global level. Moreover, after the initial shock, the Eyjafjallajökull eruption proved to have had positive effects on tourism in Iceland, since it meant great publicity for the country and an increase in attractiveness for tourists in the long-term, the eruption increasing nature lovers' interest for Iceland.⁵⁹ Therefore, this event is a particular example of disruptive shocks which can generate both negative and positive effects, depending on their evolution.

In conclusion, shocks of various types can represent important turning points in the regionalization process of tourism, influencing the trends at global and regional levels when it comes to tourist flows. Therefore, it has been noticed that while some crises might have a strong negative impact on all regions, without exception (such as COVID-19 or the global economic crisis), the intensity of their impact will inevitably vary from one region to another, which might favor changes in the hierarchies of world regions (or subregions) in terms of their share of international arrivals. It has been the case with the Americas going on the third position after the September 11 attacks, in a context in which Asia and the Pacific was already becoming rather successful as tourist destination anyway, and it has been the case of Americas getting back on second position in during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Asia and the Pacific was one of the regions hit the hardest by the crisis.

Conclusions

THE GLOBAL dynamics of international tourism associates the processes of globalization with those of regionalization, against the background of a tendency of spatial dispersion through the increase of extra-regional, long-distance flows, maintaining at the same time the predominance of intra-regional flows. The main tourist region of the world remains Europe, although it has been in a downward trend for over three decades. Europe has also the strongest regional dimension, with 80% intra-regional tourism (in 2018, on a declining trend). The regional dimension is predominant also for the Americas and Asia-Pacific, the most attractive tourist regions of the

world alongside Europe (79% for Asia-Pacific and 73% for the Americas), although with opposite tendencies: with a medium growth rate lower than the global average of 3.3% in the period 1980–2019, compared to 4.37%, the Americas steadily decreased as a region in international tourism, while Asia-Pacific grew in the same period, registering an average annual growth rate of 7.3%. The trends can be explained mainly by the higher dynamics of economic growth in Asia-Pacific, including strong emerging economies, with a growth over that of developed countries, a constant process of liberalization and a significant improvement in their international competitiveness. In addition, the Asia-Pacific countries have implemented an intense process of deregulation in tourism and transportation, have adopted incentive policies in the field of tourism and are in a growing period of the life cycle as a tourist destination, compared to America (especially North America, the dominant region of the Americas) and Europe, where many traditional destinations are in an aging/decreasing phase. At the sub-regional level, the main winners are Oceania and South Asia, while the regions with the strongest decline in total international flows were North America and Western Europe. It follows that the dynamics of tourism regionalization processes operate in favor of emerging regions and countries, maintaining a strong, dominant regional dimension and a stronger spatial reorganization, mostly at the subregional level.

Tourism crises usually influence these trends, short-term tourism being an extremely sensitive, vulnerable sector with a low resistance capacity, especially in the case of shocks that are strongly connected with perceptions of safety and security, such as health, environmental or political crises. At the same time, however, the resilience of the tourism industry is high, with tourism most often returning to pre-crisis growth rates much faster than other economic sectors. The impact of shocks is thus rather short-term and obviously differs from region to region, with tourism resilience depending on an extremely wide variety of factors in connection with economic resilience as a whole. During the analyzed period, the strongest impact was that of the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing international tourism to the level of the '90s, but local shocks like the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 can also have a global impact. From the perspective of major trends in the spatial distribution of tourism, only the COVID-19 pandemic generated a disruptive shock on a global scale, with the reversal of trends, the most resilient regions being Europe and Americas, both grounded in a strong intra-regional flow.

Overall, although a change in production and consumption patterns is anticipated due to the prioritization of environmental issues on a global scale, with possible significant implications over mobility, tourism will continue to be one of the most dynamic industries. First of all, the general increase in living standards and leisure time has determined more and more socio-professional categories to include tourism in their budgets as a normal commodity, with a relatively low price elasticity and resistant to dropping incomes, which means that in times of crisis the holidays are restructured (reduction of the number of days of stay, reduction of the average daily expenses, orientation towards the proximity tourism), rather than giving them up completely. Thus, crises have a stronger impact on revenues than on international arrivals/departures, people feeling a strong need to escape, to do something else, elsewhere, for maintaining their physical and mental balance; tourism being thus an expression of recovery processes, both individually and socially. Second, taking into consideration the potential contribution of tourism

to GDP and employment, more and more countries and regions have integrated tourism into their development policies, adopting numerous programs to directly or indirectly support the tourism industry, relevant in this regard being, for example, the case of the European Union or China.

Consequently, tourism can also be used in perspective in resilience-based policies, as a driver of economic recovery. Moreover, the dynamics of tourism above the average economic growth and the strong linkages of tourism with sustainable development will generate opportunities for capitalizing on tourism in order to transform the destinations into more resilient regions, by adopting more efficient development models, more connected with the sustainability, compared to the previous ones (evolutionary resilience pattern). Obviously, integrated resilience policies, which take into account all the interdependencies and economic, social and environmental conditionality in maximizing the impact of tourism on sustainable development, are compulsory. □

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Abstract

International Tourism Regionalization: Major Trends and Shock Disruption

Regionalization is one of the major characteristics of international tourism. The regional trade agreements, the natural tendency of business and trade flows to generate proximity networks, trade policies of liberalization, convergence and the complementarity of production and consumption patterns manifested rather at the intra-regional level, are just some of the factors that maintain a high degree of regionalization of tourism globally, despite a process of spatial dispersion. This paper includes a comparative analysis of the dynamics of these regionalization processes between 1980 and 2019 and looks at the impact that different shocks have had on the dynamics of international tourism and the transformation of tourism geography. The paper thus deepens the knowledge of the regionalization processes integrating the perspective of the tourist sector's resilience with relevance for tourism-led growth policies.

Keywords

regionalization, trade, tourism, resilience, COVID-19 crisis, economic crisis