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TOURISM AND ONLINE COLLABORATIVE ECONOMY PLATFORMS

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Abstract

The article examines the dynamic interaction between the tourism sector and the growing influence of shared economy platforms. Understanding this relationship is essential for understanding the creation and consumption of modern travel and how these platforms reshape the economic, social and environmental landscape of the tourism sector. It will evaluate the balance between innovation-driven market benefits and the need for regulatory oversight to ensure equitable growth and the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations.

Key Words: *accommodation, digital platforms, paradigms, tourism*

JEL classification: *L8, O52, Z3*

Introduction

The European Union's tourism sector is a dynamic and integral component of its economic landscape, flourishing from the tapestry of its cultural legacies and the multitude of offerings across its member countries. The advent and proliferation of digital sharing economy interfaces have cast a lasting impression on the pathways and contours of the tourism industry, a trend starkly outlined by the fluctuating patterns of guest accommodations as charted over the years 2019 to 2023.

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The rise of online collaborative economy platforms has ushered in a transformative era across multiple sectors, with tourism experiencing some of the most profound impacts. By leveraging technology, these platforms enable peer-to-peer interactions, allowing individuals to both provide and access an array of services including temporary accommodations, transportation, and personalized local experiences. This shift has not only altered the landscape of traditional tourism but has also introduced new dynamics in how services are delivered and consumed.

The rise of the sharing economy, alternately known as the platform, access, or collaborative consumption economy, has markedly altered the landscape of employment, challenging traditional work paradigms (Drahokoupil & Fabo, 2016). Characterized by peer-to-peer exchanges, this economy encompasses activities ranging from acquiring to sharing goods and services (Yaraghi & Ravi, 2017). Within the tourism domain, these digital platforms are increasingly influential, shaping the preferences and choices of users. Within the tourism sector, this paradigm shift has significantly influenced how consumers behave and make decisions. A critical element of the sharing economy in tourism is the establishment of trust between guests and hosts on platforms such as Airbnb (Tussyadiah & Park, 2018), where the manner in which hosts portray themselves can significantly sway consumer reactions and underpin strategies for effective marketing.

User-generated content, particularly online reviews on sites like TripAdvisor, is a cornerstone of consumer decision-making (Nilashi et al., 2018). Such feedback has not only facilitated the development of sophisticated hotel recommendation systems within e-tourism platforms but also informed a more nuanced understanding of consumer preferences and behaviors. The analysis of variances in pricing, demand, and satisfaction levels, especially through studies focusing on Airbnb offerings in Spain, showcases the intricate dynamics of guest relations in the sharing economy (Bulchand-Gidumal et al., 2019).

The rise of platform-facilitated collaborative consumption has also had significant market segmentation implications and has been pivotal in amplifying positive electronic word-of-mouth effects (Xu, 2020), which in turn bolster consumer interest and the overall health of platform economics. In the realm of tourism, the model of collaborative consumption has rapidly gained traction, transforming traditional travel interactions (Zhuo & Wang, 2022). By scrutinizing online testimonials of

shared accommodation services in China, researchers have delved into customer experiences and the perceived value for money, offering insights into consumer satisfaction.

Further research endeavors in the Indian tourism sector have attempted to forecast user satisfaction by considering various hotel categories and the nature of trips (Krishna et al., 2022). The body of literature focusing on tourism and online collaborative economy platforms accentuates the vital role of trust, consumer behavior, decision-making, and user experiences in sculpting the trajectory of the sharing economy within the tourism industry. Scholars persist in investigating innovative approaches and models to amplify the co-creation of value and enhance recommendation systems, ensuring the continued evolution and relevance of this economic sector (Sagar et al., 2020; Wang & Tang, 2021).

Methodology and Data

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, beginning with a quantitative analysis of Eurostat database. Using guest nights data and short-stay accommodation offered via collaborative economy platforms by months and residence of the guest provided by Eurostat (2024), this study adopts a longitudinal analysis over a five-year period, incorporating comparative country-specific investigations. This data is reviewed within the context of the wider economic and social recovery from the pandemic, with a focus on the years 2018-2023. Comparative analysis across countries enables an assessment of the correlation between digital platform use and the number of guest nights, taking into account the varying impacts of the pandemic and subsequent recovery strategies.

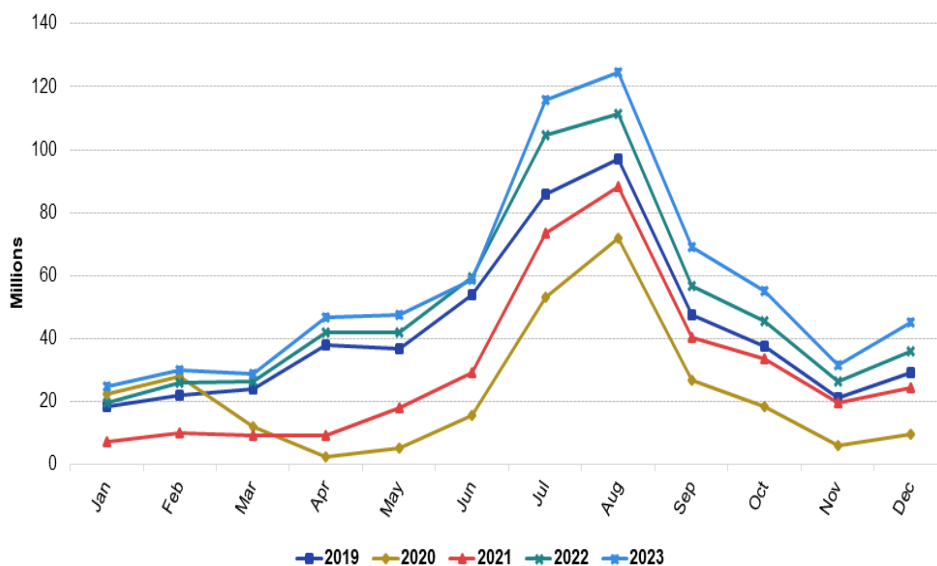
The research includes a qualitative review of literature on digitalization in tourism to contextualize the quantitative findings within broader economic and social trends. The analysis examines both the quantitative data of guest nights as a direct indicator of tourism activity and the qualitative aspects of digital platform use within the context of the sharing economy.

The research identifies patterns in the resurgence of guest nights across countries, correlating these trends with the adoption of digital platforms and assessing the implications for future tourism strategies.

Investigating the impact of digital platforms on the post-pandemic tourism recovery in the European Union

The transformative influence of online collaborative economy platforms on the tourism industry is vividly depicted in the trends of monthly guest nights in the European Union between 2019 and 2023. The fluctuating data points, as presented in the graphical representation, offer rich insights into the interplay between these digital platforms and traditional tourism structures.

Figure 1: *Monthly guest nights in the EU, 2019-2023, (million nights)*



Source: *Authors based on Eurostat (2024)*

The data from 2019 to 2023 delineate a narrative of economic upheaval and recovery within the EU tourism sector. The initial baseline established in 2019 shows a robust industry, with seasonal peaks reflecting the expected tourist influx during warmer months. However, the abrupt decline in 2020 underscores the sector's vulnerability to global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This downturn not only reflects direct travel restrictions but also indicates wider economic impacts, including job losses and reduced consumer spending in tourism-related areas.

The subsequent years reveal a story of adaptation and resilience. In 2021, there is a tentative resurgence in guest nights, suggesting a gradual return

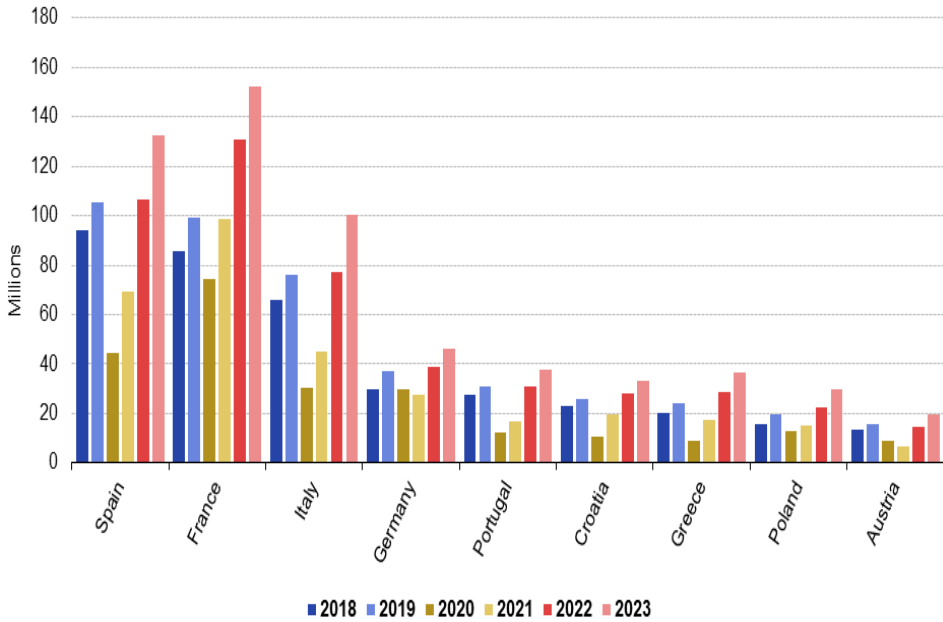
to travel as consumers and businesses alike navigated the 'new normal.' By 2022, a surge past pre-pandemic levels may indicate not just a release of pent-up demand but also the successful pivot of traditional tourism businesses towards online platforms, offering more flexibility and reassurance to travelers in uncertain times. The slight decline in 2023 challenges stakeholders to consider long-term strategies beyond immediate recovery. It suggests the need for a sustainable growth approach, balancing economic benefits with other considerations.

Socially, the fluctuations in guest nights highlight a shift in consumer behavior and confidence. The dip in 2020 represents a period of unprecedented global uncertainty, where travel was not merely restricted by law, but also by personal choice. The recovery phase in subsequent years shows a reinvigorated appetite for travel, likely influenced by the integration of digital platforms that offer a more connected and localized tourism experience. However, this renewed confidence comes with its own social implications, particularly in the realm of community impact. As 2022 shows a peak in guest nights, one must consider whether this has led to over-tourism in some destinations, straining local infrastructure and potentially disrupting community dynamics.

The environmental implications of the presented data are complex. On the one hand, the increase in guest nights might raise concerns about the sustainability of travel and its impact on natural and urban environments. On the other hand, the role of online platforms in promoting shared accommodations and transportation services could suggest a move towards more environmentally friendly travel practices. The slight regression in 2023 might indicate a leveling off that could benefit over-visited destinations, providing an opportunity to implement and promote sustainable tourism practices more vigorously.

The depicted trends from 2019 to 2023 bring to light the importance of regulatory oversight in the collaborative economy. The pandemic's impact emphasizes the need for robust frameworks that can support the industry during downturns and ensure responsible growth during recoveries. The regulatory response must balance innovation with consumer protection, fair competition with traditional businesses, and the economic imperative with social and environmental responsibilities. The data-driven insights provided by such figures are invaluable for policymakers, who must craft legislation that is adaptive, fair, and forward-looking.

Figure 2: *Short-stay accommodation offered via collaborative economy platforms by months and residence of the guest, 2018-2023 (most popular countries)*



Source: *Authors based on Eurostat (2024)*

Figure 2 presents the flux of guest nights booked through online platforms in select European nations, spanning from 2018 to 2023, with a specific lens on those surpassing the threshold of 10 million guest nights back in 2019.

In the year preceding the pandemic, Spain stood at the zenith of this chart, commanding the highest number of guest nights, only to face a precipitous fall as the pandemic took hold in 2020. The uptick observed by 2023, while notable, does not par the zenith of its pre-pandemic glory, hinting at potentially deep-seated alterations within Spain's tourism industry or evolving preferences and behaviors among travelers. France, charting a similar trajectory with a marked downturn in 2020, nonetheless, illustrates a remarkable resurgence by 2023. This rebound might be traced to adept pandemic management or dynamic marketing strategies that positioned France as a bastion of secure tourism amidst global uncertainty.

Italy's path mirrors the broader trend, a recovery in motion, yet the peak levels of 2019 remains elusive. The Italian tourism sector, steeped in

cultural and historical allure, might have felt the pandemic's sting in a manner distinct from other locales, shaping its trajectory of recuperation. In contrast, Germany displayed a less tumultuous journey through 2020 with a swift return to form by 2023, possibly due to the less seasonal nature of its tourism or a diversified visitor base.

Portugal, treading paths similar to that of Spain and Italy, saw a substantial dip followed by a gradual resurgence, not quite touching the 2019 figures by the year 2023. The recovery strategies implemented in Portugal, possibly bolstered by digital platforms' expansive reach, warrant further scrutiny. Croatia, meanwhile, rode the wave of a downturn in 2020 but managed a notable rebound by 2023, potentially benefitting from its reputation as an idyllic European coastal destination, attractive to those in pursuit of more secluded tourism experiences.

Greece, despite the sharp downturn experienced in 2020, showcases a vigorous recovery by 2023. This could likely be ascribed to effective pandemic management strategies and assertive promotion as a safe haven for travelers. Poland and Austria, while charting the lower end in terms of guest night figures, adhere to the overall pattern, with a sizeable contraction in 2020 followed by a phase of partial recovery by 2023. The nature of tourism in these nations-potentially more reliant on domestic visitors-may shed light on these observed patterns.

Figure 2 elucidates not only the susceptibility of the tourism sector to global crises like pandemics but also its capacity for resilience and renewal. This rebound is possibly linked to the adept use of digital platforms for booking, the adoption of new health and safety protocols, and the inherent charm and allure of each destination.

Economically, the diminished number of guest nights signals substantial fiscal impacts on the tourism industry and its ancillary sectors. The disparate recovery trajectories across these nations are likely to steer the strategic compass of tourism enterprises, guiding the emphasis on digital engagement and customer outreach.

From a policy-making vantage point, this data serves as a valuable instrument in shaping directives around tourism growth, the embrace of sustainable practices, and the nurturing of resilience.

Conclusions

Digital collaborative economy platforms have unmistakably reshaped the tourism industry, introducing both new prospects and complications. As these platforms continue to develop, traditional businesses will need to adopt flexible strategies, while policymakers must engage thoughtfully, and consumers should act with awareness to alleviate negative effects and enhance positive outcomes. These platforms have undoubtedly provided substantial advantages to both travelers and local communities, yet they bring with them a set of fresh challenges and obligations. Achieving a balance will necessitate careful regulation and active involvement from all parties in the tourism sector. This will help ensure that the advantages of these platforms are fully realized, while their potential downsides are minimized. As the sector progresses, ongoing adjustments and discussions will be crucial in promoting a diverse, sustainable, and prosperous tourism economy.

Moving forward, the role of online collaborative economy platforms in tourism is expected to become even more integral, with technological advancements increasingly influencing the way we travel. Emerging innovations in artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and eco-friendly technologies are set to revolutionize the travel landscape even further. This ongoing integration signals a shift towards more immersive and environmentally conscious travel experiences, highlighting the dynamic nature of this industry and its capacity for continual transformation.

The extended analysis of monthly guest nights in the EU from 2019 to 2023 reveals a tourism industry at a crossroads, shaped by the proliferation of online collaborative economy platforms. The industry's capacity for economic recovery, coupled with shifting social travel behaviors and environmental considerations, paints a picture of a sector in flux. The data illustrates not only the resilience of tourism in the face of adversity but also the crucial role that regulation and policy must play in steering the industry towards a sustainable future.

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