

THE EVOLUTION OF THE TOURIST SERVICES OFFER AT EUROPEAN LEVEL – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF URBAN/RURAL AREAS

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Abstract

This paper explores the advancement of leisure facilities in the European countries through a comparative approach between urban and rural environments, placing the tourist interests at its core. Overtourism and interdisciplinarity of tourist services are explored, in order to assess the tourism trend in urban and rural regions over the years. Regarding methodology, authors used both qualitative methods for analyzing the relevant current literature from the field and quantitative methods for analyzing secondary data retrieved from Eurostat database. Pareto distribution analysis is the main tool used for reviewing collected data for a period of ten years, 2014-2023. Results show that the same countries are in a leading position in both areas, urban and rural, respectively France, Italy, Spain and Germany, prevailing the European tourism. Authors selected this topic due to the upward trend of tourism economy worldwide. This article can be relevant for students, scientific researchers, organizations and practitioners concerned with the subject, bringing alternative perspectives for analysis.

Keywords: Tourist services, Urban tourism, Rural tourism, Sustainability.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Europe, tourism has continuously developed as a significant driver of both cultural interaction and economic growth. The contrast between urban and rural tourism, among its many forms, represents dynamic changes in traveller preferences and local offerings. Urban tourism flourishes in major cities like Paris, Berlin, and Barcelona because of its emphasis on architectural legacy, cultural sites and modern infrastructure. To satisfy the rising desire for varied experiences, these cities blend modern attractions with historical richness (Wise, 2020). On the other hand, rural tourism has become more popular as a substitute that emphasizes eco-friendly methods and authentic local experiences (Bramwell & Lane, 2000). Destinations like the Scottish Highlands and Tuscany, Italy, show how agritourism, natural landscapes, and customs can draw tourists looking for a more leisurely and genuine experience. As more and more tourists are looking for individualized and environmentally friendly solutions, niche tourism trends (Lane & Kastenholz, 2022) are developing.

Adapting to changing trends has unique opportunities and challenges for both urban and rural locations. Urban areas need to use technology to manage sustainably, while addressing problems like overtourism and overloaded infrastructure (Wise, 2020). However, rural regions prioritize preserving ecological integrity and ecotourism, which is consistent with more general sustainability objectives (Lane & Kastenholz, 2022). Comparative research shows that rural locations frequently prioritize sustainability and community involvement, which supports regional development, while urban areas have large tourist volumes as a result of accessibility and facilities. Both urban and rural environments exhibit the trend toward striking a balance between the expansion of tourism and the preservation of the environment and culture, but their strategies differ greatly (Holden, 2008). While rural communities place more emphasis on ecological stewardship and economic revitalization, urban initiatives often concentrate on controlling overtourism and protecting cultural assets (Petrick & Sirakaya-Turk, 2004).

The policies and practices that influence the development of urban and rural tourism in Europe are examined in this analysis, which has the objective to look at these conflicting patterns (Bramwell & Lane, 2000). This paper highlights how economic, social and environmental aspects interact and provide guidance for sustainable tourism tactics in a broad spectrum of regional situations. Exploring how visitor inclinations shape the advancement of benefit offerings in urban and country ranges. Urban visitors regularly prioritize openness, assortment and present-day comforts, while provincial visitors look for tranquillity, realness and eco-friendly encounters. It is important to take into consideration how computerized stages and social media impact these inclinations, empowering travellers to investigate underrepresented country goals or prevalent urban points of interest (Wise, 2020).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is recommended that businesses ensure a memorable experience by engaging tourists in the service process, just as it is well known that the satisfaction and well-being of tourists influence their future behavior and can develop loyalty. It is important to plan and manage the services offered according to the needs and requirements of the tourists. It must also ensure that the long-term relationship with tourists is maintained through social programs, organizational materials, websites as well as social networks (Gupta et al., 2023). The global tourism industry has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and travel restrictions have led to a drop in tourist numbers in many countries. It is necessary that all stakeholders in the tourism industry work together to facilitate tourism recovery from the pandemic. This may involve governments providing financial support (Noonan, 2022). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNTWO), by 2020, restrictions and suspensions affecting international travel and tourism imposed by many countries to prevent the spread of Covid-19, have led to a 60 to 80% drop in tourism activity worldwide (Albaladejo et al., 2024). Overtourism, a phenomenon that refers to the excessive influx of tourists to a destination, has become one of the main problems in the contemporary tourism industry. The pandemic has affected global trends in tourism, slowing down an industry that until then had been on a continuous upward trend (Mavrin, 2024). Tourist behavior and intention to travel in the aftermath of the pandemic have become key issues, especially when tourists perceive risks at their destination (Mheidat & Marzuki, 2023). In the post-COVID world, rural tourism may become increasingly popular as people seek to escape the crowds and enjoy natural and isolated environments (Li et al., 2024). Nature has healing powers that offer physical and mental benefits to tourists and reduce anxiety (Jiang et al., 2022). Tourism agencies can offer personalized services, products and destinations to prospective travelers based on data provided by tourists (Sohrabi et al., 2020).

Even though there are numerous data science approaches that address tourism-related issues such as tourism forecasting, planning and demand management, the literature still lacks applicable methods for the quantitative classification of tourists (Mor et al., 2023). Innovations offer the opportunity to extend the life cycle of the tourism product. It helps to maintain the competitiveness of the tourism product and to gain a long-term competitive advantage (Labanauskaitė et al., 2020). Gradually the presence of artificial intelligence is on the rise. Thanks to the application of innovative technology, tourism industry is expected to reach unimaginable heights in the future (Samala et al., 2022). Industry practitioners and authorities should therefore consider and address all elements and characteristics of local offers. In terms of marketing and communication, their strategies should be intertwined to deliver the right message and offer, as this communication mix will shape consumer perceptions and expectations (Chen et al., 2023).

Over the last decade, tourism has become an increasingly specialized industry, with new niche markets developing such as wellness tourism, local tourism or the senior or retired market (Ferrer-Roca et al., 2020). Studies in the hospitality sector indicate that attracting new customers is crucial, but efforts to win new future customers will not be enough for success (Unguren et al., 2021). Tourism flows between communities is another important determinant of community structure, which can characterize the relationship, direction and structure of tourism flows between different communities (Xu et al., 2022).

Discussions on tourism development address the need to reduce the negative impacts of tourism on tourist destinations, with negative dynamics such as over-tourism, exploitation of nature and local communities (Falter, 2024). Communication allows tourists to get a higher emotional value, thus increasing satisfaction with the service offered. The tourism product is increasingly becoming an experience for tourists. Tourism service providers are expected to be polite, understanding and friendly (Čuić Tanković et al., 2023). The natural environment, events, exploring, gaining new knowledge and experiences, relaxing and escaping from routine, socializing and a sense of belonging are important factors for the development and marketing of tourism destination products (Luvsandavaajav & Narantuya, 2021). From a psychological point of view, tourism offers the greatest benefits to elderly travelers. Social tourism has been found to have a positive impact on the well-being and social interaction of individuals, especially the economically disadvantaged. Other research has shown that older people prefer to meet, socialize and/or spend time with their family and friends (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023). The rise of "new urban tourism" shows that urban tourists are looking to experience authentic city life. The traditional way of identifying tourist attractions or planning itineraries may no longer meet the needs of today's tourists (Zhao et al., 2023). Cities are increasingly turning to places outside the central tourist districts (Stors, 2022). Tourism is being encouraged in rural areas in developing countries to improve local lives (Rastegar et al., 2024).

For governments and policy makers who allocate resources to tourism development, funding opportunities should be promoted, especially in low-resource areas, and documents should be written in a style accessible to the general public, to facilitate understanding (Park et al., 2024). Culture can be a driving force for the public sector in urban tourism development. Urban cultural tourism raises issues of concern to the public sector in terms of budgeting, human resources, the value of cultural heritage, urban sustainability, marketing communication and coordination between sectors (Liu, 2020). Tourist involvement is a moderating variable influencing tourist satisfaction. As technological and human innovation services are experienced directly by tourists, they will affect tourist satisfaction (Anggraeni et al., 2023). Tourism is a comprehensive concept, with mechanisms to impact the urban-rural income gap. The impact of tourism on the rural industrial structure is more pronounced and is supported by the development of the tourism industry, which provides a useful service model for rural areas. It is beneficial for the diversification of

industries in the rural sector, optimizing its industrial structure and accelerating the pace of rural industrial revitalization (Wang & Bai, 2023). In recent decades, tourism has experienced significant expansion and continuous growth. Due to its economic impact, it occupies an important position in the economies of many countries (Krstinić Nižić et al., 2021). Guided group activities are a common and important tourism activity. When a firm can facilitate and coordinate interactions, tourists are more satisfied, more loyal and more inclined to recommend, even when all other aspects of service delivery are already first-rate. This provides insights into how tourism businesses and destination management organizations can facilitate the development of the relationship between customers and other tourists, thus improving their experience in guided groups (Lee et al., 2021).

Tourism is considered an important force for regional economic growth and industrial modernization. Especially in declining cities, due to low labor skill requirements and low environmental pollution, tourism has become the first industry to develop. More and more declining cities are responding to this situation by developing tourism. Tourism also has positive effects on these cities in many respects, including the urban economy, employment, investment and consumption, which means that tourism development could help declining cities to achieve socio-economic prosperity (Deng et al., 2022). Urbanity forms the context for tourism and can therefore help explain the phenomenon of urban tourism. Geographers and sociologists are well prepared for this line of research, as urbanism is a fundamental principle of their concern with place, space and societies. Interdisciplinary research that approaches tourism from these perspectives will help to create a greater synthesis of knowledge to begin to answer the unanswered question of what makes cities so attractive for tourism now and in the future (Page & Duignan, 2023).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To characterize the evolution of the offer of tourist services in rural areas, the following indicators were taken into account: the number of accommodation places in urban and rural areas in the European Union (including EEA-EFTA) and in the Eurozone; indices of the evolution of the number of accommodation places in urban and rural areas in the EU and the Eurozone; the average number of accommodation places in urban/rural areas in the EU and EEA member countries (including EFTA) in the period 2014-2023; the Pareto distribution of the number of accommodation places in urban/rural areas in the European Union countries and in the EEA area in the period 2014-2023.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The evolution of the number of accommodation places in cities is presented in Figure 1, highlighting both the general upward trend of their evolution during the period 2014 -2023 and the significant share of the Eurozone in the European Union as a whole in terms of this indicator.

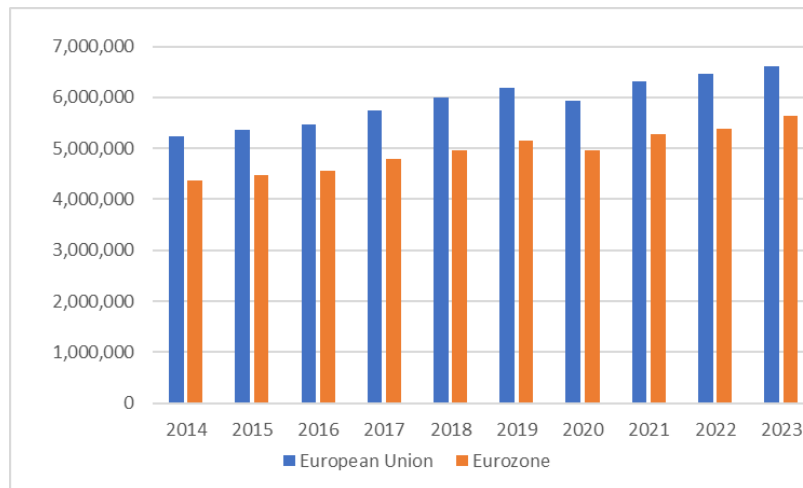


FIGURE 1. EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION PLACES IN CITIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE EUROZONE

Source: own processing of Eurostat data

The fact that the offer of tourist services followed a similar trend in the European Union and the Eurozone is also visible if we consider 3 indices of evolution of the number of accommodation places in cities in the EU and the Eurozone presented in Table 1. The exception to the evolution of the index is the year 2023 when a relatively significant gap is observed between the European Union and the Eurozone countries.

TABLE 1. INDICES OF EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION PLACES IN CITIES IN THE EU AND THE EUROZONE

Country /Index	Index 2015/ 2014	Index 2016/ 2015	Index 2017/ 2016	Index 2018/ 2017	Index 2019/ 2018	Index 2020/ 2019	Index 2021/ 2020	Index 2022/ 2021	Index 2023/ 2022	Average index
European Union	1,01	1,01	1,01	1,02	1,02	0,97	1,01	1,03	1,01	1,01
Eurozone	1,01	1,00	1,01	1,02	1,02	0,97	1,01	1,03	1,06	1,01

Source: own processing of Eurostat data

Analyzing the average number of accommodation places in cities in the EU and EEA member states (including EFTA) during the period 2014-2023, presented in Figure 2, it is found that a number of countries are in a dominant position in the offer of tourist services: France, Italy, Spain and Germany. It can be observed, correlating these data with the results regarding the structure of the offer at European level, that

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the countries that hold a dominant position in the structure of the global offer (cumulative urban-rural) are also those that occupy the first places in terms of the number of accommodation places at the urban level.

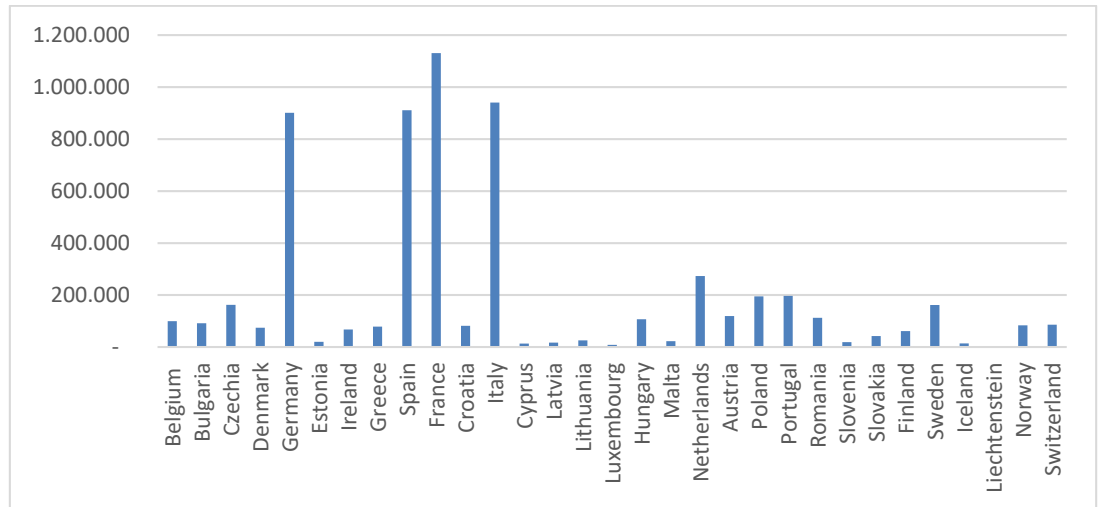


FIGURE 2. AVERAGE NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION PLACES IN CITIES IN EU AND EEA MEMBER STATES (INCLUDING EFTA) IN THE PERIOD 2014-2023

Source: own processing of Eurostat data

The group of countries with a long European tourist tradition that have the most accommodation places in cities is followed by a second group of countries that includes Austria, Portugal, the Netherlands, Poland or Greece, countries with numerous tourist attractions, which have an impressive number of accommodation places, compared to the number of population or urban population. The two groups of countries illustrate a series of particularities of the offer of tourist services, in the urban environment, at the European level:

- the offer of tourist services at the urban level is dominated by countries in which the cultural heritage and the built stock with historical value is placed mainly at the urban level;
- the offer of tourist services at the urban level is dominated by states whose major cities are landmark centers of world tourism, with a permanent and ascending influx of tourists;
- the presence of poles of tourist attractiveness in the urban environment creates the need to create a tailor-made offer.

The Pareto distribution of the number of accommodation places in cities in the European Union and the EEA countries in the period 2014-2023 confirms that, in urban areas, France, Italy, Germany and Spain dominate the offer of tourist services. It is no coincidence that they are the main tourist destinations in Europe, both in terms of tourism itself and for business.

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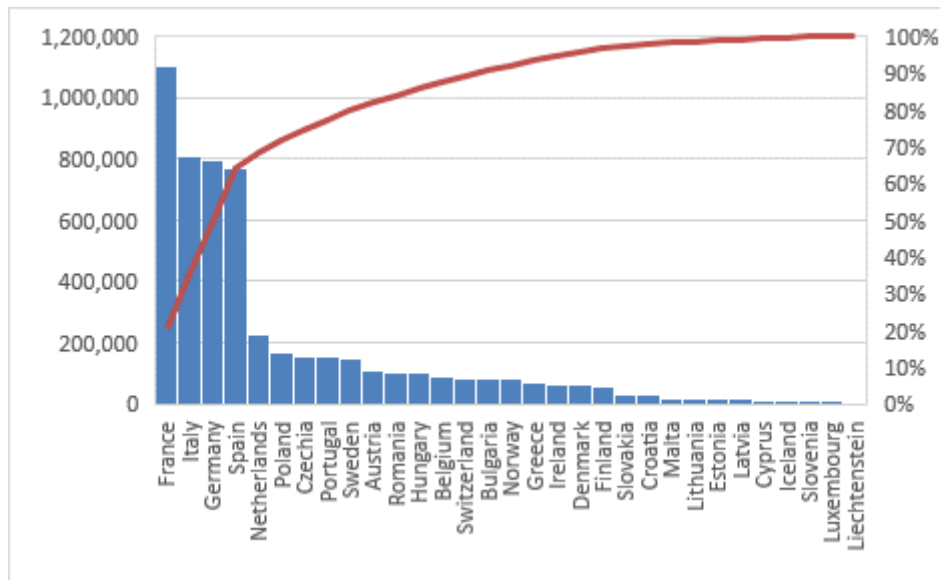


FIGURE 3. PARETO DISTRIBUTION OF THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION PLACES IN CITIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES AND THE EEA AREA
Source: own processing of Eurostat data

According to the data presented in Table 2, most European countries had an upward trend in the indices of the number of accommodation places in cities. Slovenia and Slovakia had very high values for this index in 2018 and 2021. The upward trend of the index of the number of accommodation places in the urban area in 2021 in Slovakia is surprising if we consider the fact that this year was marked by the presence of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a significant contraction in the flow of tourists at the European level.

TABLE 2. INDICES OF EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION PLACES IN CITIES IN EU AND EEA (EFTA)
MEMBER COUNTRIES

No	Country /Index	Index 2015/ 2014	Index 2016/ 2015	Index 2017/ 2016	Index 2018/ 2017	Index 2019/ 2018	Index 2020/ 2019	Index 2021/ 2020	Index 2022/ 2021	Index 2023/ 2022	Average index
1.	Belgium	1,02	1,01	1,02	1,08	1,04	0,96	1,07	1,04	1,06	1,03
2.	Bulgaria	1,04	1,01	1,12	0,92	1,00	0,98	0,93	1,09	1,02	1,01
3.	Czechia	1,02	1,01	1,00	1,04	1,00	0,97	1,03	1,02	0,88	1,00
4.	Denmark	1,01	1,01	1,05	1,04	1,07	0,99	1,15	1,04	1,00	1,04
5.	Germany	1,02	1,01	1,03	1,04	1,05	0,97	1,05	1,08	1,03	1,03
6.	Estonia	0,99	1,07	1,13	0,97	1,04	0,94	0,96	1,12	1,03	1,03
7.	Ireland	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,08	1,00	0,97	1,11	0,90	1,00	1,01
8.	Greece	0,97	0,99	1,00	1,23	1,04	0,93	1,02	1,19	1,01	1,04
9.	Spain	1,02	1,00	1,16	1,02	1,02	1,01	1,03	1,01	1,03	1,03
10.	France	1,01	1,01	1,01	1,01	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,04	1,01
11.	Croatia	1,27	1,23	1,16	2,04	1,07	0,68	1,22	1,14	1,03	1,20
12.	Italy	1,04	1,05	1,04	1,04	1,04	0,94	1,08	1,01	1,01	1,03

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No	Country /Index	Index 2015/ 2014	Index 2016/ 2015	Index 2017/ 2016	Index 2018/ 2017	Index 2019/ 2018	Index 2020/ 2019	Index 2021/ 2020	Index 2022/ 2021	Index 2023/ 2022	Average index
13.	Cyprus	1,00	0,96	0,98	1,21	1,00	0,92	1,10	0,96	0,91	1,00
14.	Latvia	1,02	1,09	1,06	1,02	1,03	0,84	0,75	1,12	1,13	1,01
15.	Lithuania	1,00	1,04	1,05	1,11	1,23	0,86	1,21	0,91	1,23	1,07
16.	Luxembourg	0,99	1,09	0,97	1,01	0,99	1,02	1,07	1,00	0,97	1,01
17.	Hungary	0,99	1,03	1,01	1,02	1,01	0,99	0,98	1,17	0,94	1,02
18.	Malta	0,98	1,01	1,03	1,02	1,12	0,94	1,06	1,09	0,99	1,03
19.	Netherlands	1,03	1,04	1,02	1,08	1,07	0,94	1,11	1,03	1,00	1,04
20.	Austria	1,03	1,01	1,01	1,04	1,02	0,98	0,99	1,09	1,06	1,02
21.	Poland	1,02	1,05	1,06	1,04	1,05	0,92	1,04	1,01	1,04	1,03
22.	Portugal	1,05	1,06	1,12	1,04	1,07	0,91	1,07	1,08	1,02	1,05
23.	Romania	1,04	0,99	1,02	1,04	1,00	0,98	1,07	1,01	1,01	1,02
24.	Slovenia	1,04	1,06	1,08	2,45	0,97	0,66	1,19	1,19	1,09	1,19
25.	Slovakia	1,08	1,00	0,93	1,03	1,09	1,14	2,35	0,37	1,02	1,11
26.	Finland	1,00	1,04	1,06	1,03	1,00	1,04	1,05	1,02	1,02	1,03
27.	Sweden	1,01	1,03	1,02	1,02	1,02	0,99	1,05	1,03	1,02	1,02
28.	Iceland	1,17	1,06	1,05	1,03	1,05	0,89	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,03
29.	Liechtenstein	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
30.	Norway	0,98	1,02	1,02	1,08	1,00	0,95	0,99	1,07	1,00	1,01
31.	Switzerland	1,00	0,91	1,02	1,11	1,01	0,96	1,10	0,91	1,00	1,00

Source: own processing of Eurostat data

The evolution of the number of accommodation places in rural areas in the European Union (including EEA-EFTA) and in the Eurozone, presented in Figure 4, shows that the trends in the evolution of the offer of tourist services are similar in the two areas analyzed, during the period 2014-2023. Over the entire period 2014-2023, it can be observed that there is a slightly downward trend in the evolution of the number of accommodation places in rural areas in the European Union.

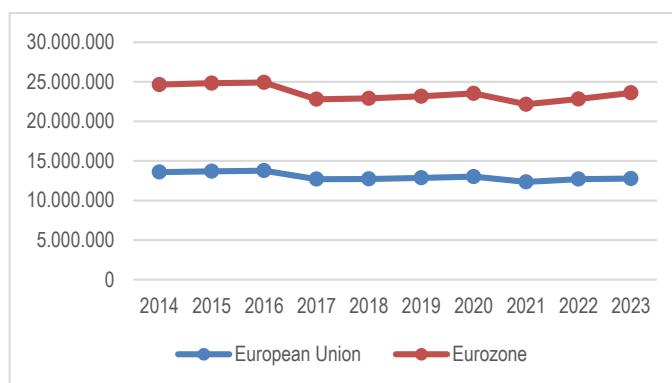


FIGURE 4. EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION PLACES IN RURAL AREAS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION (INCLUDING EEA-EFTA) AND THE EUROZONE
Source: own processing of Eurostat data

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The indices of the evolution of the number of accommodation places in rural areas in the EU and the Eurozone show, according to the data in Table 3, the obvious effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the offer of tourist services at the European level, materialized in the reduction of its size, but also the resumption of the upward trend starting with 2022. Over the entire period analyzed, 2014-2023, the two areas recorded a similar average index in terms of the evolution of the number of accommodation places in rural areas, with the difference that in the period 2022-2023 the offer of tourist services at the Eurozone level was clearly superior to that in the European Union.

TABLE 3. INDICES OF EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION PLACES IN RURAL AREAS IN THE EU AND THE EUROZONE

Zone /Index	Index 2015/ 2014	Index 2016/ 2015	Index 2017/ 2016	Index 2018/ 2017	Index 2019/ 2018	Index 2020/ 2019	Index 2021/ 2020	Index 2022/ 2021	Index 2023/ 2022	Average index
European Union	1,01	1,01	1,01	1,02	1,02	0,97	1,01	1,03	1,01	1,01
Eurozone	1,01	1,00	1,01	1,02	1,02	0,97	1,01	1,03	1,06	1,01

Source: own processing of Eurostat data

The average number of accommodation places in rural areas in the EU and EEA (including EFTA) member countries in the period 2014-2023, graphically represented in Figure 5, had a slightly different structure compared to that in urban areas. On the one hand, the countries that have the largest share in the structure of the tourist offer at urban level (France, Italy, Germany and Spain), also dominate the offer of tourist services at rural level. On the other hand, countries like Greece or Croatia are better represented in the offer at rural level than in the one at urban level.

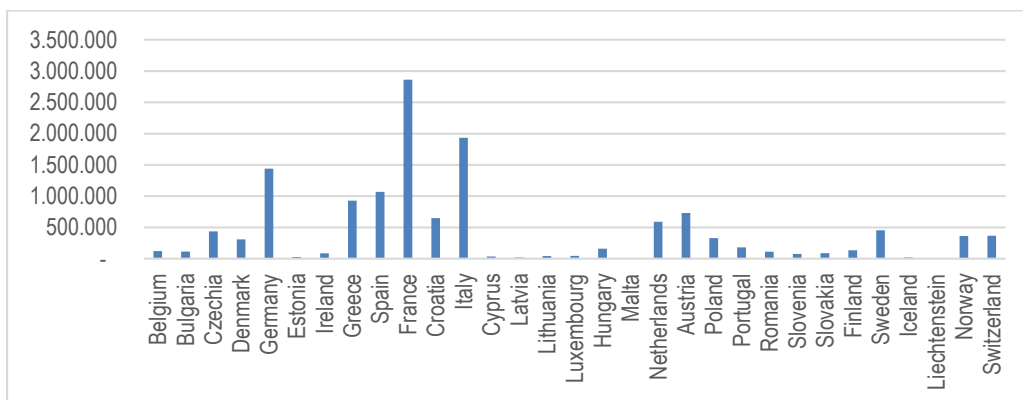


FIGURE 5. AVERAGE NUMBER OF RURAL ACCOMMODATION PLACES IN EU AND EEA MEMBER COUNTRIES (INCLUDING EFTA) IN THE PERIOD 2014-2023

Source: own processing of Eurostat data

Romania is, among all European countries, in a more disadvantageous position in terms of the offer of tourist services in rural areas compared to the one occupied by our country in terms of the offer of tourist

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services in urban areas. This gap between urban and rural areas may have, in the case of our country, several causes:

- the location in urban areas or adjacent to them of large tourist resorts with a large number of accommodation places;
- the greater attractiveness of the offer in urban areas compared to that in rural areas;
- ineffective marketing of rural tourism or lack of financial resources for efficient marketing;
- lack of knowledge and lack of exploitation of the tourist potential of rural areas in Romania.

Specific measures and policies are needed to amplify the tourist potential of rural areas in Romania, especially with regard to foreign tourists, which would have the effect of requiring investments in new accommodation spaces.

The Pareto distribution of the number of accommodation places in rural areas in the European Union countries and the EEA during the period 2014-2023, presented in Figure 4.10, confirms the data presented previously, showing the dominant role of France, Italy, Spain and Germany, but also a much more significant presence of Greece, Austria, Croatia and the Netherlands in relation to the situation in urban areas.

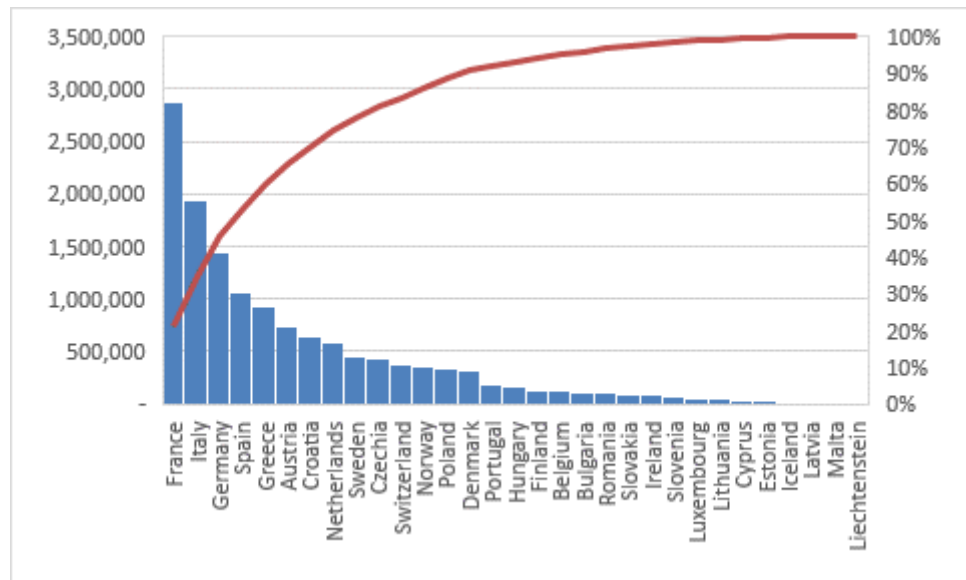


FIGURE 6. PARETO DISTRIBUTION OF THE NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION PLACES IN RURAL AREAS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES AND THE EEA AREA

Source: own processing of Eurostat data

The indices of the evolution of the number of accommodation places in rural areas in the EU and EEA member countries, presented in Table 4, show that the offer of tourist services in Finland experienced a significant recovery in 2022 compared to 2021 (when it had recorded values 59% lower compared to the previous year). Over the entire period analyzed, a significant upward trend was recorded in Slovakia and

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Latvia. Romania is also among the countries that recorded an increase in the index of the evolution of the number of accommodation places in rural areas, even if this was not able to significantly improve the place occupied by our country in the tourist offer at European level (in rural areas).

**TABLE 4 INDICES OF EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATION PLACES IN RURAL AREAS IN EU AND EEA (EFTA)
MEMBER COUNTRIES**

No.	Country /Index	Index 2015/ 2014	Index 2016/ 2015	Index 2017/ 2016	Index 2018/ 2017	Index 2019/ 2018	Index 2020/ 2019	Index 2021/ 2020	Index 2022/ 2021	Index 2023/ 2022	Average index
1.	Belgium	1,03	1,01	1,01	0,89	1,01	1,07	0,89	1,11	1,21	1,02
2.	Bulgaria	0,99	1,08	0,92	1,11	1,04	0,96	0,93	1,20	1,03	1,03
3.	Czechia	1,00	1,00	0,97	1,03	1,00	1,02	1,06	0,99	0,96	1,00
4.	Denmark	0,99	1,00	1,01	1,00	1,02	0,99	1,00	1,01	1,00	1,00
5.	Germany	1,00	0,99	1,00	1,02	1,03	0,95	0,97	1,01	1,01	1,00
6.	Estonia	0,98	1,04	0,95	1,04	0,97	1,01	0,99	1,00	0,99	1,00
7.	Ireland	0,96	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,01	1,00	1,01	0,99	1,00	1,00
8.	Greece	1,02	1,01	1,00	1,05	1,00	0,93	0,80	1,26	0,96	1,00
9.	Spain	1,01	1,00	0,59	1,01	1,01	1,01	1,04	1,01	1,01	0,96
10.	France	1,01	1,00	0,99	1,00	1,00	1,00	0,99	1,00	1,00	1,00
11.	Croatia	1,03	1,06	1,06	0,85	1,03	1,02	0,95	1,02	1,02	1,00
12.	Italy	1,01	1,01	0,80	1,00	1,02	1,07	0,91	1,02	1,00	0,98
13.	Cyprus	0,95	1,00	1,01	0,95	1,06	0,99	1,03	0,97	0,98	0,99
14.	Latvia	1,17	1,14	1,22	1,02	1,04	0,92	1,15	1,04	1,03	1,08
15.	Lithuania	1,01	1,03	1,01	1,12	1,18	0,88	1,28	0,85	1,08	1,05
16.	Luxembourg	0,98	0,98	1,00	0,98	0,99	0,99	0,97	0,94	0,96	0,98
17.	Hungary	1,01	1,01	0,77	0,98	0,97	1,08	0,76	1,05	1,03	0,96
18.	Malta	1,05	1,08	0,41	0,94	1,16	1,27	0,58	1,00	1,06	0,95
19.	Netherlands	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	0,99	1,00	0,99	0,98	1,00	0,99
20.	Austria	0,98	1,01	1,00	1,03	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,02	1,08	1,01
21.	Poland	1,02	1,05	0,94	1,03	1,04	0,95	0,99	0,99	1,00	1,00
22.	Portugal	1,04	1,07	1,10	1,07	1,01	0,92	1,03	1,05	1,04	1,04
23.	Romania	1,11	1,02	1,09	1,05	0,99	1,04	1,19	1,04	1,04	1,06
24.	Slovenia	0,95	1,03	1,03	1,27	1,21	0,83	1,24	1,02	0,95	1,06
25.	Slovakia	1,02	0,96	1,01	1,02	1,09	0,86	0,41	2,70	1,04	1,12
26.	Finland	1,00	1,00	1,01	0,99	0,99	0,93	0,98	1,00	0,98	0,99
27.	Sweden	0,99	1,00	1,00	1,02	0,99	1,00	1,01	0,99	1,01	1,00
28.	Iceland	1,03	1,02	1,01	1,05	1,04	0,93	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,01
29.	Liechtenstein	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
30.	Norway	0,94	0,99	1,06	0,99	0,97	1,00	1,00	0,97	0,96	0,99
31.	Switzerland	1,00	1,13	0,97	0,83	1,07	1,02	0,87	1,15	1,00	1,01

Source: own processing of Eurostat data

5. CONCLUSIONS

Tourist services are adapting to the changing requirements of tourists and to the external environment which is facing continuous changes. Interdisciplinary research of tourism is bringing new viewpoints into evaluating the questions from the field. One of the main problems from the industry is the overtourism in few certain locations, but pandemic worked like a disruptor, creating new opportunities for niche, authentic, sustainable destinations.

In order to characterize the evolution of tourism services in rural areas, indicators such as the number of accommodation and the indices of the evolution of the number of accommodation places in urban and rural areas, including the average number of the Pareto distribution, were taken into account. The research results showed the evolution of the number of accommodation places in cities, highlighting the trend evolution in the period 2014-2023. France, Italy, Spain and Germany rank first places in the area of tourist services, in both rural and urban sectors. Countries with a vast cultural heritage are at the top of the tourists top choices. In the second group, there are European countries visited annually by a large number of tourists for the numerous attractions in the cities, such as Austria, Portugal, the Netherlands, Poland or Greece. For example, countries such as Greece and Croatia, are represented more by their rural tourism, rather than urban one.

The effects of pandemic are taken into consideration in this study, it determined a downward trend in the tourism industry, after which it continued to follow the growing trend. As an example, in the period 2018-2021, Slovenia and Slovakia had a very high score, but after that, the decline started due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As far as Romania is concerned, it is in a disadvantageous position from several points of view, pointing the need to take action in few sectors. In this case, we can also point to insufficient resources for marketing or the lack of knowledge regarding areas with great potential in tourism.

The growing trend in the accommodation places number is registered by the majority of the studied European countries. The relevancy of this paper is related with the alternative perspectives brought for the review of leisure accommodations evolution, comparing rural and urban areas of European countries. Tourism industry is in a continuous growing tendency globally, therefore it can be further used by peers, such as students, researchers, practitioners. In future research papers we intend to analyze the same topic from different perspective, using new tools for qualitative research and expand the collected data, continuing developing the results from this field.

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