

THE WELFARE STATE AND TOURISM FOR ALL. REASONS WHY PEOPLE DO NOT TRAVEL

Antonio Alvarez-Sousa

University of A Coruña. Spain
sousa@udc.es

The aim of this article is to analyse the percentage of the European population that do not travel for tourism purposes and the underlying causes, namely a shortage of financial resources, a lack of free time due to work or study obligations, family commitments, health reasons, insufficient facilities for the disabled, administrative difficulties such as obtaining travel visas, or simply that they prefer to stay at home due to a lack of motivation to travel. The article then focuses on the individual and contextual factors associated with non-travel and three of the key causes: financial considerations; lack of free time due to work or study commitments; and lack of free time due to family obligations.

Our analysis is based on quantitative techniques and an explanatory power model: after formulating a series of objectives related to a social issue, we apply a series of theories which lead to a number of hypotheses that are represented by graphs in order to observe the relationship between the variables. This is followed by an explanation of the data sources and the analysis techniques employed, as well as a discussion of the results and whether or not the hypotheses are confirmed. The article ends with a series of reflections regarding the suitability of the theories employed and the causes of the issue under analysis.

The starting point for our discussion is the critical theory of tourism (Tribe, 2010; Cohen and Cohen, 2012; Pritchard et al., 2011). We posit that travel for tourism purposes should be a right for all, and that scholars have an obligation to shed light on the situation of those who are unable to do so. The ultimate object is to raise awareness among governments of the need to provide the means to ensure that anyone who wishes to travel for tourism purposes is able to do so, and to change the structures of society that block access to tourism travel for a large percentage of the population.

The European Union has put in place a series of social policies designed for the convergence between countries and to reduce the social problems of certain groups with fewer resources and less free time. On a global scale, the United Nations has adopted a series of resolutions regarding the right to tourism. As for the European Union, the European Economic and Social Committee (CESE, 2006) considers that everyone is entitled to rest and leisure, and that tourism is a specific form of this general right. Yet despite this, a considerable percentage of European citizens are unable to travel for tourism purposes. In 2014, this figure stood at 25.78%.

The differences between people in terms of access to tourism are determined by their social living conditions, as revealed by a series of individual and contextual variables. The individual variables analysed here include the influence of age, gender, habitat, level of education and occupation. As for the contextual variable, we have analysed the welfare state model of the countries of residence. Another factor for consideration is the impact of the economic crises and in this specific case the influence of the crisis that has affected a number of EU member states in recent years.

Financial difficulties are considered to be the key reason and are associated with social stratification measured through variables such as gender, age, habitat, level of education and occupation. Yet in addition to these variables of a social nature, it is also necessary to consider the country of residence, as the citizens that live in countries with a more consolidated and developed welfare state not only experience fewer economic difficulties but also do not perceive to the same degree the need to save in case of continued economic uncertainty. Objective reality and the subjective vision of the crisis are therefore also important. People with a higher level of education, better jobs and living in countries that apply the Nordic welfare model expect to experience fewer financial difficulties and therefore tend to travel for tourism purposes more often.

Another key factor in the decision not to travel for tourism purposes is the lack of free time, which may be attributable to two types of reasons: work or study obligations, or family commitments. Various international organisations have highlighted the need for universal rights to free time for leisure purposes and tourism leisure activities in particular. Examples include article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948); article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations, 1966), article 2 of the European Social Charter (Conseil de l'Europe, 1961); article 31.2 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Unión Européenne, 2000); and various statutes for the rights of workers. Yet the reality is that many people do not have leisure time. Indeed, there are differences between the various social groups regarding their access to free time for tourism purposes. These differences are determined by their labour status – those that are retired rank lowest in terms of a lack of free time, with many people opting for early retirement precisely in order to travel; habitat – people living in rural areas are often tied by year-round tasks that prevent them from travelling; gender – women continue to assume family commitments that do not allow them sufficient free time; the country of residence – a number of welfare states cover commitments such as care for the elderly or disabled, whilst others do not.

This leads us to a series of hypotheses comprising four variables that require an explanation: non-travel for financial, free time, work or study reasons, or a lack of free time due to family commitments. These dependent variables are in turn conditioned by a series of independent variables, namely age, sex, habitat, education, occupation, the welfare state model in the country of residence and the subjective perception that the crisis is impacting on tourism.

The data are taken from the Eurobarometer 414 and refer to tourism statistics for 2014, based on responses from a total of 26,805 EU citizens. The welfare state model variable is based on Esping-Andersen typology (1990, 1999). The study begins with a descriptive analysis, followed by a bivariate analysis and finally a multivariable analysis using Generalized Structural Equation Modeling (GSEM).

The results show that in 2014, 28.05% of those surveyed did not travel for tourism purposes. When weighted by countries, this figure accounts for 25.78% of EU citizens. The reasons underlying the decision not to travel are firstly lack of financial resources (17.48% of those interviewed), followed by health (8.6%), a preference to stay at home and lack of motivation to travel (7.20%), lack of free time due to family commitments (5.36%), lack of free time due to work or study commitments (4.96%), lack of facilities for disabled people (0.89%) and administrative difficulties (0.20%).

Percentages of those resident in large cities and those living in rural areas stand at 25.1% and 34.1% respectively. Furthermore, women also have fewer opportunities than men. The problem is greater among the elderly (38.7%) than the young (20.5%). In terms of education, the figure for those with higher education qualifications stands at 19% compared with 51.8% for those that are less qualified. The gap between professionals or senior managers and primary sector or unskilled workers and the unemployed is vast, standing at 11.3% and over 40% respectively. Nineteen point four per cent of those living in Nordic model countries claim that they are unable to travel, a figure that rises to 33% in the case of residents in Eastern European countries and 34.4% in Southern Europe. The connection with the crisis is clear: 37.1% of those that did not travel in 2014 attribute this to the crisis, compared with 18.3% who do not believe that the crisis is affecting their intention to travel.

These variables also affect motivation, with economic and free time motives tending to hold a greater weight in rural areas. Women consider that economic reasons and a lack of free time due to family commitments are the principal reasons why they do not travel, ahead of considerations such as work or study. Similarly, those with a lower level of education allege that economic reasons and a lack of free time due to family commitments prevent them from travelling for tourism purposes, whilst a lack of free time due to work obligations has a greater impact on those with an average level of educational. Economic reasons rank lowest among the young, but they suffer a lack of free time due to work or study commitments. The unemployed experience the greatest economic difficulties; those employed in the primary sector a lack of free time due to their work, and the unskilled and homemakers experience a lack of free time due to family obligations. The members of the Mediterranean welfare state model and Eastern European groups rank economic difficulties and lack of free time as the principal reasons. Those that believe that the crisis has impacted on their holidays experience greater difficulties in all areas.

The multivariable analysis revealed the need to include the contextual variable 'type of welfare state' in addition to the individual variables, as it allows for a more precise adjustment of the model. The sex variable is not significant in the multivariable analysis and was therefore not included in the final model. The coefficients and odds ratios (OR) revealed a significant influence of the individual and contextual variables as posited in the hypotheses. In addition to the influence of the individual variables considered, the welfare state model applied within the context of residence exerts a major influence both on the actual decision whether or not to travel for tourism purposes and the underlying economic or free time causes. Apart from the direct influence, there is also an indirect influence in terms of the impact the crisis may have in the future. Taking the Nordic model as our

reference, those resident in countries with a Mediterranean model obtained an odds ratio (OR) of 1.66. However, if the total OR is calculated including the perceived future impact of the crisis, the figure rises to 6.43.

In contrast to those that claim that the European Union is currently experiencing a trend towards convergence in social terms, our analysis of tourism travel data and the reasons behind the decision not to travel indicate that any such convergence between countries is still a long way off, and that based on the welfare state types, the gap between them is in fact extremely wide.

However, the most innovative contribution of this study is that although the southern model is less benevolent than others, namely the Continental, Liberal and Nordic models – albeit more than others, such as that of Eastern Europe –, and due to the intermediary influence of the crisis whose effects were felt most severely in Southern European countries, access to travel in this region is lower than all other countries, including those in Eastern Europe (33% in Eastern European countries compared with 34.4% in Southern Europe).

A further factor for consideration is how the subjective perception of risk associated with the economic crisis affected citizens in terms of the decision to travel for tourism purposes or not, as well as the various social groups based on age, habitat, occupation and education. Gender was significant in the bivariate analysis, but this was not the case when it was included in a multivariable analysis, with occupation as the principal for its loss of weight.

In line with the data obtained in the Eurobarometers, our analysis reveals the existence of disadvantaged groups in the European Union, despite the fact that together with the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), it has recognised the right of all citizens to participate in tourism. The European Union has highlighted the need for discussions between public and private organisations in order to facilitate tourism. Yet it must be realised that policies should not focus exclusively on providing opportunities for social tourism. Indeed, a more critical approach reveals the need for proposals aimed at solving economic and free time difficulties, thereby enabling people to travel and reducing the impact of the crisis, which affected the regions of Europe to widely differing degrees, although its effects were felt most severely in the Mediterranean.