

Tourism and Political Change



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The European Union: Between the Global and the National, and between Neo-Liberalism and Interventionism

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4 The European Union: Between the Global and the National, and Between Neo-Liberalism and Interventionism

Allan M. Williams and Vladimir Baláž

Introduction

The figures relating to the role of tourism in the economy of the European Union (EU) bear strong testimony to its material significance in terms of production and consumption. The European Union is the most visited region of the World and six European countries ranked among the top ten tourist destinations in 2006 in terms of international tourist receipts (WTO 2007). Most tourism markets in Europe tend to be in the mature stages of development, and have relatively low rates, especially in the face of global competition. Tourism development, partly because of its socially-constructed spatial and temporal polarization, is also associated with a range of cultural and environmental challenges (Shaw and Williams 2002, Chapter 1). And while most tourism activity remains domestic, international tourism is an important component of the industry and most forms of tourism are shaped by the internationalization of capital and labour markets. In other words, tourism and tourism impacts cannot be thought of as bounded or contained by national spaces, so that there is a compelling logic for the EU to be considered a key site for regulation and intervention.

Despite overwhelming evidence of the material significance of tourism, at first sight it seems to be weakly represented in the institutions and policies of the EU. It is not mentioned specifically in the founding treaty of the European Economic Community (as it was then named), the Treaty of Rome. The first policy document which explicitly targeted tourism development was the 1982 'Initial Guidelines on a Community Policy on Tourism' (COM (82) 235). This was the '... first comprehensive attempt to take stock of tourism's importance to the Community and to situate it in the context of other related fields of policy' (Robinson 1993: 13). It addressed several important agendas which still resonate now: the seasonality of tourism, the development of alternatives to beach holidays, and support for social tourism. These issues largely duplicated the policy concerns of national tourism policies (regional development, the environment,

consumer protection, seasonality) and did not make a compelling case for an enhanced and distinctive EU level policy. There were, however, two exceptions to this: the role of the EU in removing barriers to travel and freedom of movement amongst Member States, and the harmonisation of working conditions and provision of freedom of movement for tourism workers. These showed that the EU performed a significant role in shaping the operating environment for tourism, although through its general treaties rather than through tourism specific competences (Williams and Shaw 1998). Indeed, tourism has continued to teeter at the edge of the European agenda, compared to say agriculture, manufacturing or financial services. There is a brief reference to tourism in the Maastricht Treaty (1993), but the development of specific supranational tourist policies has been extremely modest (Anastasiadou 2008).

Although tourism has remained largely the preserve of national and sub-national policies, it has been shaped by the EU in a number of ways, especially in terms of broad regulatory frameworks as already indicated, but also via expenditures in support of tourism within the budgets of the structural, cohesion, cultural and other funds. The role of the EU in tourism has, therefore, been subject to the same tension between competing neo-liberal and interventionist visions of the EU (Lee 1990; Hudson and Williams 1999) as have other economic sectors. These tensions are explored here through a discussion of three main themes: the creation of a common mobility space, growth and competitiveness, and cohesion and interventionism.

A common mobility space: enacting a neo-liberal vision of the EU

Arguably, the fundamentals of modern tourism in Europe were laid down in the era of political stabilisation and rapid economic development in the 1950s and 1960s. Tourist arrivals increased tenfold in Greece, fourfold in Germany, Austria, Portugal and Turkey, threefold in the Netherlands and twofold in the UK, Ireland and Italy between 1950 and 59 (OECD 1989: 15). This international tourism boom was backed by a framework of supportive policies at the national level such as removing barriers to travel (in the form of currency restrictions, visa requirements, etc.) rather than by specific tourism policy actions. In other words, national states took steps towards opening their economies to international mobility for a variety of purposes, including tourism. This was reinforced by state supported marketing campaigns specifically for tourism. Combined with increases in real per capita incomes and leisure time, this laid the foundations for mass tourism growth in Europe (Shaw and Williams 2002). The logic for these measures was mostly couched in terms of the exigencies of needing to generate foreign exchange earnings, but also constituted part of a neo-liberal vision of the European space, defined above by the removal of barriers, whether to trade or human mobility. The limits to this approach were exposed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when rising unemployment and the first oil shock in 1973/74 sharply decreased international tourist flows. The oil shocks in 1973/74 and 1979/80 negatively impacted on balances of payments in Europe and led to temporary restrictions on foreign exchange availability for tourism purposes; for example, the French government imposed a 2000 franc maximum currency allowance on French citizens in 1983 (Airey 1983: 238). These restrictions were temporary and thereafter there was renewed commitment to the vision of a European mobility space. However, there was to be a more generalised policy shift with greater emphasis on local

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economic development priorities, and social and environmental issues, as well as on the quality of tourism provision, rather than simply on growth and exports.

The Treaty of Rome (1957), which brought into existence the European Economic Community, significantly advanced the freedom of travel, removing the right to impose visa or other obstacles to border crossing, and by creating rights of residence and property purchase (the latter was to be important in the growth of international second or holiday homes). While much of the regulation was generic, it was supplemented by tourism specific measures such as the 1968 Council Directive 68/367/EEC which regulated freedom of establishment and freedom to provide services in the hotel and restaurant sector. This was supplemented later by the Schengen agreement, which removed routine passport controls on mobility between members of this elective group of EU countries. The Treaty on European Union, which paved the way for the elective introduction of the euro in January 2002, can also be seen in terms of creating the freedom of mobility space among the initially 12 participating Member States, increasing to 16 by 2009. Other measures include reducing significantly the roaming fees for mobile communications in the EU, introducing a Europe-wide emergency telephone number, and implementing effective aviation safety standards. These measures have contributed, to varying degrees, to creating a single European mobility space, where market forces are played out over a vastly increased and relatively homogeneous economic space, rather than through a mosaic of fragmented national economic spaces.

Secondly, the creation of the EU was driven not only by economic goals, but also by the goal of creating a new political framework which would promote peace and collaboration in Europe. Over time the EU has become the bulwark of political, legal and social stability in Europe, creating an environment conducive to international travel and tourism. Thirdly, the EU has played a major role in the deregulation of international air travel in Europe. Air transport in the EU was liberalised in three stages between 1987 and 1997. The third package of measures, in July 1992, was the most radical: as of April 1997, all EU carriers have had open access to virtually all routes within the EU. Combined with favourable macro economic conditions, and organizational innovations, this has led to a rapid expansion of low-cost air carriers and shifts in the practices of legacy air carriers, significantly changing the geography of accessibility in Europe, while lowering the cost and convenience barriers to mobility in the continent in terms of labour migration, capital and knowledge flows, and tourism (Williams and Baláž 2009). This was further reinforced by EU funding support for transport infrastructures.

Many of the above measures, which are associated with the creation of a single market, represent selective forms of the 'deepening' of European integration. Alongside this there was a different EU agenda of 'widening' by admission of new Member States. The key moments were the Northwestern enlargement in 1972, the Southern enlargement in the 1980s, the Northern and Alpine enlargement in the 1990s, and the Eastern enlargement in the 2000s. Rapid international tourism growth in these countries had commenced prior to accession. For example, there was a tenfold growth in foreign tourist arrivals in Poland, threefold growth in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and twofold expansion in Hungary between 1989 and 1996 (Baláž and Williams 2005). However, the role of the EU in the transformation of these economies after 1989, especially through the European Agreements and the prospect of future membership (Pridham 2005), was critical in the opening of their economies, and to increased international mobility.

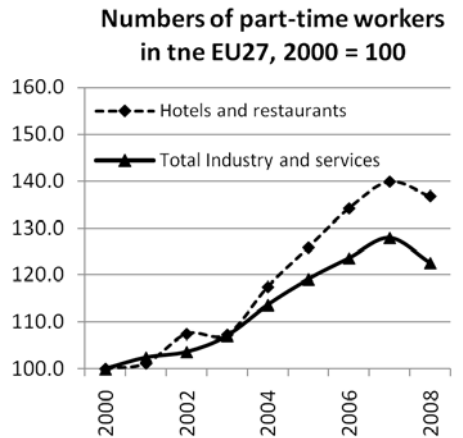
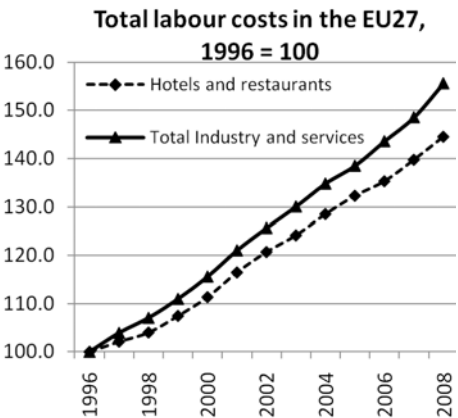
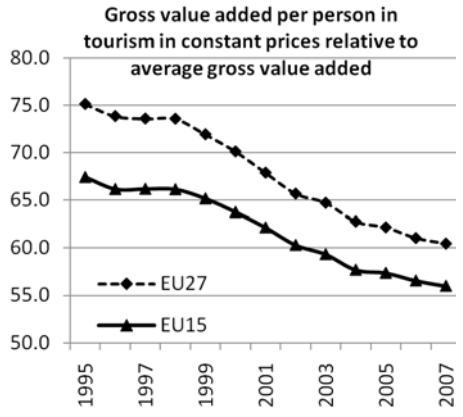
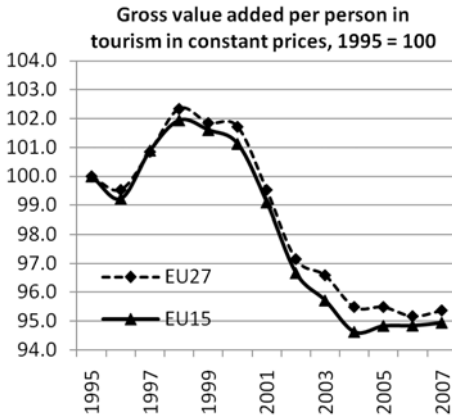
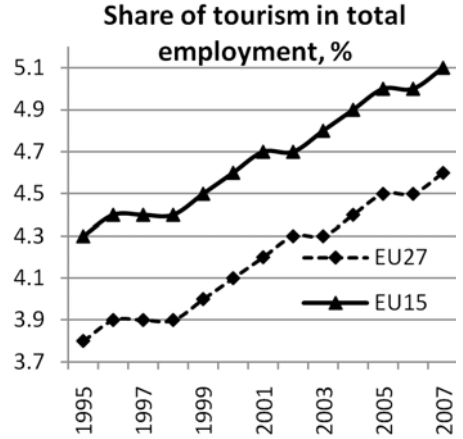
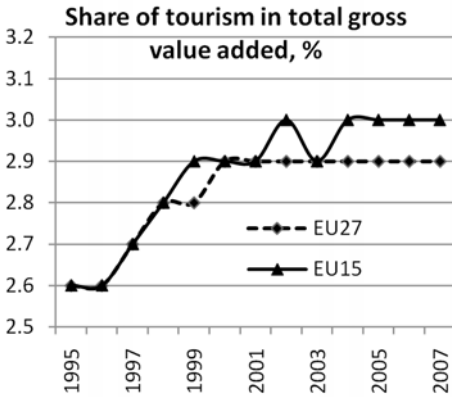


Figure 4.1: Value added, employment, productivity and labour costs in tourism in the EU, 1995-2007. Sources: authors' computations based on the Eurostat and National Accounts aggregates and employment by branch

Note: Tourism defined as Hotels and Restaurants only.

Growth and competitiveness: tourism at the centre of an ideological battleground

A recurrent theme within the EU has been the need to sustain or enhance its global competitiveness, and although this debate has mostly centred on issues relating to high technology or knowledge-intensive manufacturing and (more recently) producer services, many of the same issues are germane when considering tourism. Competitiveness is ultimately a key battleground for competing European economic and social models (Sapir 2006).

It is, perhaps, not surprising that tourism has largely been absent from EU-level discourses about European competitiveness. Tourism activities are generally labour-intensive, and characterised by above-average shares of low- and medium-skilled workers. Not surprisingly, therefore, the value added per worker is some 40% lower in tourism than the average value added per worker in the economy generally. The overall numbers mask considerable differences in tourism sub-sectors: gross value added per person varies from €17,000 in the restaurant and café sector, to €29,000 in the hotel sector and €56,000 in the tour operator and travel agent sector. The last of these figures surpassed the average productivity in market services in general, €41,000 (CEC 2007a), but the generally low levels of productivity have meant that tourism, unwisely, has rarely featured on the EU's competitiveness agenda.

The productivity, and therefore in part the competitiveness, of EU tourism is, however, more problematic than might appear from these static comparative data. Since 1995 the share of tourism in both total employment and gross value added has expanded (Figures 4.1 and 4.2). Growth in employment, however, has outpaced the growth in gross value added in tourism. Gross value added per person in constant prices fell by about 5% in both the old and new Member States. The decrease in the relative productivity of the tourism industry was even more pronounced. The gross value added per person in the hotel and restaurant sector was 75.1% of the average total value added per person in the EU27 and 67.4% in the EU15 in 1995 (Figure 4.2). However, by 2007 the gross value added per person in the hotel and restaurant sector was only about 60.5% of the EU27 average and 56.0% of the EU15 average. This relative decline in productivity can be explained because, while in the period 1995–2007 tourism benefited from technological and organisational innovations (e.g. the introduction of low-costs airlines, Internet booking), it did so to a lesser degree than many other industries. Tourism has played an important role in generating employment in recent years, so that many national and European initiatives to assist tourism have been rationalized in terms of job creation. The problem is that there have also been strategies aiming to increase the competitiveness of the industry, and these two targets have probably been contradictory, as increases in competitiveness can be accompanied by job losses or lower rates of employment growth. Productivity and competitiveness in tourism are unusually complex. Tourism has benefited from technological and organisational innovations, such as the rapid spread of Internet bookings of flights and accommodation services which have resulted in impressive increases in the numbers of tourists, nights spent and absolute volumes of value added generated in the hotel and restaurant sector.

In recent years, economists have increasingly focused on the need to understand relatively low, but internationally varied, productivity levels in consumer services (Broadberry

and O'Mahoney 2004). This has meant that tourism, belatedly, has begun to be incorporated into discussions of productivity and competitiveness. For example, the 2001 Commission communication on tourism policies (COM (2001) 665 final) listed a lack of skilled manpower for certain jobs, service quality, and the adoption and the incorporation of new information and communication technologies amongst the challenges for the tourism sector. Since 2006 the European Commission has gone further and sought to integrate Community tourism policies into the Lisbon Strategy. A Commission communication in March 2006 on 'A renewed EU Tourism Policy – Towards a stronger partnership for European Tourism' (COM (2006) 134 final) identified '... changing demography, global competition, concern for sustainability and the demand for specific forms of tourism' as major challenges for European tourism development. A new tourism policy was required to meet the 'challenges facing this sector and fully exploit its potential'. The necessary actions for promoting sustainability and competitiveness of European tourism were summarised in the 'Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism', approved by the Commission in October 2007 (COM (2007b) 621 final), and included:

- ◆ Mobilising actors to produce and share knowledge (conferences, research, formal and non-formal tourism education and training, platforms for exchanging knowledge on good and bad practices, improved statistical data);
- ◆ Promoting destinations of excellence (supporting destinations where tourism development is consistent with social, cultural and environmental sustainability);
- ◆ Mobilising EU financial instruments to support tourism, for example, the Cohesion Policy, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, European Fisheries Fund, and the 7th Framework Programme, 'Leonardo da Vinci' programme.
- ◆ Mainstreaming sustainability and competitiveness in Commission policies, especially environment, transport, employment and research policies.

Tourism has therefore been incorporated into the broader goals of the Lisbon Strategy, in terms of creating a more knowledge driven and globally competitive economy. Tourism is often portrayed in economic policy discourse as a relatively successful sector (at least in comparison with, say, traditional manufacturing) and that the way to maximize its growth is via continued relatively light touch regulation and interventionism, other than necessary actions to minimise its environmental and cultural impacts. But interventionists would contest this in terms of the need for the state to support the sector if it is to retain its global competitiveness. In reality, however, tourism remains at the margins of substantive EU actions and funding designed to bolster competitiveness, although as seen in the next section, this does overlap with spending in terms of the cohesion objectives.

Cohesion: EU interventionism in tourism by the back door

The neo-liberal vision for Europe has emphasised the role of the market in terms of promoting growth and welfare in the longer term. Little more than ten years ago, there was still a view that shocks only '*...temporarily* threaten regional and social cohesion'

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(CEC 1996:51, emphasis added). However, there has long been a critique which argues that persistent social and spatial inequalities within the EU are inherent to, rather than temporary or ‘by-product’ of, capitalist development.

There is no space here to investigate systematically the contribution of tourism to regional convergence/divergence or any other dimension of social cohesion. However, we can note three significant features of the sector. First, as noted in the introduction, it accounts for a significant proportion of jobs and output in the EU. Secondly, its shares of output and employment have increased over time. For example, there was a 23.4% increase in the total number of bed places in hotels and similar establishments between 1994 and 2007, and a 37.3% increase in nights spent in hotels.

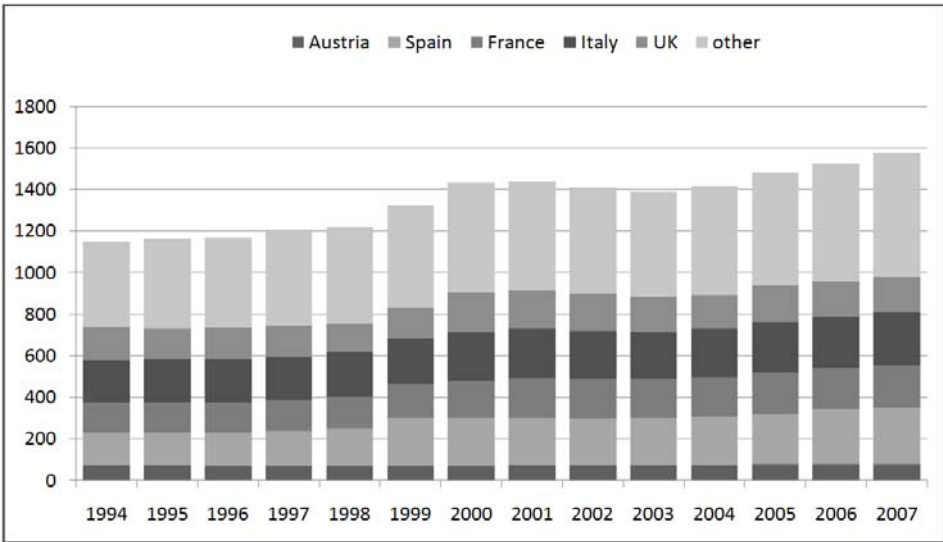


Figure 4.2: Nights spent in hotels and similar establishments in the EU 27, 1994-2007 (millions) Source: Eurostat

Third, the broad structure of accommodation capacities has remained fairly stable over time, perhaps reflecting the influence of sunk capital. The share of the five main providers (UK, Italy, France, Spain and Germany) in total hotel beds in the EU27 only decreased from 69.4% to 67.7% in this period, although there was an important shift from France (-3.8 percentage points) to Spain (+2.9 percentage points). Therefore, although most of the discussion around cohesion has focused on the manufacturing and business services sectors, tourism could not be entirely neglected, not least because international tourism constitutes an export sector and an important source of job growth.

The EU has no direct competence to intervene in tourism and – unlike in the case of agriculture – such competences remain firmly rooted at the national, regional and/or local levels. The 1960s and 1970s saw rapid growth of national scale interventionism in infrastructure supportive to tourism: e.g. motorways, mountain tunnels for rail/car transport, airports, and marinas. National states also co-financed construction of tourism facilities (hotels, restaurants), especially in Southern Europe. They also introduced new tourism policy instruments, namely land use planning, staggering holidays, and the education and training of tourism workers. Governments also intervened to regulate the quality and prices of tourism services, while other initiatives aimed to protect natural

and historical heritage sites. These regulations encouraged shifts from targeting quantity to quality. An analysis of tourism policies in the six founding Member States of the EEC (based on a content analysis of the OECD annual reports, 1972–82) established the following ranking of tourism policies: 1. Regional development, 2. Seasonality, 3. Consumer protection, 4. Balance of payments, 5. Social Tourism, 6. Rural/green tourism, 7. Environmental protection (Airey 1983). The fact that these broadly concur with current national priorities – with the exception of addressing the ageing population of Europe – indicates the relative maturity of European tourism, and tourism policies.

Tourism policies also became better coordinated and involved a broader range of stakeholders (from the culture, environment, social affairs and other domains). A survey of tourism policies (Akehurst *et al.* 1993), for example, found that the most successful countries in promoting tourism in the 1980s (France, Portugal and Ireland) shared some common features. First, they had coherent central government strategies for developing tourism, and for co-ordinating tourism with other policies, particularly with respect to transport, the environment, cultural development, and regional policy. Second, there was increased diversification of tourism products towards rural and cultural tourism. And, third, they had higher direct investment in the tourism sector, including the use of EEC funds and fiscal incentives to the private sector.

Although the EU has no direct competence in respect of tourism, interventionism in the sector is achieved via other EU competencies. The 1982 guidelines, mentioned earlier, were an early indication of awareness of these indirect EU tourism competences. Over time, EU tourism policies have become more systematic. The Community Action Plan to assist tourism (published April 1991), for example, listed many policy areas that provided indirect support to tourism development, culture, heritage, environment protection policies plus several direct interventionist actions such as the directive on package holidays (1990) and The European Year of Tourism (1990).

There are several EU policy instruments which address issues of social and territorial convergence/divergence, that are relevant to tourism. Not least, tourism is identified as an important instrument for assisting economic development in the EU's less developed regions. Financial assistance to tourism development by the Community is provided under the 'Convergence', 'Regional Competitiveness and Employment' and 'Inter-regional Cooperation' objectives. Article 4 of the ERDF regulations (No 1080/2006) on the Convergence Objective specifies which tourism tourism-related projects can be supported:

Tourism, including promotion of natural and cultural assets as potential for the development of sustainable tourism, protection and enhancement of the cultural heritage in support of economic development, aid to improve the supply of tourism services through new higher value-added services.

Similarly, Article 5 on the 'Regional competitiveness/Employment' Objective refers to the:

Protection and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage in support of socio-economic development and the promotion of natural and cultural assets as potential for the development of sustainable tourism.

The Territorial Cooperation Objective (Art. 6) identifies activities related to the environment:

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'Actions may include protection and enhancement of the natural heritage in support of socio-economic development and sustainable tourism'.

The Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion (SGC) do not mention tourism under the three main priorities, but tourism is included in the territorial dimension of Cohesion Policy, namely in terms of the attractiveness of cities and the restructuring of rural areas.

Probably the single most important instrument in respect of tourism has been the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), established in 1975. Although not specifically concerned with tourism, it became the first financial instrument to provide EU support for tourism infrastructure. Between 1986 and 1988 some 5 % of the ERDF was allocated to tourism-related projects. More recently, the ERDF allocated some €7.7bn to tourism in the period 2000–06. Most assistance addressed the competitiveness of the tourism industry and the quality of tourist services in laggard regions: (a) building tangible tourist infrastructure (accommodation facilities, tourist information centres, 65%), (b) supporting intangible investments (tourist services, 20%), and (c) improving effectiveness of the tourism industry (networking, trade fairs, 15%). In the planning period 2007–13, the competitiveness of the tourism industry and quality of tourist services remain the main targets for assistance, but significant support is also channelled to projects addressing tourism sustainability.

The overall budget for the entire Cohesion Policy (including other structural funds such as the Social Policy) is about €347 billion in 2007–13. Between 2007 and 2013, directly targeted EU support for tourism under Cohesion Policy amounting to more than €6 billion is planned, representing 1.8% of the total budget. €3.8 billion is allocated for the improvement of tourist services, €1.4 billion for the protection and development of the natural heritage, and €1.1 billion for the promotion of natural assets. In addition, support for tourism-related infrastructure and services is also provided under other headings, such as innovation, promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises, information technology applications and human capital.

In the period 2007–13, the largest assistance to tourism is planned in Poland (€979m), Italy (€894m), the Czech Republic (€692m), Spain (€468m) and Hungary (€448m), reflecting the overall aims of the cohesion strategy. In relative terms, tourism accounts for higher shares of total assistance under the Cohesion policy in Italy (3.2%), Finland (3.2%), Estonia (3.1%), Malta (2.9%) and the Czech Republic (2.6%), reflecting national specificities. Sustainability issues are prominently addressed in Lithuania, Denmark, Malta, Bulgaria and the UK, while competitiveness issues are prominent in Latvia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Austria and Estonia (Figure 4.3).

Support to tourism has also become better coordinated with more policies promoting regional development, competitiveness and cross-border cooperation in the 1990s. The cross-border cooperation programmes (INTERREG) in particular accounted for a large share of tourism-related projects. Whereas tourism interventions were more or less isolated actions in the first period (1990–93, INTERREG I), a more structured approach emerged in INTERREG II, 1994–99 (Moniz 2009).

While this chapter has focused mostly on the cohesion strategy and funds, the EU also has some competences in relation to tourism via some of its other common policies. For example, under the common environmental policy, directives aimed at the quality of bathing water (1976) and pollution in the Mediterranean and protection of

Europe’s cultural heritage (1979) helped to create a framework supportive to tourism development. The European Commission also promotes cultural tourism as a means of underpinning ‘unity in diversity’ as part of its ‘cultural policy’. Cultural tourism is seen as a way of stimulating job creation, as a growing market, as strengthening local and regional cultures, and as a means of reinforcing or projecting distinctive identities and images (OECD 2008: 19-20). This also reflects trends at the national scale, where some 25 countries in the developed world have combined their administrative structures for culture and tourism in some way, as for example within a single ministry or department (OECD 2008: 24). In summary, then, the EU has far greater competence in respect of tourism than appears at first sight.

Assistance to tourism under Cohesion policy in 2007-2013, shares of main targets

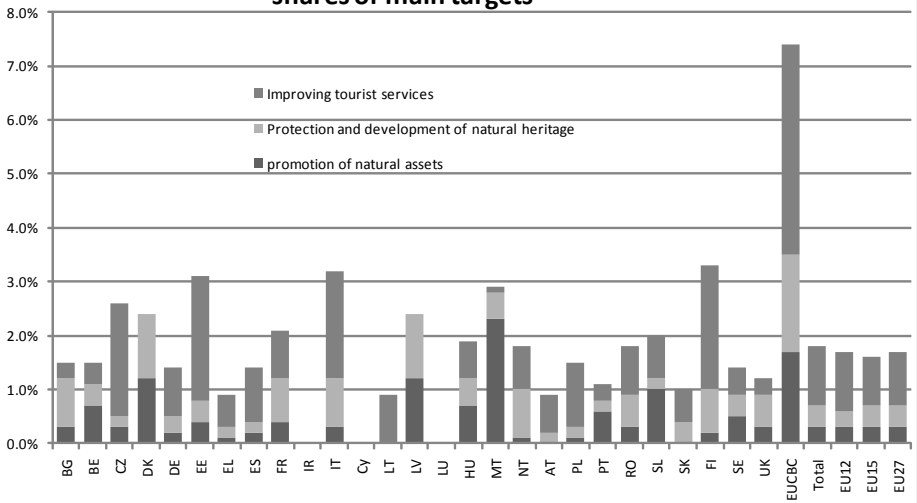


Figure 4.3: Assistance to tourism under Cohesion policy in 2007–13, shares of main targets. Source: DG REGIO.

Notes: Breakdown of data on Ireland, Cyprus and Luxembourg not available. EUCBC = European Cross-Border Cooperation; Total allocation to tourism = allocation by EU27 + EUCBC

Conclusion

The state, at whatever scale, is a contested ideological and policy battleground, and the engagement of the state with tourism is therefore necessarily shaped by (and to a limited extent shapes) this. We have sought to explore this argument in relationship to the EU in terms of three main themes: the creation of a single European mobility space, growth and competition agendas, and social cohesion and interventionism. Although the ideological and policy contest has ebbed and flowed over time, we contend that the neo-liberal agenda has been dominant in shaping the EU’s engagement with tourism, albeit there are some important, if often indirect, outcomes related to interventionism. Ultimately, however, EU interventionism is constrained not just by a dominant neo-liberalist discourse, but also by the EU budget and the evolution of the EU as a cross between intergovernmentalism and cooperative federalism (Kirchner 1992), whereby the national remains the dominant but not the only site of regulation. Of course, the

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EU engagement with tourism does not occur in a vacuum, and is often enfolded with activities at the national and the local scales, in other words demanding a multi-level governance perspective when pursuing more detailed studies than we have had scope for here. This process of enfoldment can occur in a number of ways, varying from joint funding and management of particular projects, to the incorporation of EU directives or best practices, into national legislation. Tourism also has to be considered in terms of its relationships with other sectors, whether agriculture or urban regeneration, another theme which has lain outside the scope of this contribution.

Looking to the future, there are clearly a number of key issues that will pose challenges for the EU, as well as for national and regional states. These include dealing with the consequences of population ageing on both demand for tourism and the supply of labour, sustainability issues in the face of technological and climate changes, new forms of risk management, and global competitiveness as the centres of economic and political power are redefined in the course of the first half of the twenty-first century. Despite the enormity of these challenges, there is little evidence to suggest that the EU competence in respect of tourism will shift significantly at least in the short and medium term. However, at the time of writing, the question of whether the economic crisis of the late 2000s leads to a reframing of the contestation between neo-liberalism and interventionism remains unresolved.

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