

IMPROVED OPERATIONAL DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT STANDARDS FOR DOMESTIC TOURISM

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I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of “usual environment” is a key concept in drawing up tourism statistics from the very moment in which it is included in the definition of tourism itself. Nonetheless, as pointed out in the Manual of Tourism Satellite Accounts, it is a very difficult concept to pin down in precise terms, especially in domestic tourism surveys.

Given the sheer importance of this concept in quantifying tourism flows and also the difficulty of coming up with a clear definition, the IET of Spain (Instituto de Estudios Turísticos: Tourism Studies Institute) has made a systematic attempt on several occasions to achieve a greater statistical precision; the results of these endeavours have been presented in different forums such as:

- “Methodological workshop on the implementation of the Council Directive 95/57/EC on tourism statistics” Rome 24-26 November 1999
- “5th International forum on tourism statistics”. Glasgow 19-23 June 2000;

- “Methodological workshop on tourism statistics, related to the Council Directive 95/97/EC on tourism statistics and Tourism Satellite Accounts”. Madrid, 6-8 Marzo 2002.

Furthermore, in the Conference “Tourism Satellite Accounts: Credible number for good business decisions” held in **Vancouver** in May 2001, we presented a paper examining the different results obtained when using different concepts of the “usual environment”. Scott Meis, chairman of this panel, took a great interest in the matter, as in-depth studies of this problem have also been conducted in Canada; this then sparked off a fruitful interchange of ideas and documents between both countries.

Finally, in the meeting of the **Committee On Statistics and Macroeconomic Analysis Of Tourism** of the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), held in January 2002, in which Canada and Spain occupied the two vice-presidencies, it was agreed to set up a working group to analyse the “usual environment”, this group being given the selfsame importance as the rest of the working groups (1). A handout is available

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showing the WTO document declaring itself to be in favour of setting up the aforementioned working group and detailing its remit.

This WTO Committee also included the Eurostat representative, who declared his interest in this work. Likewise, in the **“Methodological workshop on tourism statistics, related to the Council Directive 95/97/EC on tourism statistics and Tourism Satellite Accounts”**, organised by Eurostat and held in Madrid in March 2002, a paper was presented on the work carried out in Spain, based on the Familitur survey, and the meeting was informed about the methodology comparison to be carried out, an initiative we are still working on today.

In short, Canada and Spain, to quote the WTO document: *“have committed themselves to carrying out a comparative analysis of the way in which the various countries tackle the operational definition of the concept of “usual environment” in their household surveys”.... “Both countries have agreed to set up a Working Group with the aim of presenting, in the next meeting of WTO’s Statistics Committee, a proposal on how to define on an operational basis the concept of “usual environment” in relation to domestic tourism”*

In terms of the final objective the same document states that: *“the initiative would best be geared towards the drawing up of general guidelines (rather than submitting any proposals of a normative character to the UNSC); in view of the various approaches known to exist in the different countries, it would seem reasonable for these guidelines to take different proposals into account rather than recommending a single one;”*

The work has been carried out in the following way:

First of all a selection was made of 22 countries for which an exhaustive analysis would be carried out of the concept of “usual environment” used in their tourism surveys. To this end a brief questionnaire was drawn up, which could be filled in from internet; this questionnaire records the basic characteristics of the survey of each country and the criteria used for delimiting “usual environment”. These countries were also asked to send additional information such as the questionnaires used in the survey and the survey methodologies.

The 22 countries selected for carrying out the investigation were: Australia, Mexico, Canada, Nicaragua, Chile, Norway, Korea, Portugal, Egypt, United Kingdom, Spain, South African Republic, France, Singapore, Hungary, Sweden, Italy, Switzerland, Malta, Thailand, Morocco and Uruguay.

Of these countries, twelve have sent back the questionnaire on the concept used to delimit “usual environment” and eight have supplied the additional information, which is currently being analysed.

A curious case worth particular mention is Singapore, whose status of city-state makes it even more difficult to adopt a criterion for quantifying domestic tourism. They currently run no survey but they have fully backed the study of the concept of “usual environment”.

As well as pooling exhaustive information on the aforementioned 22 countries, we also decided to take advantage of all the forums we would be attending throughout this year to

collect briefer yet still highly useful information from all the countries not included in the initial selection.

To ensure the uniformity of the information collected, the information was gathered from the aforementioned internet survey, which contains questions on the basic survey characteristics and the way of defining the term “usual environment”.

Since the setting up the Group, Spain has attended two meetings in which information was collected, about which more information will be given later: one with all the Autonomous Communities (17) and Cities (2) of Spain and another with all the countries of Latin-America.

In Spain the IET runs a domestic-tourism survey called Tourism Movements of the Spanish (Movimientos Turísticos de los Españoles: Familitur). The Familitur survey gives information on a regional level, so the definition of “usual environment” directly affects the data offered for each of the Autonomous Communities and Cities, which are the regions into which the country is broken down politically.

In 1999 Familitur began to gather information on short-duration trips to a second home, a type of journey clearly affected by the definition of “usual environment”. This type of trip is so frequent that it raised the problem of deciding which ones should be included as tourism journeys and which excluded, according to the definition given by international bodies. Spain decided to apply the criteria of distance, measured in terms of territorial administrative units, as laid down in point 22

of the statistical report published by the WTO “Recommendations on tourism statistics”. New York, 1994” (this was before the publication of WTO’s “Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework”, which lays down the same in its point 2.7).

An article accompanying the WTO document sets out the results that would have been obtained from applying other criteria, also dealt with in the manuals.

When Spain, together with Canada, decided to initiate this project, the importance of this concept in regional calculations prompted it to submit the Familitur “usual environment” criterion to the Autonomous Communities for their consideration. It should also be borne in mind that some of these Autonomous Communities or regions conduct their own tourism surveys on their particular territory, so information has been collected on the “usual environment” criterion used by each one. Another point to bear in mind here is that some of these Autonomous Communities are drawing up their own draft Satellite Account of Regional Tourism, in which procedure a sound definition of “usual environment” is crucial.

The case of the Spanish regions or Autonomous Communities is interesting insofar as it shows how different criteria for measuring the same concept can be used even in the same country. The Spanish State is divided into 17 Autonomous Communities and two Autonomous Cities, to which tourism responsibilities have been transferred. The Spanish state is hence a federal state. When tackling state-level projects that affect the regions, therefore

(such as obtaining national data broken down by regions), procedures have to be set up for harmonising the criteria and concepts used.

With this end in view the Instituto de Estudios Turísticos has been holding two meetings a year with the Autonomous Communities since 1996, with the paramount aim of reaching a consensus on tourism statistics matters.

As for Familitur, the Autonomous Communities manifested their agreement with the use of the criterion of administrative territorial unit (municipality), since this criterion is the most handy when offering regional information, which in reality is the addition of smaller administrative units.

Some Autonomous Communities contain very large municipalities, in whose territory numerous trips are made. These trips, according to the criterion of the municipality, are not counted as journeys by Familitur, but they are recorded for subsequent exploitation of the data.

Therefore, although there is a degree of harmonisation in national statistics, the criteria used in the various Autonomous Communities for drawing up regional statistical surveys show a variety of approaches. We have taken four of them as a reference: Andalucía, the Canaries, Cantabria and Comunidad Valenciana (Valencia Autonomous Community):

Andalucía, one of the biggest Spanish regions, gives its own definition of "usual environment", based on the concept of "tourism zone"; this involves dividing the regional territory into 25 tourism zones, so

that the "usual environment", in distance terms, is considered to be the "tourism zone". The Canaries, one of the archipelagos making up the Spanish territory considers "the island" to be the "usual environment", in terms of distance.

Cantabria, a small region in the north of the peninsula bordering the Bay of Biscay, deems the use of the administrative territorial unit "municipality" to be the most suitable criterion for "usual environment" in its territory.

The Comunidad Valenciana, a region on the Mediterranean coast, regards the "usual environment", in terms of distance, to include trips made both inside and outside the residence municipality.

As the next stage in the ongoing endeavour, Cartagena de Indias (Colombia) hosted the **Fourth Ibero-American on the Tourism Satellite Account**, in June 2002. A meeting is held every year with the Latin-American countries with the aim of harmonising tourism statistics. These forums are financed by the WTO, the Instituto de Estudios Turísticos (IET) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL).

The research project into the "usual environment" was presented in Cartagena de Indias. Information was also collected on the concept used in domestic tourism statistics by the countries at the meeting.

Of the more than twenty countries attending the meeting, thirteen have responded to the questionnaire: Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Cuba, El Salvador,

Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela and Costa Rica. The contributions made by these countries can be summed up as follows:

- Except in the case of CUBA, all the countries make reference to domestic tourism surveys (6), in households (2), of the domestic market (1) or of hotels (1). El Salvador makes no surveys of this type (referring to domestic tourism).

Disparate criteria are used:

- **Duration of the journey:** Bolivia (Outward trip only; 4 hours), Panama (outward trip only and without specifying time) and Venezuela (without specifying more).
- **Frequency:** Ecuador (without specifying the actual frequency), Brazil ("regularly visited destinations") and Paraguay (consideration is given only to trips in holiday times, Holy Week and long weekends/bank holidays).
- **Administrative territorial units:** the four countries that responded (Ecuador, Salvador, Mexico and Venezuela) refer to the municipality.
- **Distance:** Guatemala (yes, 50 Km.), Panama and Venezuela (without specifying exactly).

7 countries consider the criterion used to be satisfactory. Bolivia, Paraguay and Venezuela consider it to be clearly unsatisfactory. Cuba and Peru did not respond and Guatemala deems there to be insufficient experience for an evaluation.

Many countries confessed in one way or another that the concept is difficult to delimit. In their observations, matters such as the following were posed: international same-day trips (Brazil, Argentina), the treatment of "travelling workers" or the second home.

Finally, on 8 to 11 inst. (September 2002) the WTO's Madrid head office hosted the "First International workshop on tourism statistics and development of tourism satellite accounts (TSA)". All attending countries, mainly from Asia and Africa, were given the same information dossier that we have brought to this meeting, including the questionnaire on the concept of "usual environment" used in the domestic-tourism surveys of each country. Although the questionnaires were collected they have not yet been analysed, but they have been attached at the end.

II. CONCLUSIONS

The amount of information collected has been very satisfactory in terms of the countries' level of participation, their readiness to collaborate and the effort made in filling in the questionnaire. Information has by now been gathered from over 30 countries and this number is expected to grow even more.

Information currently to hand constitutes an important reference point. It shows the variety of criteria used, even within the same country, as in the case of Spain.

The sheer heterogeneity shown up in this first approach to the analysis of the "usual

environment” means that the situation is much more complex than we first thought.

This has prompted us to study this concept in greater depth, taking into account as many experiences as possible from the various countries. This will help to enrich the stock of knowledge on a matter of such enormous importance to tourism statistics and furnish the World Tourism Organisation with as much information as possible, in the interests of giving the best recommendations to the international community.

We therefore ask to you to collaborate by filling in the questionnaire given out to you, if you have not done so already, to help in the endeavour of increasing knowledge on this matter and hence improving tourism statistics.

NOTE

(1) The seven working groups formed by the committee are dealing with the following areas: Nomenclature, regional accounts, economic impact of tourism, employment, capital, prices and “usual environment”.