

An analysis of regional economic vulnerability through the lens of tourism dependence: The case of Spain.

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Abstract

In some peripheral economies, long-term economic growth has not been frequently accompanied by processes of structural change. Moreover, in some particular cases, regional economies were trapped in a growth model characterised by an over-concentration of resources in the export sector and the absence of incentives for private and public economic agents to promote a more diversified regional development. This situation was named in the literature as ‘the staples trap’ (Watkins, 1963).

Besides that, tourism has often been pointed to as a possible way out of these situations of dependency and vulnerability (Brown, 1988; George et al., 2009; Sinclair, 1998). However, the literature has also pointed out how tourism has often failed as a sustainable development tool in such cases where tourism development has served to replace one dependency (based on the export of natural resources, for example) with another (international tourism) (Baum, 1999; Hall, 2007; Kneafsey, 2000; Müller and Jansson, 2007). In this sense, Schmallegger and Carson (2010), Carson (2011) and Carson and Carson (2020) showed how tourism experiences and products in peripheral territories seem to follow development patterns similar to those described by the staples trap model.

Today, however, the problem of the excessive economic dependence of some territories on international tourism is wider than the fact that this situation conditions their long-term economic and social development path (Shaw and Williams, 1994). Moreover, dependence on international tourism in these territories could be particularly vulnerable to exogenous economic shocks (WTO, 2021). In the near past, this was starkly illustrated during the so-called Great Recession (2008-2013) and, particularly, during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dioko, 2022; Milesi Ferreti, 2021).

Taking this theoretical framework into account, the main aim of this proposal is to provide evidence of the existence of regions in Spain in which the excessive dependence on tourism is conditioning their long-term economic development possibilities, placing their economies in a position of economic

Bringing hospitality, tourism, transport, and events back for *good*. vulnerability. To our knowledge, this will be the first attempt to analyse the relationship between dependence on tourism and economic vulnerability in Spain. Previously, Watson and Deller (2022) studied how dependency on tourism influences regional economic resiliency using US county-level data.

Thus, in this study, attention will be paid to the relationship between economic dependence on tourism and economic vulnerability in Spanish tourist regions in the two most recent periods of recession: the ‘Great Recession’ of 2008 and the initial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. With this aim, we will first conceptualise and measure regional economic vulnerability/resilience following the works of Briguglio et al. (2009) and Ringwood et al. (2019). Then an index of regional dependence on tourism will be developed in order to have a single tourism dependence indicator to be associated with differences in vulnerability/resilience regional scores previously calculated. In this regard, particular attention will be paid to the influence of differences in the portfolio of visitors on the levels of resilience of regional economies.

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