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Tourism Growth and Economic Development: Academic and Non-Academic Perspectives

Abstract

This article explores the complex relationship between tourism growth and economic development from academic and non-academic perspectives. The former mainly highlights the positive influence of tourism while recognizing biases and limitations that may arise from using different methodologies, variables, or temporary scenarios in research. However, non-academic stakeholders, such as the media and politicians, offer unverified and biased opinions that can influence public perceptions and lead to failed investments. This article provides recommendations to foster a balanced conversation between the two perspectives, with a broader dissemination of academic results and a recognition of the difficulties in analyzing the relationship between tourism and economic development, such as the mobility of stakeholders.

Keywords: tourism industry, economic development, stakeholders, mobility, methodologies

1. Introduction

As a multifaceted phenomenon, tourism involves complex relationships and interactions between stakeholders and their environment, which evolve as destinations consolidate (Gore et al., 2022). Depending on the destination, these connections vary significantly in type and magnitude, primarily influenced by two factors. The first is tourism specialization, encompassing the activities at the destination (business, leisure, beach, cultural tourism, etc.) and the predominant accommodation type (apartments, hotels, residences, etc.). The second is the mobility of the agents or stakeholders involved, measured in numbers and the diversity of interactions, including tourists, workers, businesses, and residents.

Both factors are relevant in explaining the relationship between the tourism industry and economic development. However, while the literature has extensively documented the economic and social effects of travel motivations and tourism specialization in destinations (Coccosis & Constantoglou, 2008; Briassoulis, 2017; Jordan et al., 2023), the mobility of stakeholders has received less attention. This is although the effects of linkages and leakages (closely associated with the mobility of stakeholders) have an undeniable economic impact on destinations (Lejárraga & Walkenhorst, 2010; Webster & Ivanov, 2014). To compensate for this, we focus on the theoretical incorporation of the mobility of agents to enhance the analysis of tourism economics and the resulting recommendations.

To this end, we examine the intricate relationship between tourism and economic development (Sections 2 and 3), which represents a highly relevant research topic due to the existing divergence between practical and

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scientific perspectives. Destination growth has been accompanied by the political idea that the tourism sector generates unlimited wealth, leading to unsustainable actions and social issues such as tourism phobia. On the other hand, due to the uncontrolled growth of the activity, non-academic publications such as the mass media have focused their discourse on the adverse effects of tourism, shaping public opinion with views that are sometimes simplistic and not based on corroborated data or validated analyses. Finally, scientific documents have confirmed the Tourism Led Growth Hypothesis (TLGH), but using different variables, timeframes, and analysis methods, these results are not definitive.

Tourism economics must work on reducing the biases and limitations of academic research, employing increasingly complex and robust methodologies while integrating a scientific perspective into decision-making processes. Only in this way can we avoid forming an overly optimistic or pessimistic opinion, which could either promote unsustainable practices or limit the potential of tourism to generate wealth and employment. To contribute to a balanced discourse between academic and non-academic perspectives, this article proposes incorporating the mobility mentioned above of stakeholders into the complex analysis of the relationship between tourism and economic development (see Section 4). This approach enables us to pose new questions regarding methodologies and expected outcomes while opening a space for debate about the limited impact of scientific research (despite its continuous efforts to improve), in contrast with the often sensationalist coverage found in the media.

From the literature point of view, this article's typology can be considered a perspective paper seeking to review the existing studies and publications from both academic and practical perspectives. The methodology used is a case study, with reflections and considerations centered around Spain, a well-established and fiercely competitive tourist destination. Nevertheless, the insights gleaned can offer a conceptual groundwork for deliberations within developing countries or destinations in an earlier stage of development.

2. The relationship between tourism and economic development: The academic perspective

2.1. Tourism as a factor for economic development

Traditionally, institutions responsible for promoting development have considered that tourism could play a vital role to this end. As indicated by Sharpley (2014), "Since the early 1900s when, as a social activity, it was largely limited to a privileged minority, the opportunity to participate in tourism has become increasingly widespread" (p. 3). However, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century, when the benefits of tourism and the advent of charter flights (Sharpley, 2022) became evident, that the activity began to spread, and it did so mainly in countries or territories that were encountering difficulties to develop their economies. As Telfer (2014) points out, since WWII, the tourism industry has been one of the main focal points of development in many countries, with the number of national tourism policies growing since 1945 (Shaw & Williams, 1990).

In the case of Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Greece or Italy, the promotion of tourism that began in the 1950s led to significant development around the coastal areas, making this sector the benchmark for wealth and job creation ever since (Tsartas, 2014; Plumed Lasarte et al., 2018). The same has occurred in other regions worldwide, such as Pacific Asia in the 1970s and 1980s (Zhao, 2018) and Latin America, first in the 1960s and later in the 1990s (De Araujo & Dredge, 2012). The fact is that tourism progressively spread to more and more regions, eventually becoming a global phenomenon.

Data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) show that international tourist arrivals increased from 25 million in 1950 to 1.4 billion in 2018, with an annual growth rate of 4.3%. Tourism's contribution

to global GDP has also risen from 2.1% in 1950 to over 10% today, employing more than 9% of workers worldwide. Tourism is also important to note that it is recognized for its ability to drive inclusive economic development and promote income generation and education (UNWTO, 2019). This has led researchers to consider the relationship between tourism and economic growth from a theoretical perspective.

With the explosive tourism growth and the industry's consolidation as a global phenomenon in the 1970s, the first theories about tourism development began to be published (Butler, 2015). Some of the most famous pioneering theories are related to the tourism area life cycle (TALC) model, developed by Butler (1980), or the push and pull model (Crompton, 1979), which suggests that tourists are motivated by both internal and external factors. Other contemporary theories relevant in explaining the influence of tourism on economic development (although not originally intended specifically for this purpose) include the spill-over effect theory (Dunning, 1974), which suggests foreign investment in one sector boosts direct effects such as economic growth and the creation of higher-wage jobs, and the value chain theory (Porter, 1985), arguing that enhanced efficiency and productivity in businesses can add value to both the destination and other sectors.

Over time, approaches began to consider more factors to explain "development," not just the income generated or arrivals. Perhaps the most significant paradigm shift was the inclusion of sustainability (Butler, 1993), with increasing strategies to transform tourism activity in recent decades to protect the destination environment (Weeks et al., 2014; García-Pozo et al., 2015). However, despite strategic advancements and public awareness, tourism activity has continued to grow, causing degradation and increased pollutants due to infrastructure construction, tourist accommodation, and the high number of flights (Bateman & Fleming, 2017; Haibo, 2020).

Other evident dichotomies besides the clear example of the sector's sustainability can be highlighted. For instance, the psychological benefits for social well-being derived from rest and leisure are evident (Neal et al., 2007; Filep, 2011), yet stress is also generated among residents of destinations where tourism leads to overcrowding (Jordan & Vogt, 2017; Perles et al., 2020). In terms of economic development, some authors highlight tourism's positive effects in countries such as Spain (Cortes-Jimenez & Pulina, 2010; Perles-Ribes et al., 2017), while others point out the divergence that specialization in tourism activity is creating among European countries (Haller et al., 2020). Finally, although the job creation capacity of the tourism sector is highly relevant, various authors have emphasized the precarious working conditions that exist in this sector, such as low wages, long working hours, and gender segregation (Cañada & Sud, 2019; Lillo-Bañuls et al., 2018).

In summary, although tourism has been theoretically considered a driver of economic development since the 1950s, researchers are increasingly questioning the neoliberal approach of the 1970s and 1980s, which was based on maximizing economic results through the liberation of trade rules, the globalization of investments, and the constant pursuit of new competitive activities and destinations (Telfer, 2014). Although this stance remains highly influential, it is more than evident that a move is being made towards more comprehensive and complex ways of valuing tourism's impact on economic development, which do not always go hand in hand with economic growth.

2.2. Empirical evidence: How the economic impact of tourism is measured

The growing theoretical importance, combined with the interest of the destinations themselves in the sector's economic development, has led to the increased involvement of countries and international organizations in measuring tourism activity. In this regard, we can highlight the work of a key organization such as UNWTO, which collects, analyzes, and disseminates international tourism data through publications such as the Tourism Barometer. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) also conducts research at global and national levels on the economic impact of travel and tourism, with reports that provide insights into the sector's contributions to GDP, job creation, and investment. To these invaluable contributions to policymakers and

businesses, we should also add the efforts made by national statistical institutes of many countries (including Eurostat), which collect critical data related to tourism activity for their empirical analysis.

The publication of tourism data has enabled a growing number of empirical academic studies to be conducted, generating an increasingly relevant topic of research with continuous methodological and empirical contributions, as can be seen in literature reviews such as those by Pablo-Romero and Molina (2013), Comerio and Strozzi (2019), Nunkoo et al. (2019), and Song and Wu (2022), among others. However, it is necessary to point out that unlike theoretical approaches, most of the empirical studies to date have addressed the relationship between tourism and economic growth, not development, which would imply a set of broader variables other than just GDP or its derived forms.

In this approach, the literature often indicates a positive link between tourism and economic progress, yet the findings are not universally conclusive, with some studies presenting ambiguous or conflicting results. For instance, Perles-Ribes et al. (2017) identified a bidirectional positive effect in Spain, whereas Mérida and Golpe (2014) found no causality. Additionally, the impact of tourism on economic growth appears dynamic, varying over time, as shown in studies such as Brida and Risso (2009) for Chile and Wu and Wu (2020) for 11 Asian countries, while Croes et al. (2021) noted a short-term positive impact of tourism on economic growth, but a negative effect on human development.

This is due to multiple issues, the most prominent being using different methodologies. Many other approaches are used, from purely descriptive studies to rigorous quantitative research. Among the quantitative studies, the input-output analysis was the first to consider the effects of tourism, with many studies being carried out during the first decades of tourism's global expansion. Some early examples of the use of this methodology include Burger (1978), Wanhill (1983), and Mescon (1985), although this methodology is still used by some researchers (Surugiu, 2009; Jones & Munday, 2004; Tohmo, 2018). Since the Balaguer and Cantavella-Jordá (2002) paper, the main objective of tourism impact studies has been to confirm or deny the existence of the TLEG hypothesis (tourism leading economic growth) using panel data analysis. Finally, Song and Wu (2022) highlight other less-used alternative techniques, such as the tourism satellite account, the computable general equilibrium model, or social accounting metrics.

Along with the different methodologies, another factor that limits the universal confirmation of the TLGH is the heterogeneity in the analyses conducted, considering different groups of regions, temporal moments, or degrees of maturity of the destinations. For instance, Sequeira and Maças Nunes (2008) and Lee and Chang (2008) found that tourism impacts GDP more in developing countries, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa. Conversely, in a 144-nation study, Cárdenas-García et al. (2015) observed a stronger tourism-economic growth correlation in more developed countries, especially in highly tourist-oriented regions such as Mediterranean Europe, whereas less developed nations often lack the infrastructure to benefit from tourism fully. Interestingly, while the least advanced European countries gain the most from tourism (Leontidou, 1995; Cortes-Jimenez & Pulina, 2010), in Asia, the more advanced countries are those reaping more significant benefits (Odeleye et al., 2022; Wu & Wu, 2020).

This variety of results has led to criticism regarding the definitions and variables associated with tourism activity and economic growth or development in confirming the TLEG hypothesis (Song & Wu, 2022). Undoubtedly, this should lead us to reflect on the motivations driving the research conducted from the perspective of tourism economics in each case to align methodologies and variables with the valid object of study. While in developed countries, it seems appropriate to ask whether tourism is the best path for development or whether it stimulates convergence between regions (as Haller et al., 2020 suggest), for developing areas, tourism should be studied as a mechanism for wealth distribution and combating poverty (Zeng & Ryan, 2012).

Despite this, the methodological effort of scientific works, the self-criticism from academia, and the recognition of limitations in studies due to the absence of data must be acknowledged. This represents a balance and

robustness that is not present in most non-academic publications, the assertions of which are often based on unverified value judgments yet have a significant influence on political decisions and social awareness.

3. The economic impact of tourism from a non-academic perspective

Non-academic perspectives, such as those heard in political speeches or media opinion pieces, tend to oversimplify the relationship between tourism and economic development. Causal relationships are rarely established with empirical validations, frequently relying on arbitrary comparisons between per capita income and tourist arrivals. The result is a discourse with excessive connotations (positive or negative, depending on the stakeholder), which offers society an extreme image of the phenomenon.

In the case of Spain, where the economic development model has been debated for years, messages with an excessively optimistic tone can often be encountered, such as: "Tourism is the sector that contributes the most wealth to the Spanish economy" (Canalís, 2019), "Tourism accounted for 61% of the Spanish economy growth in 2022, according to Exceltur" (Galindo, 2023), and "Record employment: Spain creates 238,000 jobs in April, 52% in the hotel industry" (Olcese, 2023). Sometimes, tourism is often used for partisan and populist purposes without specific data, as we can see in some headlines, including "Diaz Ayuso asserts that Madrid is the region that is talked about the most outside of our borders: 'Perhaps it is most complete place in the world.'" (Comunidad de Madrid, 2023) and "Garcia-Page announces the enormous take-off of tourism in the region" (Diario de Castilla La Mancha, 2023).

At the other end of the scale, publications highlighting the negative impacts of tourism tend to minimize its ability to generate economic activity and wealth. In this regard, we can find examples that derive this relationship directly, such as: "The Paradox of Spanish Tourism: Increasingly Richer Regions with Poorer Inhabitants" (Plaza, 2018) and "The B-side of Tourism: when Torrevieja and Marbella Lead Poverty" (Bayona, 2019); and indirectly, as in the following examples: "The wealthiest municipalities in Spain, according to income tax declarations: Pozuelo, Matadepera, and Boadilla" (González Moreno, 2018), "The richest and poorest municipalities of La Marina Alta: all of them below the average Spanish income" (La Marina Plaza, 2021), or "The extreme focus on tourism takes its toll on Málaga" (El Observador, 2023), in which it is easy to recognize the tourism specialization of the regions or cities compared.

Both perspectives hold some truth, but when simplified to only positive or opposing viewpoints, they create a debate lacking the necessary nuances. The importance of tourism as an economic sector in Spain is indisputable, with its contribution to the Spanish economy in 2019 amounting to 12.6% (Spanish National Institute [INE], 2023). However, the industrial sector accounted for 20.04% of GDP in the same year (Statista, 2023), which calls into question the headlines that suggest that the tourism sector is the most significant for the Spanish economy. Concerning the record figures in employment and economic growth in recent years, the truth is that these are primarily due to the sector's recovery after COVID-19, as it was the most affected by the pandemic.

According to Seraphin et al. (2019), an extraordinarily positive image of the impacts of tourism could fuel promotion policies that would lead to excessive growth in the destination, unsustainability, overtourism, and a social backlash against the activity. This fact, described in studies such as Bruttomesso (2018), Rejón-Guardia et al. (2020) or Caballero-Galeote and Cruz-Ruiz (2022) for different cities in Spain, might incite the media to align against the tourism sector, overlooking that its contribution has been and continues to be highly relevant in economic stimulus, in correcting the balance of payments, or in the modernization of cities.

Academia has a significant social responsibility to lay the foundations for an unbiased debate that informs citizens of the multiple realities of the relationship between tourism and economic development. As a science, tourism economics must be responsible for conducting rigorous studies and disseminating and conveying

the results and limitations of the conclusions in an understandable way. Meanwhile, the media must access this research to avoid simplistic or sensationalist reporting. They must also demand open access to scientific analysis, allowing them to quickly contrast statements with political or economic interests.

Analyzing available data should not be the responsibility of the non-academic sphere, or at least not to the same extent as within academia. Experience shows that the media tend to establish a direct causal relationship between tourist destinations and per capita income without scientific validation or an explanation of the underlying mechanisms, ignoring methodological limitations. This poses a real risk to the development of tourism activities in destinations, as the media significantly influence the decisions of politicians, residents, and other stakeholders, compared to academic papers. This is logical when considering that the most relevant scientific articles are primarily written in English, use methodologies that are complex for the public, and, in many cases, require payment of more than 30 dollars for access. In contrast, major media outlets use approachable, direct language and are most often free or available cheaply.

In summary, the asymmetrical dissemination of academic and non-academic perspectives risks tourism activities and benefits for stakeholders, including residents. This issue should be addressed in at least three ways. First, academia must improve the "non-scientific" communication of the studies carried out, their conclusions, and their difficulties without limiting itself to journals inaccessible to the public. Second, journalists should be provided with access to the results obtained under scientific criteria and to the data supporting such research to ensure that their analysis is rigorous. Finally, it is the responsibility of academia to denounce when media headlines are contrary to empirical results or seek to distort outcomes in favor of political interests or business groups. We should not forget that science must always be at the service of citizens and their well-being.

4. Asking the right questions when analyzing the relationship between tourism and economic development

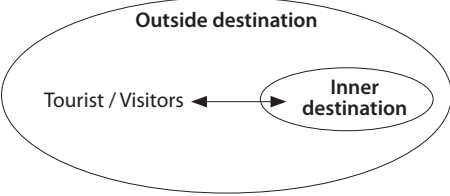
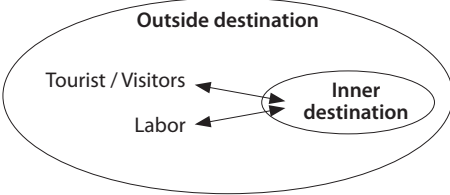
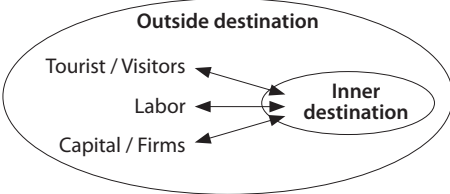
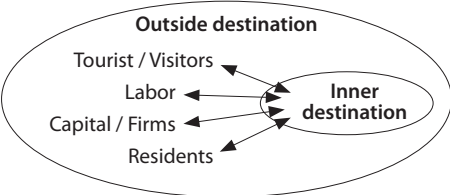
The criticism directed at the academic study of the relationship between tourism and economic development, focusing on the diversity of empirical findings and their limited impact on stakeholders, compels researchers in tourism economics to adopt solutions. First, this relationship must be rethought dynamically and incredibly complexly and not be reduced solely to the causality between variables. To do this, it is fundamental to consider stakeholders' relationship with their environment, as the region conditions empirical results studied the moment in time and the chosen methodology.

In this regard, the literature has considered the connection of stakeholders based on the characteristics of the destination (sun and beach, cultural, nature, etc.) or its offer (hotels, apartments, residential, etc.). In research such as Brida et al. (2008), Perles-Ribes (2016) or Portella-Carbó et al. (2023), among many others, the typology of the supply serves to identify the impact of tourism on economic growth, the well-being of the population, or employment levels, among other factors. However, the degree of the mobility of stakeholders in destinations, measured both in terms of numbers and the diversity of interactions, has not been given as much attention, even though it is an essential issue for explaining the relationship between the tourism industry and economic development, as well as for addressing the adverse effects generated.

This effect can be logically understood if, for example, the economic growth caused by tourism generates an interest in the population to take advantage of these opportunities to a relatively higher degree. In this way, there might be a conflict between the generation of global wealth of a destination and the data on well-being or development per inhabitant. Moreover, works such as Jackiewicz and Craine (2010), Domínguez-Mújica et al. (2011), and Flognfeldt and Tjørve (2013), which analyze cases in Panama, Spain, and Scandinavia, respectively, clearly show how the evolution of stakeholder mobility in destinations is crucial for understanding the type and degree of the tourism impact. This evolution can range from the mere arrival of visitors

to the attraction of capital, companies, and professionals in very mature destinations. In this way, we can establish a relationship of complexity in destinations based on their stakeholders' diversity and number of movements, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
The influence of mobility in tourism, based on the number of stakeholders involved

Travels	Agents involved
	<p>Level 1: Deficient mobility</p> <p>Mobility is only due to visitors and tourists who return to the destination and their places of origin.</p>
	<p>Level 2: Low mobility</p> <p>Mobility is due to visitors and tourists who come to the destination and return to their places of origin and workers who come to the destination during the high season.</p>
	<p>Level 3: High mobility</p> <p>Mobility is due to visitors and tourists, workers and entrepreneurs. The return of workers and entrepreneurs to their places of origin may occur at the end of the season or the end of their working or business life.</p>
	<p>Level 4: Very high mobility.</p> <p>In addition to the mobility of level 3 residents, These residents may stay at the destination for varying periods (short or long) and may or may not register as residents of the destination.</p>

In this relationship, we must also include the mobility of residents, who temporarily leave their destination for work, leisure, or even to escape situations of saturation in their places of origin. Additionally, tourists with second homes and long-term stays should be given special consideration. Although they may not be considered "residents," their effect on the destination (consumption, travel, leisure, etc.) can be very similar to that of the inhabitants.

The methodological introduction of stakeholder mobility in destinations will help us achieve the purpose of this last section, which is to understand the complexity of analyzing the relationship between tourism and economic development. To do this, we pose the classic questions: 'How, what, when, and where do we measure the economic impact of tourism?' We aim to provide clear answers and recommendations that make the economics of tourism a more didactic and communicative science, moving towards a convergence between academic and non-academic contributions.

4.1. How do we measure?

In addressing the "how" of measurement, the primary recommendation involves the application of econometric analysis techniques to provide a more robust and non-linear understanding of the phenomenon under study,

as suggested by Brida et al. (2016) and Saayman and Botha (2017). As we can easily perceive, in the most cited journals, almost every analysis of the relationship between tourism and economic development incorporates methodological innovations and empirical findings. This progression is evident in the evolution of analytical models, ranging from the initial Granger causality analysis by Balaguer and Cantavella-Jorda (2002) to the recent advanced adaptation by Hatemi (2021), which explores the dynamic symmetric relationship between tourism and economic development found in Iglesias et al. (2018) or Osinubi et al. (2021).

Besides this methodological advancement, it is also essential to acknowledge the intricate dynamics of tourism and its interplay with economic development, recognizing the inherent limitations of the results and recommendations. Among these limitations is the very measurement of "economic development," which can be based on different criteria depending on the researcher and the effects of stakeholder mobility, especially that of labor and residents, but also of investments.

Finally, it is imperative to effectively communicate these insights to both authors and stakeholders who approach this topic from a non-academic perspective. This is not an easy task, but from the academic community, we must ensure that the public's reflections are somehow based on scientific and statistical evidence. Objectivity is the only path to prevent reactionary or even hateful discourse. However, the issue of causality shows us the long road ahead: while the academic field speaks cautiously, based on a very particular concept such as that developed by Granger, in non-academic fields, a very accessible and bold interpretation of the concept is made. As discussed in Section 3, there is a tendency to hastily associate tourist destinations' low per capita income rankings with the presumption that tourism leads to poverty. This viewpoint overlooks critical factors such as the initial economic status of these destinations and the impact of agent mobility, measured as the population increase experienced in the destinations due to the economic opportunities arising from tourism development.

4.2. What do we measure?

The most frequently used elements for measuring the impact of tourism on economic development, following reviews such as those by Brida et al. (2016) or Comerio and Strozzi (2019), are, on the one hand, tourist arrivals and tourism expenditure and, on the other, the gross domestic product (GDP), and total factor productivity (TFP), in absolute terms or per capita. However, the academic literature has explored various forms of relationships, incorporating elements such as the Human Development Index (HDI), as exemplified in studies by Pulido-Fernández and Cárdenas-García (2021) and Chattopadhyay et al. (2022). Additionally, research focused on the satisfaction of destination stakeholders, such as the studies by Sánchez Cañizares et al. (2016) and Tokarchuk et al. (2017), contributes to this ongoing methodological exploration and the search for new relevant contributions.

On the other hand, as observed in section 3, in non-academic articles, GDP per capita seems to be the only consideration with which to analyze the relationship between tourism and the development of destinations. This is not an error, but using only one variable limits the verification of their results and almost invalidates the derived recommendations. Indeed, per capita income would be problematic when studying the effects of residential tourism on economic development: as suggested in section 4.1, it is possible that a tourism boost could generate an increased flow of people to the destination, attracted by the possibility of improving their economic situation, especially during vacation periods. In such a context of high stakeholder mobility, we might find a positive relationship between tourism and GDP but a negative relationship between tourism and GDP per capita, which is deceptive.

Table 1 demonstrates this phenomenon in Spain between 1980 and 2019: provinces and regions with a high level of tourism activity (the Balearic and Canary Islands, Alicante, Girona, Málaga, Las Palmas, and Santa Cruz de Tenerife) achieved economic growth rates much higher than the national average. However, they have also experienced higher rates of population growth than other regions over the last four decades, which has resulted in a relatively stagnant GDP per capita over the same period.

Table 1
GDP, population and per capita income in Spanish provinces

Province	GDP pm (millions) euros current prices			Population x 1000			GDP per capita		
	1980	2019	Var	1980	2019	Var	1980	2019	Var
Albacete	620.88	8,475.0	1,265	340	390	14	1,825.01	21,757.29	1,092
Alicante	2,895.6	37,366.4	1,190	1,124	1,863	66	2,575.96	20,059.53	679
Almería	750.13	15,813.9	2,008	407	707	74	1,842.86	22,371.74	1,114
Álava	998.30	12,813.4	1,184	252	328	30	3,963.89	39,103.10	886
Asturias	2,542.38	23,711.2	833	1,123	1,022	-9	2,263.60	23,196.19	925
Ávila	368.61	3,321.3	801	186	159	-15	1,976.52	20,855.22	955
Badajoz	879.85	12,490.5	1,320	650	672	3	1,352.76	18,573.53	1,273
Barcelona	13,022.3	179,195.2	1,276	4,557	5,575	22	2,857.91	32,141.48	1,025
Bizkaia	2,227.9	36,767.8	1,550	1,180	1,137	-4	1,888.65	32,332.14	1,612
Burgos	936.93	10,596.4	1,031	364	355	-2	2,575.48	29,813.26	1,058
Cáceres	628.50	7,988.3	1,171	427	393	-8	1,473.22	20,330.19	1,280
Cádiz	1,978.38	23,153.8	1,070	978	1,250	28	2,022.82	18,526.98	816
Castellón	1,221.97	16,082.5	1,216	427	572	34	2,862.50	28,135.98	883
Ciudad Real	928.81	10,769.4	1,059	480	495	3	1,935.27	21,751.71	1,024
Córdoba	1,197.9	14,121.8	1,079	723	784	8	1,655.71	18,015.59	988
Coruña, A	2,297.4	27,718.0	1,106	1,088	1,122	3	2,112.26	24,704.01	1,070
Cuenca	411.27	4,515.5	998	220	200	-9	1,867.28	22,619.65	1,111
Gipuzkoa	3,538.0	24,493.7	592	690	713	3	5,127.55	34,352.78	570
Girona	1,469.7	21,828.3	1,385	462	757	64	3,183.08	28,816.39	805
Granada	1,211.6	17,383.9	1,335	758	920	21	1,598.67	18,901.82	1,082
Guadalajara	370.16	5,465.3	1,376	143	259	80	2,580.65	21,110.66	718
Huelva	935.62	10,544.1	1,027	417	525	26	2,244.79	20,100.24	795
Huesca	602.85	6,499.2	978	216	219	2	2,796.73	29,644.57	960
Jaén	1,088.9	11,170.6	926	642	632	-2	1,695.01	17,674.25	943
León	1,059.4	10,093.2	853	529	462	-13	2,001.32	21,823.45	990
Lleida	1,097.5	12,641.1	1,052	353	431	22	3,110.61	29,317.38	842
Lugo	780.84	7,763.9	894	407	330	-19	1,917.37	23,556.53	1,129
Madrid	13,456.9	242,093.2	1,699	4,602	6,642	44	2,923.93	36,450.78	1,147
Málaga	1,868.5	32,202.6	1,623	1,005	1,661	65	1,858.92	19,387.67	943
Murcia	2,185.5	32,319.2	1,379	944	1,488	58	2,315.95	21,724.84	838
Navarra	1,580.5	20,873.3	1,221	506	650	28	3,124.56	32,115.58	928
Ourense	656.45	7,100.8	982	431	308	-29	1,524.23	23,066.52	1,413
Palencia	486.89	4,410.2	806	190	161	-15	2,567.50	27,443.89	969
Palmas, Las	1,677.2	24,214.2	1,344	692	1,139	65	2,422.31	21,252.03	777
Pontevedra	1,730.8	21,637.3	1,150	872	941	8	1,984.64	22,993.78	1,059
Rioja, La	711.22	8,822.4	1,140	252	314	24	2,819.82	28,135.24	898
Salamanca	673.53	7,202.0	969	367	332	-9	1,836.80	21,677.80	1,080
SC Tenerife	1,607.1	22,968.3	1,329	651	1,068	64	2,470.46	21,515.66	771
Segovia	327.99	3,500.8	967	151	154	2	2,167.73	22,718.66	948
Sevilla	2,626.5	40,538.4	1,443	1,466	1,950	33	1,791.60	20,792.82	1,061
Soria	223.57	2,524.6	1,029	103	90	-13	2,173.98	28,207.53	1,198
Tarragona	1,815.7	24,643.9	1,257	504	803	59	3,600.81	30,707.22	753
Teruel	423.04	3,394.7	702	156	133	-14	2,714.14	25,467.53	838
Toledo	957.11	13,173.5	1,276	475	692	46	2,015.31	19,044.46	845
Valencia	4,966.5	62,157.5	1,152	2,037	2,541	25	2,438.30	24,465.80	903
Valladolid	1,171.9	14,635.1	1,149	475	520	10	2,469.44	28,123.65	1,039
Zamora	413.94	3,514.4	749	232	174	-25	1,786.37	20,240.88	1,033
Zaragoza	2,090.0	28,155.5	1,247	823	968	18	2,540.35	29,084.89	1,045
Total Spain	91,161.3	1,245,513.0	1,266	37,347	46,937	26	2,440.93	26,535.81	987

Similar considerations can be applied to the average disposable family income that only considers income declared by residents, ignoring the indirect impact of businesses, taxes, and non-residents. We should also note the significant bias that can occur when counting inhabitants who, while residing in a tourist destination, receive their income from a third country.

Again, these issues do not invalidate the results of non-academic research, but they show that the scientific rigor of academia must complement their conclusions. Otherwise, 'development' may be confused with 'depopulation', as in the case of some provinces observed in the previous table. Even so, it would be advisable for aggregated variables such as the overall GDP of the destination to be used for analyzing cases with high stakeholder mobility, such as residential destinations or second homes. Other indicators, such as per capita income, should be limited to low mobility contexts, where tourists and workers do not become long-term residents, or for international comparison.

4.3. Where do we measure?

The previous considerations are linked to a fourth issue concerning the researcher: What should be the unit of analysis? Should it encompass the entire national or regional territory? Is it preferable to focus on a specific city? And an even more relevant question: Should economic development be analyzed for the entire destination, or should it focus on individual stakeholders, such as residents, entrepreneurs, or workers?

Responding to the first question, the literature shows us a wide range of possibilities, covering the national dimension both in analyses of countries individually (Perles-Ribes et al., 2017) and in a comparative international context (Aistov & Nikolaeva, 2019; Tang & Tan, 2018). There are also numerous regional or local studies, such as those by Brida and Giuliani (2013). Data availability and the survey's focus usually determine the initial unit of measurement without a clear preference.

However, all these studies, and generally most studies that link tourism growth and economic development, focus on destinations and not so much on stakeholders. The truth is that, in this way, a great deal of information is lost, as the literature has shown that not all stakeholders benefit equally in turning a territory into a tourist destination. This is an issue that affects both academic and non-academic publications.

The truth is that this does not invalidate the results found with commonly used variables. Still, it is true that not considering this significantly limits decision-making and results in an oversimplification of the problem. One first possibility to address this bias would be to replace the usual GDP or GDP per capita variables with other indicators that better reflect the concept of "development," such as the Human Development Index (HDI) or GDP weighted with an inequality indicator. The second possibility would be to directly approach the data analysis from the perspective of the situation of workers or the poorer layers of the destination's residents, using variables that reflect their reality. In Spain, for instance, the Tax Agency has provided data on income tax returns since 2013 for individuals from municipalities with more than 1,000 inhabitants. There are also specific surveys on income received in households, which allow us to estimate the evolution of labor income by sector. In this way, the situation of the most disadvantaged quartiles of the destination could be better considered in the analysis, complementing other more straightforward analyses that take the information of the destination.

A final issue in this regard is whether studies should be conducted from an intra-destination, intra-sectoral perspective or an inter-destination, inter-sectoral perspective. In the first case, it would be much more likely to find a positive relationship between tourism and economic development because the analysis focuses explicitly on the dynamics of tourist activity. On the contrary, from an inter-destination, inter-sectoral perspective, tourism competes with other sectors with a greater productive capacity, making the consideration of the economic term of opportunity cost especially relevant to elucidate the result of the impact on economic development. All this leads us to reiterate the methodological importance of analyses since each result must be valued with its frame of reference, with all the necessary nuances.

4.4. When do we measure?

The periods in which the relationship between tourism and economic development was analyzed can be considered one of the most relevant aspects influencing the results obtained in academic and non-academic studies. The scholarly literature reveals that studies constrained by a limited time frame, often due to convenience (such as circumventing the effects of exogenous shocks) or data scarcity, tend to produce less definitive conclusions. This leads to an inconsistent understanding of the dynamic between tourism and economic growth, as it fails to accurately perceive the initial conditions and the relationships with other financial mechanisms that do not unfold in the medium term.

Non-scientific documents are even more evident, as they usually focus on short-term growth in tourism. As discussed in Section 3, they tend to overlook the possibility that such growth may be a temporary recovery from setbacks such as the COVID-19 pandemic or that tourism's performance may lag other sectors over a more extended period. This short-sighted view in non-academic analyses highlights the need for a more comprehensive temporal perspective in assessing the sector's long-term impact on economic development.

To address this issue, the periods studied need to be extended. This might somewhat distort the non-academic strategy, which focuses more on headlines than on a thorough analysis of the situation. It is true, as pointed out by Bartunek and Rynes (2014) or Benoit et al. (2019), among others, that conducting academic studies requires a lengthy period, ranging from data collection to applying various methodologies that yield conclusive results. This creates a significant gap between the educational and non-academic approaches. Consequently, non-academic documents will have to continue to focus on urgent information. At the same time, science explores study fields that require more meticulous analysis, including the most appropriate time frame for the work purpose. However, this should not be an excuse for failing to incorporate scientific advancements into the conclusions of non-academic articles.

Special care must be taken in interpreting and comparing the results to an appropriate frame of reference among all available comparative studies. This is valid for either of the two approaches analyzed.

5. Increasing complexity: Incorporating the dimension of sustainability

To further complicate matters, the dynamics and evolution of tourist destinations and scientific advancements in the field have made it necessary to incorporate sustainability into the study of tourism massively. Although, as we have seen in the introduction, the theoretical analysis of sustainability is not new (there are references, for example, in Butler (1993)), its incorporation into empirical studies that link tourism with economic development is a novelty.

Until now, most of the academic work in this line has been limited to testing the TLGE hypothesis, restricting the exercise to a relationship between tourism and variables such as GDP, which shows us more about economic evolution or growth than "development." Recently, and gradually, limited to the available data, other variables such as the Human Development Index (HDI) have been accommodated in the analysis, as we have outlined. However, introducing variables related to the sustainability (social or environmental primarily) of destinations in this type of analysis is in a very developing, if not non-existent, stage.

Nevertheless, the tourism economy is reacting, given the social interest in a sustainable future and the undeniable relationships between tourist activity and CO2 emissions (Al-Mulali et al., 2015; Balsalobre-Lorente & Leitão, 2020). Tourism is required to promote the sustainable development of destinations, not just growth (Odeye et al., 2022), while researchers have been forced to consider new methodologies and instruments of analysis. These include variables from the field of environmental economics, like energy and water resource consumption (Katircioglu et al., 2019) and synthetic indicators, which serve as proxy variables for

the sustainable development of destinations. However, for some of these new indicators, no long-term data is available. Hence, studies only consider a relatively short time frame, with all the disadvantages mentioned in the previous points.

6. Conclusions

This article examines the complex relationship between tourism growth and economic development, noting no consensus. The numerous methodological advancements have not added clarity, and new debates even arise as more data become accessible and increasingly complex tests are conducted. One possible explanation for this might be that methodological advancements serve only academic advancement and not the resolution of real-world problems, such as those related to the economic impact of tourism. The second explanation, undoubtedly the most plausible according to the literature reviewed, is that the relationship between tourism and economic development is genuinely complicated, with notable differences depending on the context studied. This requires researchers to be especially cautious when selecting methodologies, variables, and time frames for analysis.

As a perspective paper, this work has sought to approach the complex relationship between tourism and economic development from a critical and propositional point of view. The derived recommendations, which can be understood as a methodological novelty for future research, aim to overcome the difficulties associated with studies related to the subject matter from a theoretical and empirical standpoint.

The first of these recommendations is the need to evaluate the variables used in each study critically. As noted, the variables commonly used in the relationship between tourism and economic development, such as per capita income, can be problematic as they do not consider the mobility of agents, resulting in more sparsely populated regions appearing to grow more. Similarly, GDP does not capture development as effectively as other more appropriate indicators, such as the Human Development Index (HDI), employment levels, or workers' income, which are less affected by the mobility issue described in this article.

This recommendation can also be extended to the temporal framework and selected methodologies. The literature shows us that studies focused on short periods fail to adequately capture the relationship between tourism and the development of a destination. The same applies to linear methodologies, which do not account for the fluctuations in tourist activity. Therefore, based on the analysis, it is recommended to use methods that capture the complexities and nonlinearities related to the subject of study over an extended time frame.

The second contribution of this article is the analysis of how non-academic environments have examined the relationship between tourism and economic development. As we have discussed, although these analyses are considered less robust and more headline-oriented than content-focused, the truth is that they have a significant influence on political decisions and the mood of society. Academia must engage in self-criticism and seek ways to become a reference source of information, given the complexities of the phenomenon under study, which, as we have mentioned, requires a correct selection of variables and methodologies.

At this point, we might suggest some areas where cooperation between the two perspectives could be fostered: for example, by sharing data to improve knowledge of the dynamics of the sector and its economic effects on destinations. Smart City initiatives would be a good practice in this field, as they would allow cooperation between Universities, DMOs, and private sector activities in this area. Another aspect, perhaps even more relevant, is the transfer and communication of research results: academic researchers need to disseminate their results widely among social media, blogs, and initiatives such as *The Conversation* (<https://theconversation.com/es>) characterized by their accessible language, which also helps journalists find relevant information.

As pointed out in this paper, science should not replace non-academic media: the times for conducting analysis are different, drawing a line between urgent information and information of greater relevance. However,

although we may exclusively recognize academia with this responsibility for disseminating results, we must not forget that the mass media are responsible for disseminating irrefutable scientific results, even if they go against their editorial line.

As a third novelty, this study presents the mobility of tourist stakeholders as an extra element of complexity in the relationship between tourism and economic development. The mobility of agents has different levels of complexity, ranging from destinations that receive occasional tourists to truly complex connections that involve workers, residents, investors, and entrepreneurs. This mobility must be considered for two reasons: first, because the more complex the relationships, the more they give rise to permanent or semi-permanent movements, which distort or complicate the interpretation of the results. This is especially true if there is no proper registration of the agents' residence.

Second, this mobility is neither permanent nor homogeneous. It evolves as the destination matures and under the specific conditions of each context. This causes the economic impacts of tourism to be in continuous transition, in addition to introducing heterogeneity into the existing scientific corpus on the topic. As a suggestion, future studies should delve into the complexities introduced by varying degrees of mobility (from tourists to long-term residents and workers) and how these complexities impact the interpretation of indicators and overall results. Moreover, given the potential heterogeneity in mobility patterns, researchers should develop specialized methodologies to accurately interpret results when studying destinations with diverse stakeholders' mobilities. Creating nuanced frameworks can help extract meaningful insights from complex data.

We know that each aspect and difficulty discussed in this article deserves investigation. However, we have focused on synthesizing the unresolved problems despite the progress made, suggesting some practical lines that can be followed to improve the way future researchers approach the exciting challenges in tourism economics.

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