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THE CONTEMPORARY METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND THEORIES EXPLAINING INTERNATIONAL TOURISM FLOWS

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Proceeding from the fact that international tourism is in permanent growth the last decades, and contributes significantly to the development of contemporary national economies, the authors of the article have focused on methodological and theoretical frame that allows deeper understanding of the touristic flows from various aspects. In doing so, the first author has launched some methodological approaches that allow deepening a perspective research on touristic flows while the second author has concentrated upon grouping and analysis of existing theories used to explain touristic flows. As an outcome, the authors recommend a blend of those approaches and theories to be used for an adequate understanding and managing the existing and perspective touristic flows.

Keywords: *international tourism, synergy, paradigmatic approach, megatrend, destination image, determinant factor, gravity theory.*

ABORDĂRI METODOLOGICE ȘI TEORII CONTEMPORANE CARE EXPLICĂ FLUXURILE DE TURISM INTERNAȚIONAL

Pornind de la faptul că turismul internațional manifestă permanentă creștere în ultimele decenii, precum și contribuie semnificativ la dezvoltarea economiilor naționale contemporane, autorii articolului s-au axat pe cadrul metodologic și teoretic ce ar permite conceperea aprofundată a fluxurilor de turism internațional. Primul autor a lansat unele abordări metodologice care ar contribui la aprofundarea cercetărilor de perspectivă ale fluxurilor turistice, iar cel de-al doilea autor și-a concentrat atenția asupra grupării și analizei teoriilor existente în care se explică natura fluxurilor de turism. Ca rezultat, autorii recomandă utilizarea îmbinării organice a abordărilor și teoriilor considerate pentru perceperea și gestionarea adecvată a fluxurilor de turism existente și de perspectivă.

Cuvinte-cheie: *turism internațional, sinergie, abordare paradigmatică, megatendență, imaginea destinației, factor determinant, teoria gravitației.*

Introduction

Tourism has been manifesting itself as an everlasting phenomenon which refer to the fact that people travel for a limited time outside of their domestic usual ambiance, in order to attain certain goals, such as fun, knowledge, therapeutics and others [1]. Tourist migration can be defined as "a certain number of people that entered a given territory and departed from this territory with tourist purposes for a certain period, usually a year" [2, p.164]. Consequently, two flows are created: inflows and outflows of tourists [Ibidem]. Moreover, one can distinguish between domestic and international tourism, while international tourism can be categorized into inbound and outbound tourism [3].

"International touristic flows represent one of the most dynamic components of the international economic flows" [4, p.7]. The number of international tourists has increased significantly over the last decades. In 1980s there were registered 278 million international tourists, and in 2015 the number increased up to 1 184 millions [5, p.3]. According to the prognosis of the UNWTO experts, the number of international tourists is supposed to be in further growth up to 1,8 milliards in 2030 [6, p.15]. The progress takes place due to improved transportation, higher incomes and diversification of destinations, leading to the fact that tourism is currently one of the largest economic sectors in the world [7]. It has also been contributing for years to the economic development of the nations, and last decades is considered to be one of the considerable means to overcome economic crises both in developed and developing countries.

Proceeding from mentioned above, *the purpose of the article* is in analysis of the methodological and theoretical frame that allows deeper understanding the touristic flows from various aspects as well as explaining the determinants of international tourism, both theoretically and empirically.

Research Methodology

In this methodological and theoretical study, on the one hand, there are suggested some approaches that allow deepening a perspective research on touristic flows, on the other hand, there is made use of classical tools of economic research, among which are various forms of analysis (comparative, deductive and systemic).

Actual Methodological Suggestions and Theoretical Overview

General methodological approaches which can be used for deeper understanding of the touristic flows from various points of view are formulated here as follows:

1) **Paradigmatic approach.** It is developed on the basis of the Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm in scientific and academic interpretation. A paradigm is a totality of beliefs, values and tools that is accepted by a scientific community and ensures the existence of a scientific tradition [8]. Proceeding from the very idea, it is worthy to consider for the future research an application of the Paradigmatic approach to the evolution of tourism. In other words, for better understanding the nature, character and vectors of touristic flows, it is necessary to reveal the paradigms of tourism in its worldwide evolution as well as to formulate, in a clear manner, a tourism paradigm of present and future. This approach will allow deeper explanation of touristic inbound and outbound flows in historical perspective as well as the understanding of those trends that shape the flows today, and anticipate the demand which shape the flows in future.

2) **Megatrends Approach.** In order to work out a paradigm of tourism of present and future, it is worthy to address to the contemporary socio-economic megatrends which determine the development of contemporary cultural, political and economic systems, including tourism as a branch. "A *Socio-economic Megatrend* is defined as a direction which, first, influences not few but all social systems, including national economies, shaping, so far, a global socio-economic space; secondly, acts not few years but up to centuries, constituting a global socio-economic time". The socio-economic megatrends "are distinguished as follows: *industrialization, informatization, globalization, localization, transnationalization, socialization, ecologization, genderization*" [9, p.84].

Thus, for deeper understanding of touristic flows it is suggested to undertake an analysis of contemporary tourism industry in the light of the megatrends mentioned above. The expected outcomes will be the deeper understanding of those changes in touristic services, companies, nature of demand and supply, investment policies, touristic infrastructure etc. which determine the touristic flows of present and future time.

3) **Synergetic Approach.** Among the key principles of the Synergetic approach are as follows: polylinear analysis; transformation of close systems into open ones and vice-versa; synergy effect [10, p.215-216]. Application of the Synergetic Approach to the analysis of tourism flows will allow better understanding of the latter due to getting more realistic picture of the touristic flows in the world economy which develops under the impact of the megatrends mentioned above. The *polylinear analysis* refers to the fact that the contemporary touristic flows take place in a world economy that is globalized and, at the same time, is regionalized and localized; it is liberalized and, at the same time, it manifests numbers of integration process outcomes at both micro-economic and macro-economic levels [9]. In all cases it develops as a networking innovation system. Respectively, the touristic flows today are based, on the one hand, on mass tourism industry, focused on global touristic packages offered at all markets without adaptation, on the other hand, they are shaped by local services, specified in regions, countries, cities and villages. A special contribution to this process an ecologization megatrend brings, so that new destinations of ecotourism appear and new touristic flows are shaped. Besides, application of polylinear analysis to touristic flows shows that they appear and develop today simultaneously in two dimensions physical (traditional) and virtual (based on ICT Sector).

The application of *synergetic principle of close-open systems* to touristic flows shows that due to the liberalization of former close systems of socialist camp, many new touristic flows appeared, both of inbound and outbound nature. More than that, those regions which contained the closed socio-economic systems are considered to be among the most perspective touristic regions of the world. For example, Central and Eastern European Region is estimated to be of growth for both inbound and outbound touristic flows [6].

Synergy effect can be formulated as a result got due to the joining of efforts and resources of few participant who undertake an action in contrast with the result obtained by each participant in case of undertaking the action individually, not in group. Synergy effect can be positive in case the collective result is higher than that of an individual, and negative in case of the collective outcome is lower. Positive synergy effect in touristic flows can be obtained owing to the joining of resources and efforts of the stakeholders (tour operators, governmental specialized agencies, tourists, local community and international profile organizations) in some touristic affairs by the means of the implementation of the concept of sustainable tourism, for example. Negative synergy effect can result from practicing mass tourism for long-run without any compensation policies for Natural environment and local community.

Having analyzed the contemporary theories used to explain the touristic flows, the considerations as follows are presented below. Consistent with Prideaux, the specialized literature has paid limited attention to the structure and significance of bilateral tourism flows [11]. Nevertheless, numerous theories have been suggested to explain the determinants of international tourist flows. However, the contemporary profile literature does not provide a specific categorization of the theories. Having based on the research conducted, the theories are suggested to be grouped as follows: (a) *Tourism-demand models*; (b) *International trade theoretical approaches based on supply-side factors*; (c) *Destination image models*; (d) *Gravity theories*. The **tourism-demand theories** have prevailed in explaining the tourism flows among countries. The tourism flows variable is illustrated typically by the quantity of arrivals and departures or the expenditures and receipts. The following factors were empirically demonstrated to be the most prominent demand-determinants of tourism flows: income of the sending country, number of people in the market, cost of living, transportation expenses, currency exchange rate, inflation etc. [12]. Numerous researchers investigate the *demand for international tourism and its factors*. For example, a researcher studies the demand for international tourism in the Mediterranean area [13]. Another researcher examines the factors influencing the international tourism demand in Izmir and determines that the prices and income of the country of origin of the tourists are the main determinants [14]. Other researchers investigate Turkish tourism demand using the gravity theory and find out that higher income of the tourists impacts demand positively; on the other hand, if the distance between the sending and the receiving countries is bigger, the demand is influenced negatively [15]. The determinants of international tourism were investigated also in Spain and the results report that income, price, exchange rate and the Gulf War are crucial in impacting international tourist flows to Spain [16]. Political risk is also amid the most significant factors of international tourism, whereas exchange rate is noteworthy vis-à-vis tourism to developed countries [17]. As regards agro tourism in Italy, distance and income were found as important determinants, whereas mutual agreements and increased urbanization rates of the sending countries influence positively the tourism inflows [18]. The tourism-demand model is valuable in predicting the demand for a destination for a short period of time, whereas, for a long period of time, the model has a number of shortcomings. The theory does not take into account the features of the product; it "treats all the destinations as undifferentiated" [12, p.225]. Nevertheless, the tourism destinations are diverse and distinctive. Besides, this model disregards the hard work of the nation which draws tourists and the perceived impressions about the destinations. Finally, the demand theory is static, considering each of the countries equal and ignoring their historical stage of development and competitiveness.

International trade theories group can be considered as relevant in explaining tourism trade with respect to the **supply-side determinants** associated with production in destination nations. Table 1 specifies the diverse theories of the group and demonstrates parallel examples explaining the reasons why nations could have comparative advantage in tourism [12, p.227].

Table 1

Trade Theories and Their Application to Tourism

Trade Theory	Main Explanation for Trade	Tourism Example
Linder	Preferences (similarity)	Cultural affinity, such as pilgrim tourism
Ricardian theory	Technology/productive efficiency	Price competition among tourism destination countries
Heckscher-Ohlin theory	Natural endowments (capital, labor, and land)	Sun, sand, sea and cultural heritage
Multinational firms	Ownership advantages (firm-specific technology)	International hotel chains
Neo-technology	Innovation/diffusion patterns	Adventure parks, internet marketing for tourism
Agglomeration	Externalities, infrastructure, chance	Tourism clusters, investment in tourism infrastructure

Source: [7, p.227]

As opposed to the demand-oriented models, the supply-side factors have the potential to explain the comparative advantage of the outbound nations. Tourists could choose a country thanks to cultural similarity (*Linder theory*); they might be attracted by the natural resources, such as sun, sand and sea; or by various cultural heritages (*Heckscher-Ohlin theory*). The price competitiveness amid tourism destinations might also be the factor of flows (*Ricardian theory*). Multinational firms, for example tour operators and hotel chains, could have an influence using FDI in the destination nations as a result of status, brand, and product recognition (*Multinational Firms theory*). In addition, nations are at present investing more and more in enhanced hotel facilities and in tourism infrastructure, since these are strong determinants that influence tourist inflows (*Agglomeration theory*). Lastly, the *neo-technology theory* affirms that the novel technology-oriented adventure parks, computer reservation system, and internet marketing are major factors of attracting tourists.

In some studies a **mixture of demand and supply-side determinants** is recommended to be used as well. For instance, by using factors connected to price, income, supply factors, a study reveals that an explanation for the decreased tourist movements in the Caribbean could be the sensitivity of the consumers to price and income in the sending countries, and also the higher cost of a vacation in the Caribbean in comparison to other destinations [19].

Destination competitiveness/image group of theories. As international tourism has a competitive and dynamic structure, one should grasp the consumer needs and their opinions. "Destinations mainly compete based on their perceived images relative to competitors in the marketplace" [20, p.14]. Consequently, image is essential to the success of a destination. Moreover, destination attractiveness is the main determinant that attracts tourists to a destination [21]. That is why the foremost duty of the nation is to contribute to the creation of a positive image of the country, so as to raise the number of tourist inflows [22]. Image is imperative in attracting tourists. In view of the fact that destination marketers are competing intensively in drawing tourists [18], their task is to help in the formation of a positive image of their destination [24, 20]. Initially, it must be done by assessing the destination image amid consumers.

Examples of *models of destination competitiveness* are suggested and empirically tested by Dwyer & Kim [25] and by Bozbay & Ozen [20]. As regards the first model, it is graphically exemplified in Figure 1. It comprises the main aspects of national and firm competitiveness and the main aspects of destination competitiveness. In addition, it categorizes the factors of destination competitiveness [25].

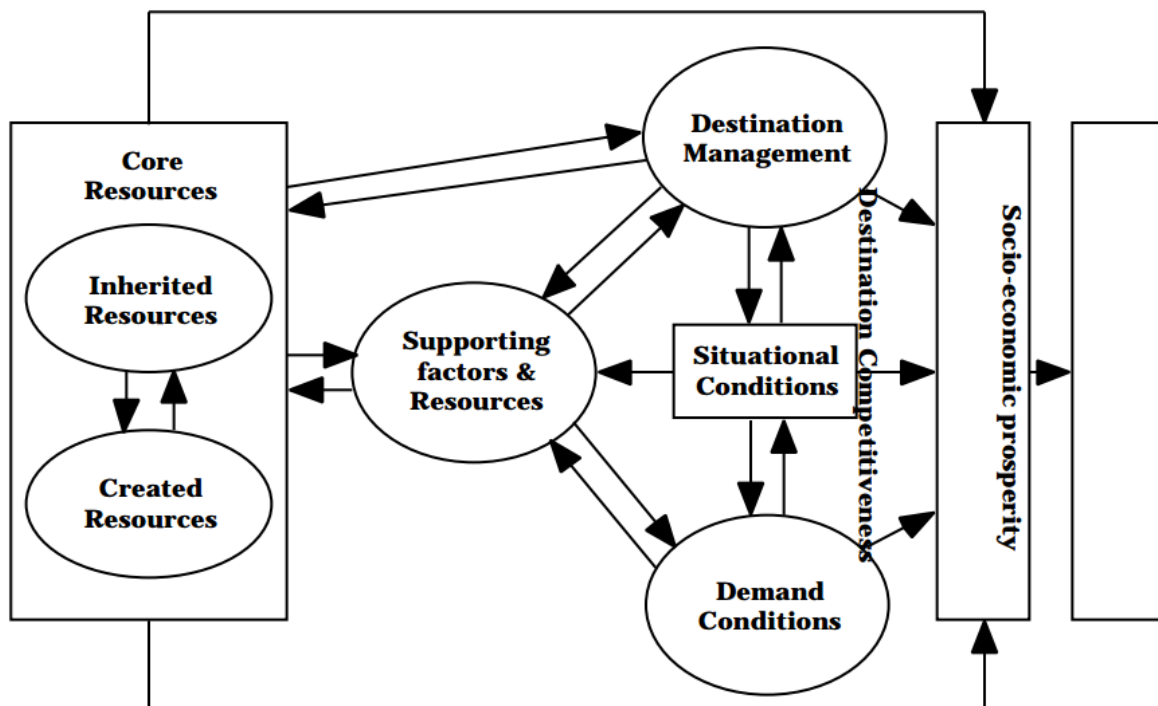


Fig.1. Integrated model of destination competitiveness

Source: [25, p.58]

Bozbay & Ozen suggest an ample and simple model of assessing the destination image (see Figure 2). The assessed aspects of the image are: environmental beauty and convenience; country's citizens; place and architectural structure; shopping and tourist accommodation; similarity of the culture and cuisine [20]. So, by applying this model, the researchers discovered that individuals who have very high intentions to visit Greece assess as high every destination image dimension, but individuals who have low intentions to visit Greece, quite the opposite, assess very poorly the destination image elements.

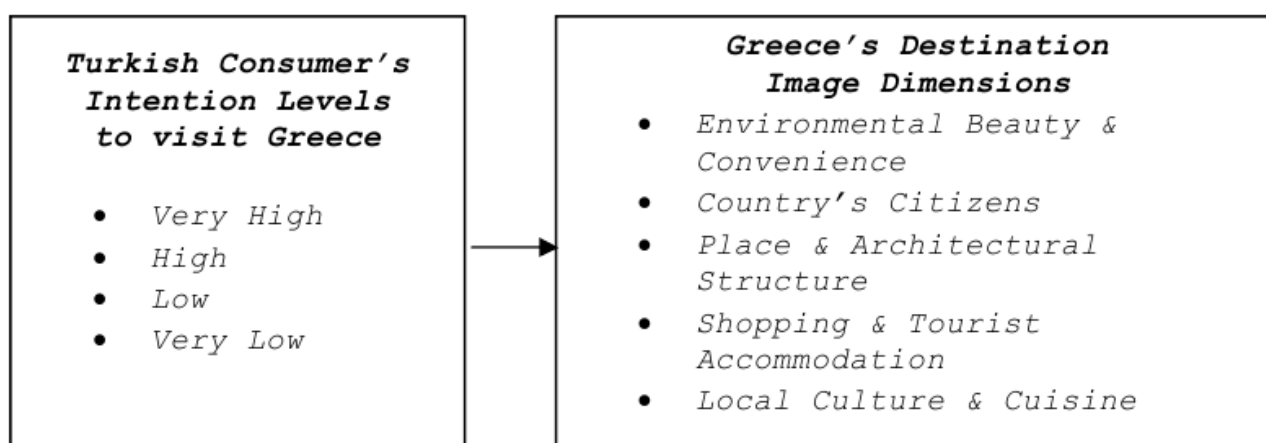


Fig.2. Research model to evaluate destination image

Source: [20, p.17]

The gravity theories group.

Neglected by the specialized literature for a long time, **gravity models** have re-emerged as an instrument for explaining tourism demand [26]. The basic structure of the gravity frame for the tourism demand function looks the following way:

$$T_{ij} = \beta_0 \frac{[(GDP)_i] \times [(GDP)_j]}{Dist_{ij}} u_{ij}$$

Where:

- T_{ij} refers to the international tourism flow between country i and j ;
- GDP represents the economic size of the country i and j ;
- $Dist$ refers to the distance between the countries;
- β_0 is the constant term;
- U_{ij} represents the error term [15, p.267].

The gravity theory for bilateral tourism flows was applied in numerous studies. For example, it was used to investigate the impact of cultural values on international tourism flows [27]. Also, it was utilized in examining the demand and supply determinants of international tourism flows to Greece [28]. Further, the model was applied in evaluating the tourism movements to and from Korea, showing that bilateral international tourism flows are bigger if the distance between the two nations is small and if the income of the two nations is big. Nevertheless, this investigation asserts that the tourism inflows and outflows should be analyzed separately [29].

Concerning the *factors affecting bilateral tourism flows*, the bilateral tourism framework is shown in Table 2. The factors are classified into public and private sector factors, besides the economic and non-economic factors [11].

Table 2

Categories of Factors that Comprise the Bilateral Framework

Category	Factors (Examples)
Demand	
Price	Cost of travel
Personal choice	Travel versus other forms of consumption
Government Responsibilities	
State of diplomatic relations	Facilitates or discourages travel
Government policy towards tourism	Visa and passport regulations
Transport policy	Bilateral aviation agreements
Currency restrictions	Level of restrictions on import or export of currency
Promotion and marketing	Level of public and private sector funding
Government regulations	Designed to assist or hinder tourism development
Government supplied goods and services	Security, public health, policing
Economic policy	Does government have expansionary policies to stimulate tourism
Private Sector Factors	
Travel infrastructure	Efficiency of tour operators
Domestic price levels	Restrict or encourage personal consumption
Intangible Factors	
Quality of the nation's attractions and national attractiveness	Positive attractiveness encourages travel, negative attractiveness discourages travel
Icons and images	Unique icons encourage travel
Barriers to bilateral tourism	Distance, cultural differences
Other factors including media	Positive or negative images
External Economic Factors	
Efficiency of national economy	An efficient economy provides competitively prices goods and services
Competition	Impacts on visitor numbers and destination prices
Exchange rates	Impacts on relative price levels
Income effect	Determines number of people able to participate in travel
Elasticity and Substitution effect	If prices increase consumers seek substitute destinations
External Political and Health Factors	
Terrorism and political risk	Known level of terrorist risk
State of international relations	Friendly is a positive factor, unfriendly is a negative factor
Health	State of public health system

Source: [11, p.783]

Additionally, an illustration which models the flows and factors involved in bilateral tourism is shown in Figure 3 [11].

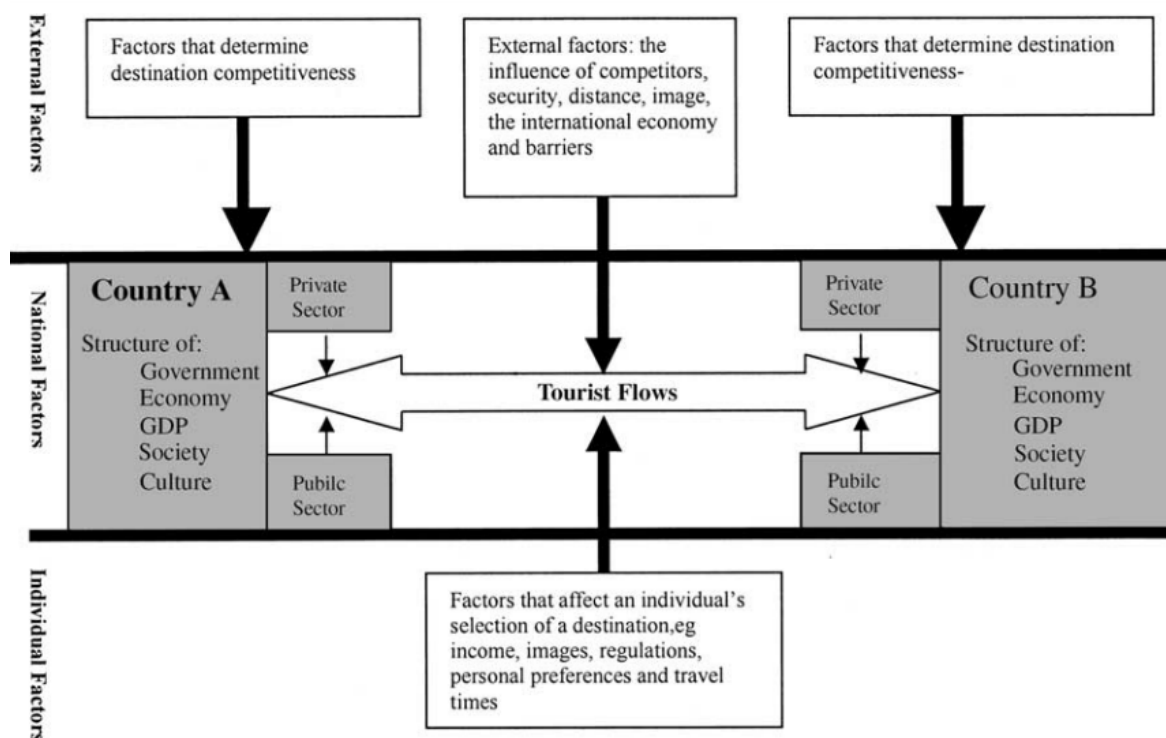


Fig.3. Structure of Bilateral Tourism.

Source: [11, p.785]

Concerning the *measurement of bilateral tourism*, the elementary means in doing it is to depict “the patterns of departures and arrivals between two countries” [11, p.793]. On the other hand, so as to find out the complete dimension of the bilateral tourism movements, it is advised to utilize further measures, e.g. bed nights, revenue flows, structure of tourist categories.

Conclusion

Representing one of the most dynamic forms of international economic flows, international tourism has increased considerably over the last decades, contributing a lot to the economic growth and development of the nations. That is why, the use of the complex methodological and theoretical frame for the investigation of current touristic flows as well as for anticipation of the new ones is worthy today. Besides, the understanding of the determinants of the tourism flows is essential for the countries and for the destination marketers who intend to attract a successful number of tourists.

It appears that currently all the international tourism theories are used in the research studies, but they emphasize, usually, a certain aspect of study. In order to be realistic in research and planning of the touristic flows of both inbound and outbound nature, it is recommended to apply a blend of methodological approaches and theories mentioned above while explaining the determinants of international tourism flows, including the bilateral relations between countries.

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