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Special Session Proposal

Assessing the economic impacts of tourism

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Abstract

The EU is one of the most prominent tourist destinations worldwide due to its natural richness, diversity, cultural heritage and economic importance, drawing hundreds of millions of international visitors yearly. In 2022 and 2023, tourism demand returned to or surpassed pre-pandemic levels in many EU tourist destinations. Tourism thus continues to play an important economic role in the EU and to promote a range of socioeconomic opportunities for destinations, residents and tourists alike.

The development of tourism activity, like with many other economic sectors, presents several trade-offs. In recent years, research on the sustainability of tourism dedicated extensive attention to negative social and environmental externalities of tourism, showing its detrimental aspects related to, for example, environmental pressures and resident's satisfaction. However, to assess and improve tourism sustainability overall, its economic dimension needs to be better understood and quantified.

The tourism activity is not a single sector in the economic accounts. Therefore, the assessment of its economic impacts is not straightforward and different definitions of what can be classified as tourism have been proposed recently. The European Commission is proposing a "tourism ecosystem" definition based on a weighted sum of economic sectors to quantify the broad economic contribution of tourism. In parallel, Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA) use an approach based on tourism product categories to account direct economic

impacts of tourism. TSA is increasingly being compiled by national statistical institutes under Eurostat's coordination in the EU.

The OECD continues to support the methodological development and implementation of TSA, including the integration of new data sources, and wider TSA uptake both in the EU and beyond. The Joint Research Centre (JRC) is investigating ways to augment TSA by combining it with additional data sources to assess the direct, indirect and induced economic impacts of tourism. Finally, the use of big data on, for example, tourism accommodation, transactions or human mobility, to improve the assessment of tourism economic impacts is rich with possibilities and a novel area of work for both the OECD and the JRC.

This special session seeks novel contributions to improve and/or streamline the assessment of the economic impacts of tourism in terms of data, methods, tools, or their implementation. The session also welcomes case studies developed to assess socio-economic or other impacts in specific tourist destinations, at different geographical scales.