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An analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of tourists arriving in Romania using the correspondence factor analysis

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Abstract. Due to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to the reluctance of the consumers to travel, tourism is one of the most affected sectors worldwide. Romania was no exception to this truth, as most vacations were canceled, and travel budgets were cut. However, Romanians have not lost their appetite for travel, opting, as will be seen in this study, for holidays in their own country, for destinations as close to home as possible, with the possibility of canceling without a penalty. Those who chose foreign destinations preferred Bulgaria, Greece or Turkey. This paper aims to carry out a dynamic analysis of the number of tourists arriving in Romania in the 2018-2020 period by two distinct categories: Romanian tourists and foreign tourists, and to identify the links between the statistical variables: year and region. Our conclusion was that 2020 was the year of the rediscovery of Romania by Romanians, this pandemic representing a chance to reposition our country among European destinations.

Keywords. Tourist arrivals, COVID-19 pandemic, correspondence factor analysis (CFA).

1. Introduction

Viewed in correlation with the general national economy, tourism acts as a stimulating element of the global economic system. Tourism development implies a specific demand for products and services, a demand which leads to an increase in their production. At the same time, tourist demand determines an adaptation of the offer which materializes, among other things, in the development of the technical and material base of this sector and, indirectly, in stimulating the production of the branches participating in the construction and equipment of accommodation and food units, the modernization of road networks, the development of means of transportation, leisure facilities, etc.

Currently, tourism is one of the most affected sectors worldwide, due to the restrictions imposed during the COVID pandemic, but also to the reluctance of consumers to travel because of the measures taken as a result of the adoption of normative acts to limit the spread of COVID-19 (Stan, Rus and Tasește, 2020). Romania was no exception, with most vacations canceled and travel budgets cut. According to Marin (Barbu) and Condrea (2021), in a few months, the framing of the global tourism system has shifted from super-tourism to non-tourism.

However, Romanians did not lose their appetite for travel, opting rather for holidays inside their country, to destinations as close to home as possible, in family bed and breakfasts (B&Bs), small hotels or hotels in isolated regions, apartments and holiday villas, with the possibility of canceling them without a penalty. Those who chose foreign destinations preferred Bulgaria, Greece or Turkey. Dumitru Luca, the president of ANAT (National Association of Travel Agencies), stated that “it is unanimously recognized that in the context of this delicate year, tourism was one of the hardest hit economic branches worldwide, and Romania is no exception. We are talking about a decrease in turnover of about 70% and up to the complete paralysis of the agencies specialized in incoming or events”. Moreover, Dan Goicea, the vice-president of ANAT, warned that travel agencies recorded big losses, starting with the salaries, which represent a large share of their expenses.

Duro and his colleagues (2021) tackled the devastating economic consequences in the global tourism arena and leisure sectors (and also in the hospitality subsector) triggered by the lockdown during the pandemic, the hotel and tourism demand approaching zero between April and mid - June 2020. Having in view that “tourism is a major economic sector providing livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people” (Duro et al., 2021), the economic and social impact is huge, especially in countries such as Spain, where tourism plays a major role in the country’s economy. According to many specialists in the field, half of the provisioned decrease in the country’s annual GDP is caused by the negative impact that the pandemics had on its tourism activities. Another important issue in this regard is related to the fact that each territory was affected in a different way by the pandemic, depending on the demand, supply or on the measures or policies implemented in order to mitigate these disastrous effects.

In his turn, Goh (2021) pinpointed the tragic aftermath caused by the pandemic (the closure of borders and the restriction of travels being among the safety measures), which engulfed all areas of life, especially the tourism industry. The aforementioned scholar examined in his paper certain strategies designed in order to revive and assist the development of the tourism industry in Sabah, a Malaysian state and reached the conclusion that, unfortunately, the authorities came up with inefficient strategies that are not suitable to the country’s sustainable development in the future. Moreover, in his perspective, the future remains speculative especially since the crisis triggered by the pandemic, which affected tourism, pinpointed the importance of this sector to Sabah but it also enhanced “the issues of over-dependence on tourism as the economic sector”. Therefore, despite the holidaymakers’ rebuilding confidence, “an integrated approach at the destination level” is mandatory. In the scholar’s optimistic perspective, stakeholders should take advantage of the “opportunity to reflect on the pre-existing issues on tourism and reset the current approach for a more responsible and sustainable tourism industry in the future”; moreover, they should “establish supportive policies and defend mechanisms from over-dependency on tourism and reverse the impacts of over-tourism both culturally and environmentally” (Goh, 2021). Among the strategies proposed by him in order to ensure the sustainability and development of tourism but also social justice and the communities’ resilience in the crisis include “more detailed segmentation and careful planning integrating tourism into part of the sustainable development of Sabah”, “more inclusive planning of infrastructure to benefit the society in general”, “a more integrated approach to relieve the over-dependency of tourism”, which demands “the diversification of livelihood options in the state” (Goh, 2021).

According to Sharma and his peers (2021), not only was the tourism industry one of the most affected economic sectors but it was also one of the most important causes and carriers of the virus that turned the entire world upside down, as the unsustainable tourism practices hindered the sustainable living at the global level. In the scholars’ opinion, a common effort of

all the stakeholders carrying their activities in the industry is required in order to revive and strengthen tourism and they designed “a resilience-based framework for the industry” which requires the involvement of “governments, market players, technology innovators, and the workforce employed in the industry” and which would boost the sustainable evolution of tourism (Sharma, Thomac and Paul, 2021). Having in view the restrictions on, and the new regulations of international travel, the same scholars argue that local communities also play a vital role in this regard and that their framework would both enlarge the tourism base and entail new opportunities and advantages for the less-developed tourism areas, small-scale players being thus enabled to win on the pandemic battlefield, to safeguard the social well-being and to support sustainable tourism. In a similar approach, the analysis of tourism indicators in the Romanian coastal area, which was severely affected by the effects of the pandemic, is of interest if it is correlated with investment indicators in the construction field, which show an increase in the interest to expand tourist accommodation (Munteanu, 2021). Even though during the lock-down periods people traveled less for recreational purposes, the investments in tourist infrastructure increased during this period, new perspectives for the diversification of local coastal tourism being created.

Skare, Soriano and Porada-Rochon (2021) have published a study that pinpoints the common shock and the long-lasting negative consequences triggered by the pandemic in the tourism industry, in particular, and in the economy, in general, highlighting the urgency of designing efficient and eloquent contingency plans vital for the immediate tackling of pandemic crises. Global cooperation is required in order to revive tourism and to mitigate the financial issues caused by the pandemic lockdown. The above-mentioned scholars explain that the shock which propagated within the world economy entailed effects “compounded due to buyer–seller ties” and in the best case scenario, when all lockdowns come to an end, “the world economy takes about one quarter period to achieve a new balance”, while the persistence of partial lockdowns would considerably prolong the recovery time (Skare, Soriano and Porada-Rochon, 2021).

2. Methodology

In a systemic approach, tourism can be seen as a cybernetic system included in the national economy system and in its turn consists of a series of interconnected subsystems, whose state of operation must be constantly known. In order to formulate, substantiate and choose the optimal decisions, the decision-makers must constantly have information about the state of the system, a process which is achieved by gathering information, systematizing, processing and presenting them in the form of indicators.

The statistical measurement of tourist flow aims to determine its dimensions and to provide useful information for the future development of the service industry. Among the statistical indicators that measure and characterize tourist flows, this study has used the indicator *total number of tourists arriving in tourist accommodation units*, an absolute indicator which shows the number of people (Romanians and foreigners) who travel outside the localities where they have their permanent residence, for a period of less than 12 months and stay for at least one night in a tourist accommodation unit in the visited areas of the country. The main reason for the trip is other than to carry out a paid activity in the visited places.

Tourism is nowadays an important activity similar to the activities carried out in other key sectors of the world economy, such as industry, agriculture, trade, being well known that tourism activities bring, in addition to many jobs, an understanding of other cultures of the world (Nguyen et al., 2020).

According to *Romania's National Tourism Development Strategy 2019-2030*, Romania provides a wide variety of tourism experiences and has the potential to unlock the capacity for economic growth at local, regional, and central level. The financial support offered to Romania by the European Union in the field of tourism was distributed in accordance with the regional development policy, the basic units for the regional policy being the development regions (Stan, 2014). In this sense, regional development in Romania was achieved by dividing the country into 8 development regions: North-East/N-E Development Region (it comprises Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Suceava and Vaslui counties), South-East/S-E Development Region (it comprises Brăila, Buzău, Constanța, Galați, Vrancea and Tulcea counties), South/S-Muntenia Development Region (it comprises Argeș, Călărași, Dâmbovița, Giurgiu, Ialomița, Prahova and Teleorman counties), Oltenia South-West/S-V Development Region (it comprises Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea counties), West/V Development Region (it comprises Arad, Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara and Timiș counties), North-West/N-V Development Region (it comprises Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Sălaj, Satu Mare and Maramureș counties), Central/Centru Development Region (it comprises Alba, Brașov, Covasna, Harghita, Mures and Sibiu counties) and Bucharest-Ilfov Development Region (it comprises Bucharest and Ilfov County).

The objective of this research, given the occurrence of an unexpected event that upset the whole world, is to perform a dynamic analysis and to identify the links between statistical variables: year and region, regarding the number of tourists arriving in Romania in the 2018-2020 period at the total level and on two distinct categories: Romanian tourists and foreign tourists. The methodological approach was based on an exploratory, multivariate data analysis method, namely the correspondence factor analysis, given the non-numerical nature of the variables. The initial values of the indicators used in the analysis were taken from the INS (National Institute of Statistics) website, the *Tempo-online database*.

Applying the CFA method, the initial information, contained in Table 1 of contingency or disjunctive, is synthesized/summarized in a system of factorial axes in which the points represented by the categories of registered variables are projected, years and regions, in our case. The correspondence factor analysis aims to find the orthogonal axes uncorrelated with each other on which to project the row point cloud – the years, respectively the column point cloud - the regions. For this, the eigenvalues of the inertia matrix and the coordinates of the eigenvectors associated with each eigenvalue are calculated. The calculation of the coordinates of the row points and the column points on the factorial axes is performed using the coordinates of the eigenvectors associated with the eigenvalues of the inertia matrix. To estimate the distance between two points, the distance χ^2 is used.

3. Results

The data collected from the INS website are grouped and centralized in Table 1, with a double-entry. The values in this table show the distribution by development regions of the total number of tourists arriving in Romania during the 2018-2020 period.

3.1. The analysis of the total number of tourists arriving in Romania

At the level of the year 2018, the largest number of tourists, 3,053,580, which represents 23.7% of the total number, belonged to the Central/Centru region, while the S-V region was situated in the opposite position. While in 2020, the year following the Covid-19 pandemic, the hierarchy by counties in the 3 years analyzed was maintained, there is a significant increase in the share of tourists arriving in S-E Romania, from 14% in 2018 to 19.9% in 2020. These values form the profile of the number of tourists arriving per year.

Table 1. The distribution of the total number of tourists arriving in Romania, in the period 2018-2020, by regions - Correspondence Table

Year	Reg_numeric								
	Buc_ilfov	Centru	N-E	N-V	S-E	S-Muntenia	S-V	V	Active Margin
2018	2,279,165	3,053,580	1,257,205	1,721,729	1,802,189	1,036,151	739,486	1,015,626	12,905,131
2019	2,236,650	3,173,150	1,352,527	1,766,289	1,898,433	1,084,291	791,821	1,071,782	13,374,943
2020	616,208	1,534,573	691,913	791,158	1,271,233	543,261	470,935	479,361	6,398,642
Active Margin	5,132,023	7,761,303	3,301,645	4,279,176	4,971,855	2,663,703	2,002,242	2,566,769	32,678,716

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

Table 2 of the row profiles has as terms the partial relative frequencies for each value of the variable *year*. A row profile shows us, for each x_i value of the variable X (the years) the share of statistical units on y_j values of the variable Y (the regions).

Table 2. Row profiles

Year	Reg_numeric								
	Buc_ilfov	Centru	N-E	N-V	S-E	S-Muntenia	S-V	V	Active Margin
2018	.177	.237	.097	.133	.140	.080	.057	.079	1.000
2019	.167	.237	.101	.132	.142	.081	.059	.080	1.000
2020	.096	.240	.108	.124	.199	.085	.074	.075	1.000
Mass	.157	.238	.101	.131	.152	.082	.061	.079	

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

A statistical association between two years, two row profiles, shows a similar distribution of the arriving tourists by year. The analysis of the values in Table 2 highlights the fact that the years 2018 and 2019 are characterized by similar distributions of arrivals among the regions of Romania, the points represented by these years being located at a very small distance from each other in the system of the first factorial axes. The year 2020, the year of recovery after the general upheaval caused by the global pandemic, in addition to the much lower values of tourist arrivals in each region, has a different profile, with significant decreases in shares being registered in some regions, such as Bucharest-Ilfov and N-V, and increases especially in the S-E and S-V regions.

Table 3. Column profiles

Year	Reg_numeric								
	Buc_ilfov	Centru	N-E	N-V	S-E	S-Muntenia	S-V	V	Mass
2018	.444	.393	.381	.402	.362	.389	.369	.396	.395
2019	.436	.409	.410	.413	.382	.407	.395	.418	.409
2020	.120	.198	.210	.185	.256	.204	.235	.187	.196
Active Margin	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

The values in Table 3, that of column profiles, indicate the annual distribution of the number of tourists arriving in each region. Out of the total number of arrivals in the Bucharest region in the period 2018-2020, a percentage of 44.4% of tourists arrived in 2018, 43.6% arrived in 2019 and 12% in 2020. There is an obvious discrepancy recorded in this time interval as a result of the impact of the pandemic crisis. The smallest differences in terms of structure were registered by the S-E region, from 36.2% in 2018 and 38.2% in 2019, to 25.6% in 2020. Although all the regions recorded considerable decreases in shares in the year 2020, the most serious situation was registered in the Bucharest-Ilfov region, and the least serious situation was recorded in the S-E region, which includes Constanța county, situated in the coastal area of the Black Sea, which poses quite different social, economic and environmental problems (Filip, Stan and Vintilă, 2016), but having a key role in the socio-economic development (Petrișor et al., 2020). The points represented in the diagram of the factorial axes of these two regions will be located at a great distance from each other.

Table 4. Calculated value of the χ^2 statistic, eigenvalues and inertia explained by each factorial axis

Dimension	Singular Value	Inertia	Chi Square	Sig.	Proportion of Inertia		Confidence Value	
					Accounted for	Cumulative	Standard Deviation	Correlation
1	.101	.010			.996	.996	.000	.026
2	.007	.000			.004	1.000	.000	
Total		.010	335246.199	.000 ^a	1.000	1.000		

a. 14 degrees of freedom

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

The Summary output in Table 4 shows the calculated value of the test statistic χ^2 used in testing the independence hypothesis between the variables. Testing the independence hypothesis entails formulating the following hypotheses: H_0 : there is no relationship between the statistical variables and H_1 : there is a relationship between the statistical variables. Since sig. = 0.000, it can be guaranteed with a probability of 0.95% that there is a relationship between the considered variables. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between the year of tourist arrivals in Romania and the region chosen by tourists for the stay. The first factorial axis explains in this case 99.6% of the total variance, the similarities, respectively the differences between regions and years being realized only according to this factorial axis.

Table 5. Results regarding the profile of the analyzed years

Overview Row Points^a

Year	Mass	Score in Dimension		Inertia	Contribution				
		1	2		Of Point to Inertia of Dimension		Of Dimension to Inertia of Point		Total
					1	2	1	2	
2018	.395	-.196	.088	.002	.149	.456	.986	.014	1.000
2019	.409	-.118	-.094	.001	.056	.535	.959	.041	1.000
2020	.196	.640	.018	.008	.794	.010	1.000	.000	1.000

Active	1.000			.010	1.000	1.000			
Total									

a. Symmetrical normalization

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

The position of the points represented by the column profiles - years in Figure 1 in the system of the first two factorial axes shows that the year 2020 is situated at a great distance from the years 2019 and 2018, and the S-E region, corresponding to the coastal region is at a long distance from the Bucharest-Ilfov region. The interpretation of the proximity or distance between the row profiles and the column profiles allows the explanation of regional differences or similarities. The S-E region was characterized by an adaptation of the offer to the conditions imposed by the pandemic to a much better extent than the other regions of Romania.

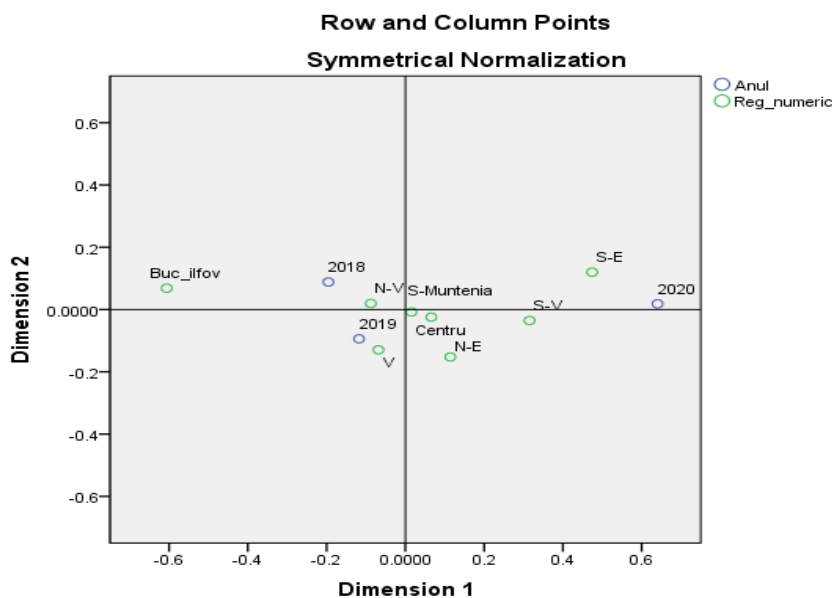


Figure 1. Diagram of the categories of variables analyzed regarding the number of tourist arrivals in Romania

(Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program)

3.2. The analysis of the total number of Romanian tourists in Romania

When choosing the statistical indicators used in this study, we have taken into account, out of a series of characteristics of the tourist demand, the dynamic character and the concentration of arrivals in development regions.

The analysis of the tourist demand on the two distinct categories of Romanians and foreigners was born out of a specific need that would be transformed into a specific consumption. The regions - the cities, in particular - are strong poles attracting travelers who want to escape from the hectic life caused by the pace of work, the polluted atmosphere, living together in high-density housing, etc. The higher the degree of urbanization, the higher the proportion of tourist demand nationwide.

The results of the processing for the Romanian tourists' category are summarized in Tables 6-11. Regarding the arrivals of Romanian tourists in the tourist accommodation units on the territory of our country, throughout the analyzed period, most tourists opted for the Central/Centru region. The structural analysis highlights a change in the shares at the level of the year 2020 for the S-E region, from 16.7% to 21%. The other regions showed decreases in shares or constant levels, as in the case of the Centru region.

Table 6. Correspondence Table

year	Reg_numeric								
	Buc_ilfov	Centru	N-E	N-V	S-E	S-Muntenia	S-V	V	Active Margin
2018	988,575	2,501,035	1,094,932	1,438,422	1,685,417	887,920	691,343	820,865	10,108,509
2019	1,012,914	2,645,097	1,197,264	1,494,798	1,782,430	943,004	748,697	866,991	10,691,195
2020	409,354	1,465,686	664,159	746,214	1,250,465	518,195	459,677	431,025	5,944,775
Active Margin	2,410,843	6,611,818	2,956,355	3,679,434	4,718,312	2,349,119	1,899,717	2,118,881	26,744,479

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

The analysis of the values in Table 7 highlights the fact that the years 2018 and 2019 were characterized by similar distributions of the arrivals in the 8 regions of Romania. However, the year 2020, a post-pandemic year, has a different profile, decreases in shares in the Bucharest-Ilfov, V, and N-V regions and increases especially in the S-E region being recorded.

Table 7. Row Profiles

year	Reg_numeric								
	Buc_ilfov	Centru	N-E	N-V	S-E	S-Muntenia	S-V	V	Active Margin
2018	.098	.247	.108	.142	.167	.088	.068	.081	1.000
2019	.095	.247	.112	.140	.167	.088	.070	.081	1.000
2020	.069	.247	.112	.126	.210	.087	.077	.073	1.000
Mass	.090	.247	.111	.138	.176	.088	.071	.079	

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

The values in Table 8 show an obvious decrease in arrivals in the year 2020 in all the regions of Romania as a result of the impact of the pandemic crisis. The biggest differences were registered in the Bucharest-Ilfov region, from 41% in 2018 to 17% in 2020, while the least serious situation was registered in the S-E region, which includes the coastal area.

Table 8. Column Profiles

year	Reg_numeric								
	Buc_ilfov	Centru	N-E	N-V	S-E	S-Muntenia	S-V	V	Mass
2018	.410	.378	.370	.391	.357	.378	.364	.387	.378
2019	.420	.400	.405	.406	.378	.401	.394	.409	.400
2020	.170	.222	.225	.203	.265	.221	.242	.203	.222
Active Margin	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

As can be seen in the output shown in Table 9, since sig. = 0.000, it can be guaranteed with a probability of 0.95% that there are significant relationships between the variables considered. Therefore, it makes sense, from an economic point of view, to analyze the relationship between the year of Romanian tourist arrivals in Romania and the region chosen

by tourists for their stay. The first factorial axis explains in this case 98.9% of the total variance, the similarities, respectively the differences between the regions and years being attained only according to this factorial axis.

Table 9. Summary

Dimension	Singular Value	Inertia	Chi Square	Sig.	Proportion of Inertia		Confidence Singular Value	
					Accounted for	Cumulative	Standard Deviation	Correlation
1	.063	.004			.989	.989	.000	.008
2	.006	.000			.011	1.000	.000	
Total		.004	106727.657	.000 ^a	1.000	1.000		

a. 14 degrees of freedom

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

3.3. Analysis of the total number of foreign tourists arriving in Romania

Although the Romanian Government has shown its support for the development of tourism by adjusting some policies, as well as through tax cuts and financial incentives, statistics show that there are still many opportunities to capitalize on Romania's potential in the field of travel and tourism. In the last three years preceding the pandemic crisis, Romania registered a 44% increase in international arrivals, reaching a number of 2,7 million. Although this growth is impressive, our country still has one of the weakest results in EU28. The gap is widening and, as a result, the Government must take immediate measures to diversify the product offer, in order to allow higher amounts of money spent per tourist.

Table 10. Correspondence table

year	reg_numeric								Active Margin
	Buc_ilfov	Centru	N-E	N-V	S-E	S-Muntenia	S-V	V	
2018	1,290,590	552,545	162,273	283,307	116,772	148,231	48,143	194,761	2,796,622
2019	1,223,736	528,053	155,263	271,491	116,003	141,287	43,124	204,791	2,683,748
2020	206,854	68,887	27,754	44,944	20,768	25,066	11,258	48,336	453,867
Active Margin	2,721,180	1,149,485	345,290	599,742	253,543	314,584	102,525	447,888	5,934,237

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

As can be seen in Table 10, the hospitality industry in the Bucharest-Ilfov region, the only city where large enterprises are an important part of the market, the arrivals of foreign tourists recorded the highest level for the entire period analyzed, being followed, at a great distance, by the region Centru.

Table 11. Roe profiles

year	reg_numeric								Active Margin
	Buc_ilfov	Centru	N-E	N-V	S-E	S-Muntenia	S-V	V	
2018	.461	.198	.058	.101	.042	.053	.017	.070	1.000
2019	.456	.197	.058	.101	.043	.053	.016	.076	1.000
2020	.456	.152	.061	.099	.046	.055	.025	.106	1.000
Mass	.459	.194	.058	.101	.043	.053	.017	.075	

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

At the level of each year, corresponding to the row profiles in Table 11, on the first two places in terms of international arrivals are the regions Bucharest-Ilfov (45.9%) and Central (19.4%).

The S-V region, which for a very long time was the second largest hospitality market in Romania and also the second largest employer in the industry, was overtaken by the Central region, which includes several important tourist destinations, including Braşov and Sibiu. We could say that one of the reasons for the deepening of these gaps could be the seasonal character that affects Constanţa County the most, where 89% of the total number of tourists travel during the summer. However, the reality is that investments in infrastructure and an appropriate marketing policy have been the ingredients that have ensured a sustainable development both in terms of economy and environmental protection.

Table 12. Column Profiles

year	reg_numeric								
	Buc_ilfov	Centru	N-E	N-V	S-E	S-Muntenia	S-V	V	Mass
2018	.474	.481	.470	.472	.461	.471	.470	.435	.471
2019	.450	.459	.450	.453	.458	.449	.421	.457	.452
2020	.076	.060	.080	.075	.082	.080	.110	.108	.076
Active Margin	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program

At the regional level, Romania continues to attract a smaller number of international visitors than any of the neighboring countries. Data collection, the monitorization and evaluation of the results are poor. There is a low level of information-based policy-making, which is connected to Tourism Satellite Accounts and strategic information on the tourism market, whereas tourist satisfaction surveys are rarely available.

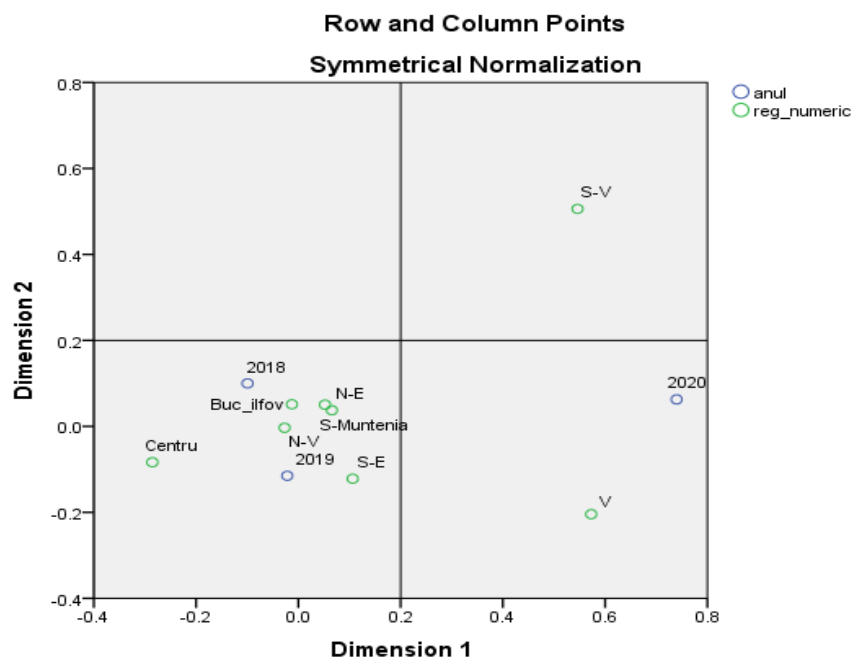


Figure 2. Diagram of the categories of variables analyzed regarding the number of foreign tourist arrivals in Romania

(Source: Processed by the author using the SPSS program)

Limited and unreliable statistics result in a lack of useful monitoring and evaluation frameworks, on which tourism development at the local, regional and national levels could be based. Moreover, according to a study on National Tourism Development Strategies by 2030, only 20% of all international tourists entering customs are registered in accommodation units in Romania. This could be the result of inaccurate recording practices or monitoring systems. The National Institute of Statistics does not take into account small bed and breakfast (with less than 10 beds) and properties rented through the practice of collaborative economy, which has registered a rapid growth.

4. Conclusions

Romania benefits from an abundance of natural landscapes, including sea, mountains, plains, swamps and, of course, the biggest asset - the Danube Delta, the objective inscribed on the UNESCO World Natural Heritage List. This is the most important wetland in Europe. Romania is also the only country in the European Union with five of the nine biogeographical regions (13): the Continental region: 53% of the country's surface; the Mountainous region: 23% of the country's surface and over half of the surface of the European eco-region of the Carpathian Mountains, with over 77% of the remaining virgin forests; the Steppe region: 17% of the country's surface; the Pannonian region: 6% of the country's surface; the Black Sea region: 1% of the country's surface.

These exceptional natural assets are related to the rich ethnographic cultural heritage, the specific local architecture, the traditional crafts, the folklore and the events. In 2002, the National Institute of Research and Development in Tourism identified 20 specific ethnographic areas, and most of them overlap or are in the immediate vicinity of important protected areas.

The year 2020 was a year full of trials and challenges, the most atypical year in the history of tourism.

The decrease in the number of tourists was also reflected in the business and profitability of companies in this sector, which were particularly affected by the general decrease in travel for tourism or business purposes.

Our conclusion was that 2020 was the year of rediscovery of Romania by the Romanians, the differences being significant between the number of arrivals of Romanian and foreign tourists. Obviously, it would have been much better if our country did not miss the unique chance to reposition itself among European destinations. „Unfortunately, Romanian tourism industry has faced the lack of coherent measures, the delay in the reopening of the restaurants, the closure of treatment centers and spas and much more”, Dumitru Luca, president of ANAT, told AGERPRES. The agencies' offers responded to the demand quite late, so that tourist units hardly introduced packages appropriate to the health crisis and measures of distancing and sanitation.

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