



EU MEMBERSHIP AND THE IMPACT ON THE IMAGE AND ATTRACTIVENESS ON TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it aims to understand if the territory of the European Union (EU) contains any form of identity, with particular effects on tourism. Secondly, to identify how EU citizens interpret the Union in a special way when they choose their international tourist destinations.

A brief state of the art shows that tourism used to be considered in the EU as an appropriate matter to the national level, but in the last years it was emerged as an essential and interesting issue among the political and technical responsibilities of the Union. Based on the above mentioned statement, it is vital to identify the reasons that lead to this occurrence.

There is no doubt about the importance of tourism in Europe and, in particular, in the EU. It is worth mentioning that ten of the countries included in the top world 25 international tourist destinations are members of this Union. In addition, on the list of the 25 top world international tourism generating countries, nine EU members are included. The key issue is to understand the behaviour of EU nationals as a new form of ‘domestic’ tourism in the European Union. In other words, to set an exploratory observation about the value and characteristics of tourism demand in the EU countries by citizens resident in other member States.

Tourism statistics of the EU countries highlight some interesting topics on this subject but not a definitive conclusion. That is why the author conducted a direct survey to the EU residents. More than 600 responses were received from all the 27 Members. The questionnaire was delivered online between the end of 2011 and 2012. The questions included demographics and variables about important factors that determine the choice of a tourism destination. The questions were in five Likert scale format.

The results of this questionnaire indicate that the condition of the country of destination which does not require a visa, and the country of destination with lower cost of living than the country of origin, are the most important determinants for choosing a EU destination. According to the questions related with what attributes make a EU member state more attractive to be chosen as a tourism destination than another, the results are revealing in the inexistence of customs’ regulation and the use of the same currency in the Eurozone countries.

Greeks and Spanish are the citizens of European Union that pay more attention on the value of factors that determine the choice of a tourism destination in Europe. The youngest respondents give more importance if the country of destination is a member of the EU, and to the country of destination which uses the same currency as their country of residence. In

addition, they prioritise the fact that there is no immigration control; and for all the factors that determine the choice of a tourism destination in Europe, the results are higher in men than women.

In conclusion, the fact that this research is exploratory, it can be confirmed the unambiguity of this subject, in a crucial moment for the institutional understanding of tourism inside the EU. More data is needed, both in terms of strengthening the sample and diversity.

Keywords: European Union territory, European citizens, Tourism demand.