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MASTER'S THESIS

THE IMPACTS OF SEASONALITY ON TOURISM ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY: EVIDENCE FROM CROATIA

Ljubljana, July, 2021 BARBARA BACHIOCCO

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organization
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
NSFE	Non-Standard Forms of Employment
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WTO	World Tourism Organization

‘’To Croatia,

My Beautiful Homeland’’

(Daleka Obala, 1993)

Abstract

The present study investigates the impacts of seasonality on the tourism economic sustainability of adestination, as despite its importance, the economic pillar of sustainable tourism has received the leastattention from the academia (Qiu, Fan, Lyu, Lin, & Jenkins, 2019). In particular, the thesis focuses on the cogent case study of Croatia, as the high level of seasonality challenges the tourism economicsustainability of the country (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). Specifically, the study investigates the impactsof seasonality on two key economic variables emerged from the academic literature review: employment (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003; Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005; Yacoumis, 1980) and investment (Butler 1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000; Mathieson & Wall, 1982). As it arises from the empirical study, tourism seasonality does not only influences Croatian seasonal employees and entrepreneurs, but also those tourism businesses that are officially open all year round. However, theseasonal tourism employees are the most exposed to the issues of seasonality in terms of employmentstability, poor work-life balance, social security coverage and banking issues. Interestingly, during the interviews it emerged a remarked duality existing between Croatian tourism seasonal jobs short- term profitability and their long-term economic sustainability. Similarly, the interviewed tourism workers voiced that the remarked level of seasonality hinders their investment decision, as seasonality leads to higher income instability and probability to face credit denial.

#sustainable tourism #tourism economic sustainability #tourism seasonality #Croatia

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, the concept of sustainability has been placed on the top of tourism agenda andhas received increasing attention from academics and practitioners alike (Niñerola, Sánchez-Rebull & Hernández-Lara, 2019; Qiu, et al., 2019; Sharpley, 2000). The United Nation World Tourism Organisation defines sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005, pp. 11-12).

Nowadays, the concept of the three pillars of sustainable tourism, namely the economic, social, and environmental one, has been widely accepted in the tourism literature

(Niñerola, Sánchez-Rebull, &Hernández-Lara, 2019). However, despite its importance, the economic dimension of tourism sustainability has received the least attention from the academia (Qiu et al., 2019). In order to understand the pillar's fundamental role we need to take into consideration its definition. Accordingto UNEP and UNWTO (2005), tourism economic sustainability ensures viable long-term economic operations, provides fair socioeconomic benefits to all stakeholders, includes stable employment, income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, as well as contributes to poverty alleviation. From the terminology, it emerges that the economic pillar plays a key role in balancing tourism viability over the long period and has wider socio-economic implications for all stakeholders, and therefore cannot be neglected.

According to Qiu et al., 2019 ''there is a need to deepen the understanding of economic sustainabilityby exploring its dimensions '' (p. 231). In particular, seasonality has been defined as one subdimension of tourism economic sustainability and the major factor that hinders tourism frombeing economically sustainable (Qiu et al., 2019; World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2004). Although few studies have focused on the impacts of seasonality on the economic sustainability of tourism businesses (Altinay, 2000; Shen, Luo, & Zhao, 2017) or city destinations (Qiu et al., 2019), the way seasonality impacts the tourism economic sustainability of a destination at a country levelhas not been described to date. Therefore, the present thesis aims to bridge the abovementioned gap in the literature, by addressing the following research question:

How does seasonality impact the tourism economic sustainability of a destination?

Objectives:

- To analyse how the level of seasonality impacts the tourism economic sustainability of a givendestination.
- To analyse how the level of seasonality impacts the employment level of a given destination.
- To analyse how the level of seasonality impacts the investment level in a given destination.

The present qualitative study does not aim to find an ultimate answer to the research question, butto raise awareness concerning the topic at hand and critically reflect upon the impacts of seasonalityon the tourism economic sustainability of a destination. Specifically, the present study will focus onthe impacts of seasonality on two key economic variables emerging from the literature: employment(Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003; Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005; Yacoumis, 1980) and investment (Butler 1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000; Mathieson & Wall, 1982).

In particular, the present thesis focuses on the case study of Croatia. This latter was chosen not onlybecause tourism represents a fundamental economic activity for the

country, accounting for approximately 25% of GDP (WTTC, 2020), but also because the stagnated high level of seasonalityundermines both the tourism economic sustainability and employment stability of the country. Indeed, in Croatia 45% of workers employed in the tourism industry are temporary workers, representing one of the highest share in the European Union (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018).

As far as it concerns the thesis structures, chapter 2 and chapter 3 review the existing body of literature regarding the concepts of sustainable tourism, tourism economic sustainability and seasonality. Chapter 4, titled methodology, focuses on the constructivism paradigm overarching qualitative research methods and presents the study research design, namely the data collection and data analyses methods implemented in the empirical research. Chapter 5 concerns the case study of Croatia, focusing on the country's socio-economic background, the Croatian tourism sector, and theremarked issue of seasonality in the country. Chapter 6, titled research findings, illustrates the findings of the thematic analysis of the empirical study. Chapter 7, titled discussion and recommendations, critically reflects upon the key findings described in the previous chapter and proposes different potential actions for the Croatian Tourism Board and for the country's policymakers. Lastly, the conclusion presents the main conclusions drawn from the research, the study's limitations and highlights some significant areas for future research.

2. Literature review & research construct

In the following paragraphs, the major concepts, theories and findings concerning sustainabletourism, tourism economic sustainability and seasonality will be critically analysed, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical framework underpinning the present study(see fig 1). Moreover, the section will present the semi-structured questions that have arisen from theliterature review and that will be asked to the participants during the interviews.

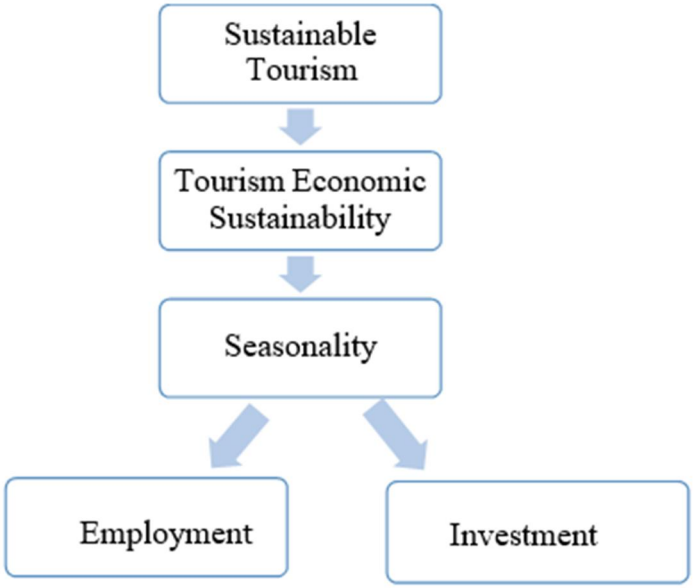

Figure 1: Graphical representation of the main concepts discussed in the literature review (source: own drawing)

2.1. Sustainable tourism

Nowadays, the concept of sustainable tourism has gained wide popularity among both academics andtourism practitioners (Niñerola, Sánchez-Rebull & Hernández-Lara, 2019; Qiu & al., 2019; Sharpley,2000). The concept has its roots in the environmentalism movement that emerged during the 1970s and in the notion of sustainable development (Hunter, 1997; Liburd, 2018; Liu, 2003; Mihalič, 2016). The term sustainable development was coined for the first time by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1980 in its World Conservation Strategy (IUCN, 1980 in Liu, 2003). In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development Report titled‘Our Common Future’, also known as the Brundtland Report, defined sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED, 1987, p. 43).

Following the Brundtland report, the global environmental debate gain momentum in the globaland local socio-political discourses and agendas (Mihalič, 2016). Although the Brundtland reportmentioned tourism only once, it had a large impact on the tourism literature (Holden & Fennell, 2012). Indeed, the number of academic papers regarding tourism from the perspective of sustainable development grew steadily (Butler 1999; Garrod & Fyall, 1998; Holden & Fennell, 2012).

During the 1990s, different definitions of sustainable tourism arose (Butler, 1999; Liu,

2003). Inskeep defined five major criteria for sustainable tourism, namely the economic, environmental andsocial responsibility of tourism and the responsibility of the industry towards tourists and global justice and equity (Inskeep, 1991 in Mihalič, 2016). However, some of his criteria received little attention in the following debates (Mihalič, 2016). Cater (1993) highlighted three key objectives forsustainable tourism, namely improving the living standards of the host population over the short and long term; satisfying the increasing tourism demand; while safeguarding the environment to accomplish both of the preceding objectives. Farrell (1999) defined the 'sustainability trinity' that aimed to integrate smoothly and transparently the economy, society and environment. Some authors (Butler, 1999; Harris & Leiper, 1995; Hughes, 1995) differentiated between the terms 'sustainable tourism' and 'sustainable tourism development'. The main difference between the concepts is that the former one is state and result-focused, while the latter one is dynamic and process-oriented (Butler, 1999; Liburd, 2018; Liu, 2003). However, according to Liu (2003), 'sustainability, sustainable tourism and sustainable development are all well-established terms that have been used loosely and often interchangeably in the literature' (Liu, 2003, p. 460).

Nowadays the most widespread definition of sustainable tourism is the one of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (Mihalič, 2016). This latter defines sustainable tourism as 'tourism thatl account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities' (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005,pp. 11-12). According to UNWTO, sustainable tourism is not a new form of tourism, but a concept applicable to all types of tourism in every destination, including mass tourism and the different types of niche tourism segments (WTO, 2004).

In terms of terminology, the present thesis will use the notions of 'sustainable tourism' and 'tourism sustainability' as synonyms and follow the UNWTO definition of sustainable tourism.

2.2 The three pillars of sustainable tourism

From the abovementioned UNEP and UNWTO (2005) definition of sustainable tourism, it arises theconcept of the three pillars of tourism sustainability, namely the economic, social, and environmentalone (see figure 2) (Waligo, Clarke & Hawkins, 2013). This concept has been widely accepted in thetourism academic literature (Mihalič, 2016; Niñerola, Sánchez-Rebull, & Hernández-Lara, 2019), and used as basis for different tourism strategies and policies (Mihalič, 2016).

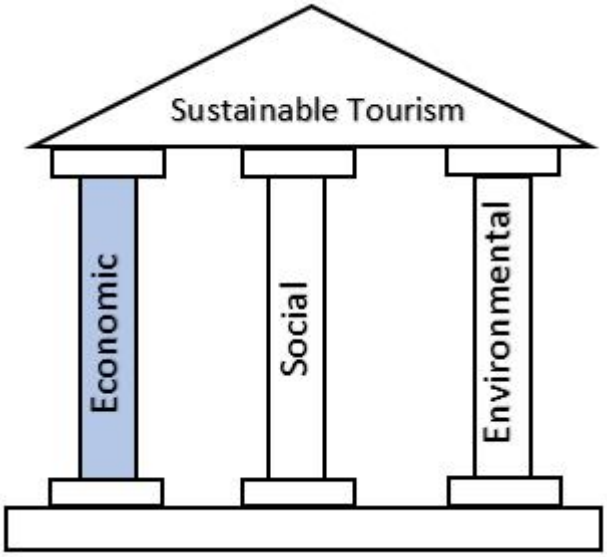

Figure 2: The three pillars of sustainable tourism
(source: own drawing, adapted from Purvis, Mao, & Robinson, 2019).

In particular, the economic pillar of sustainable tourism ensures viable long-term economicoperations, provides fair socioeconomic benefits to all stakeholders, includes stable employment, income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, as well as contributes to poverty alleviation (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). This dimension 'seeks resource efficiency in order toachieve profitability in the long term' (Niñerola, Sánchez-Rebull, & Hernández-Lara, 2019, p.1). Among all, this pillar is the most ill-defined and underresearched (Qiu et al., 2019). For instance, sustainability evaluation tools and guidelines are focus more on the environmental and social dimensions (Buckley, 2012). Given that the economic pillar of sustainability is the main focus of thepresent study, it will be further discussed in paragraph 2.5.

The social pillar of sustainable tourism, concerns respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of localcommunities, preserve their cultural heritage and traditional values and contribute to the understanding among different cultures (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). This dimension focuses on the socio-cultural impacts of tourism, arising from the interaction between local people and visitors (Smith, 1995). Socio-cultural impacts tend to be a mix of positive and negative components, affectingboth host communities and tourists (Cooper Fletcher, Gilbert, Wanhill, & Shepherd, 1998; Oppermann & Chon, 1997). On the one hand, tourism can improve host communities quality of life,bring modernization, generates welfare, as well as conserve and revitalize the local cultural heritage(Chen, 2014; Ismail, King & Ihalanayake, 2011; Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2012; in Zhuang, Yao, & Li, 2019). On the other, tourism can lead to discrimination, creation of tourism enclaves, relocationof local communities, collapse of the traditional family structure, as well as to the increase in crime and prostitution (Mbaiwa 2004 in Zhuang, Yao, & Li, 2019).

The environmental pillar of sustainable tourism, regards making optimal use of the natural resourcesupon which tourism is developed, preserving the ecological processes as well as conserving the biodiversity (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). Indeed, the tourism sector can create different damages to the natural environment (Briassoulis, 2002; Brohman, 1996; Saenz-de-Miera & Rossello´, 2014; Sheng & Tsui, 2009). For instance, as the tourism industry expands it can cause environmental degradation in the form of air pollution, natural habitat loss, and soil erosion (Mikayilov, Mukhtarov,Mammadov, & Azizov, 2019; Ozturk, Al-Mulali, & Saboori, 2016). On the one hand, tourism can contribute to nature preservation as it can create additional sources of income for biodiversity conservation, as well as raise awareness in regards to environmental issues (Leung, Spenceley, Hvenegaard, & Buckley, 2018). This dimension has received the greatest attention from the academia(Butler, 1999; Eagles, 1995). According to Butler (1999), one reason behind it is that the concept of sustainable development emerged from the second global wave of the environmentalism movement (Butler, 1999).

To clarify, it is important to note that the concept of the three pillars of sustainable tourism aligns with the broader concept of the three pillars of sustainability, first mentioned by the United Nation inrelation to sustainable development. From a theoretical perspective, sustainability is a state that posesequal importance on all the three pillars (Hamilton & Harper, 1994). Whether one dimension is missing the construct can be considered equitable, viable or bearable (Barbier, 1989) (see fig. 3). Forexample, the viable dimension implies a strong focus on the economy and environment, but neglects issues concerning the society. The equitable dimension has a strong commitment towards theeconomic and social sphere, but the environment is over-exploited. The bearable dimension has a strong commitment towards the environmental and social dimensions, but it has a poorly defined economic system. Remarkably, Eugene, Eja, Otu, & Ushie, (2009) argue that the bearable dimensionof development is the most difficult to remedy. In the bearable dimension, residents are dedicated totraditional economic activities, including bartering, farming, hunting, forage, as well as to the informal economy (Slocum, 2015). Indeed, the economic dimension cannot be neglected in order to reach true sustainability.

Figure 3: Sustainable development dimensions (source: Barbier, 1989 in Slocum, 2015).

In the business world, the three pillars of sustainability are also known as the ‘’triple bottom line’’.The term was coined by the entrepreneur and advisor John Elkington, who created this newexpression in order to introduce and sell sustainable business practices to corporations and private businesses (Elkington, 1997 in Mihalič, 2016). One of the principle of the triple bottom line is that corporate performance should not be exclusive profit-driven to benefit the company shareholders, but shall benefit all the involved stakeholders, including the local communities where the businesses operate (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans, 2012).

Typically, the term stakeholder is defined as ‘any group or individual who can affect oris affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives’ (Freeman 1984, p. 46). In particular, ‘tourism stakeholders can be defined as any groups or individuals who are affected by tourism (...) in a specific area’ (Blichfeldt, 2018, p.41). According to Blichfeldt (2018), tourismstakeholders are not only those parties that have an economic interest in the industry, but all those actors that are in some ways affected by it. Although different methods for classifying tourism stakeholders exist, traditionally, tourism main stakeholders are the private sector (including tourism related businesses, travel agencies, tour operators, among others), the public sector (including national and local governments and institutions such as DMOs), the civil society (such as NGOs), local communities, and tourists (Blichfeldt, 2018; Saito & Ruhanen, 2017). Similarly, Swarbrooke (1999) proposes to categorise tourism of stakeholders into five groups: governments, tourists, host communities, tourism businesses and other sectors.

2.3 Measuring sustainable tourism

One of the major drawback in order to achieve sustainable tourism is the complexity of measuring the degree of sustainability in a tourist destination (Alfaro Navarro, Andrés Martínez & Mondéjar Jiménez, 2020). This latter can be defined at a country, state, region, city or town level (Beirman,

2003). A tourism destination has been also described as 'an amalgam of individual products and experience opportunities that combine to form a total experience of the area visited' (Murphy, Pritchard and Smith, 2000, p. 44).

Different authors (Hunter, 1995; McCool, Moisey, & Nickerson, 2001; Wheeller, 1993) remarked the need to operationalize the theoretical concept of tourism sustainability in order to measure it and allow its evaluation. As Ko (2005) argues: 'if sustainable development is one of the tourism industry'smajor contemporary objectives, then the industry needs to be able to measure its performance and impacts' (p. 432).

In recent years, sustainable tourism indicators and their aggregation of these into indices have become a widespread tool for measuring sustainable tourism (Alfaro Navarro, Andrés Martínez & Mondéjar Jiménez, 2020) and making policy and management decisions (Hezri & Dovers, 2006). For instance, The World Tourism Organization (2004) published the 'Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations a Guidebook', while the European Commission in 2013 developed the 'European Tourism Indicator System Toolkit for Sustainable tourism' (ETIS), among others (European Commission, n.d.). Although there is no generally accepted set of indicators, they are valuable instruments to support destinations measuring sustainable tourism from a multidimensional perspective, including the economic, social and environmental one (Alfaro Navarro, Andrés Martínez & Mondéjar Jiménez, 2020).

In spite of being criticized sustainable tourism indicators and indices are valuable tools forcomparing the performance of different destinations between geographical areas and periods of time(Bell & Morse, 2003; Ceron & Dubois, 2003). These comparisons are vital to control tourism growthby delineating some criteria and limits for achieving sustainable tourism (Hunter, 1995 in Alfaro Navarro, Andrés Martínez & Mondéjar Jiménez, 2020).

2.4 Criticism of sustainable tourism and its indicators

The present discussion concerning sustainable tourism and its indicators would not be complete without taking into account the major criticism towards them. The concept of sustainable tourism hasbeen criticized for being too vague and confusing (Hunter & Green, 1995; Komilis, 1994), as well asflawed (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010). Hunter & Davis (1995) argued that there are no in-depth explanations on the content and consequences of sustainable tourism development (Hunter & Green,1995). Similarly, Komilis (1994) claimes that most research concerning tourism sustainability has not gone much further than the formulation and discussion of the various principles and

suppositions.Higgins-Desbiolles (2010), argues that sustainable tourism is an elusive concept and that the societymust shift from the current value system of neoliberalism and consumerism to a new less harmful onein order to achieve true sustainability. Indeed, tourism does not operate in an isolated space and mustbe understood as a total socio-economic phenomenon (Theobald, 2005), 'as part of other elements of society, the environment and the economy' (Liburd, 2018, p.20).

Furthermore, sustainable tourism has been criticized to be merely a fashionable term (Liu, 2003), anappealing concept with not much meaning in practice, as it has become a public relation tool to justifythe impacts of tourism activities, while allowing the same old conduct (Wheeller, 1993). Similarly, Adams (2006) argues that tourism sustainability can be considered a theoretical construct, somethingfor which local communities strive for, but which might not ever achieve. In addition, Lansing & DeVries (2007) have questioned whether sustainable tourism is not only a smart marketing promotion aimed to 'provide corporations ethically more appealing wrapping paper for the same old toy' (p.77)

Likewise, also the use of sustainable tourism indicators has been blamed. Stoeckl, Walker, Mayocchi,& Roberts (2004) argue that sustainability cannot be assessed and that the indicators only represent some kind of variation, in some circumstances a partial variation, because there is a breach between what is valuable measuring and what could be measured. Consequently, different theoretical contributions have been problematic to translate into practice (Buckley, 2012; Budeanu, Miller, Moscardo, & Ooi, 2016) and most case studies concern small-scale geographic zones (Alfaro Navarro, Andrés Martínez & Mondéjar Jiménez, 2020). Nonetheless, the abovementioned critiques do not aim to denigrate the existing body of sustainable tourism research, but to constructively indicate the path for future research (Liu, 2003).

2.5 Tourism economic sustainability and its subdimensions

As mentioned above, the economic pillar of sustainable tourism has received the least attention from the academia. Traditionally, academic literature has focused on the positive contributions of tourismto economies (Qiu et al, 2019). Indeed, tourism appears to be a good economic growth engine (Katircioglu, 2011), as it generates income, employment, tax revenue and foreign exchange earnings(Katircioglu, 2009; Oh, 2005; Seetanah, 2011; Sirakaya, Jamal, & Choi, 2001). In particular, least developed and developing countries are engaging in tourism activities, as they see in them a viable resource for economic growth and poverty alleviation (WTO, 2002). Nevertheless, 'tourism must notbe viewed as a panacea or the easiest way out of economic problems' (Qiu et al., 2019, p. 229), as itcan create different side effects (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Indeed, merely focusing on the tourism sector can create negative impacts on the economy as a whole (Comerio & Strozzi, 2019).

For instance, tourism expansion can cause deindustrialization in other sectors

(Copeland, 1991); a phenomenon known in economics as the 'Dutch Disease effect' (Comerio & Strozzi, 2019). The term 'Dutch disease' was first mentioned by 'The Economics 'in 1977, referring to the adverse effects thatthe large natural gas discoveries in the Netherlands had on the country's economy, as causing the decline of the manufacturing sector (Corden, 1984). In addition, tourism increases the cost of living and creates economic bubbles (Copeland, 1991; Sheng & Tsui, 2009). The expression 'economic or asset bubble' indicates a state where the price of an asset has increased so steadily in a short period that it suggests that the price is very likely to collapse (Allen & Gale, 2000). Once tourism activity isdeveloped, there could be other negative economic impacts such as the leakage effect, which can bedefined as 'the loss of foreign exchange and other hidden costs deriving from tourism related activities' (Cernat & Gourdon, 2005, p. 6). Therefore, the role of tourism economic sustainability must not be underestimated.

As with the term sustainable tourism, multiple definition of tourism economic sustainability exist. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2004), tourism economic sustainability ensures viable long-term economic operations, provides fair socioeconomic benefits toall stakeholders, includes stable employment, income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, as well as contributes to poverty alleviation. According to the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the UNWTO (2005), tourism economic sustainabilityregards economic prosperity at different levels of the society, cost-effectiveness and economic efficiency, as well as vitality of tourism businesses. Choi and Sirakaya (2006) add that tourism economic sustainability is a process that optimizes 'the development growth rate at a manageable level with full consideration of the limits of the destination environment' (p. 1276). Carbone (2005) argues that 'economic sustainability refers to the additional income provided to locals to compensatethem for the burden that the presence of tourists may cause' (p.560).

As emerging from the above definitions, tourism economic sustainability is a multidimensional construct with a wide-ranging meaning. Nonetheless, different existing studies concerning sustainable tourism indicators consider tourism economic sustainability as a unidimensional construct(Qiu et al., 2019).

In the present body of literature concerning the topic at hand, Jaafar & Maideen, (2012), investigated the economic sustainability of small and medium island chalets in Malaysia and their relations with ecotourism products and activities. Moreno-Gené, Sánchez-Pulido, Cristobal-Fransi, & Daries (2018) studied the economic sustainability of ski resorts in the Austrian, French and ItalianAlps. The study revealed the larger the size of the ski resort the greater its financial and economic profitability. A similar study was conducted in the Catalan Pyrenees, which led to the same results (Pulido, Ramón, & Fransi, 2016). Qiu et al. (2019) studied tourism economic sustainability from the perspective of local stakeholders in Hong Kong. In their study, economic sustainability in tourism comprised three dimensions, namely economic positivity, development control and individual welfare. Garrigós-Simón, Galdón-Salvador, & Gil-Pechuán (2015) studied the phenomenon by investigating the leakage effect. Altinay (2000) and

Shen, Luo, and Zhao (2017) considered seasonality as a major factor hindering the economic sustainability of tourism businesses. Logar (2010) remarked that the quality of accommodation and staff training also affected the economic sustainability of tourism destinations. Bramwell & Lane (2011) highlighted the state's impact on theeconomic sustainability of tourism. Gössling (2017) investigated how information technologies influenced tourism economic sustainability. He argued that sharing sites such as Couchsurfing 'maypromote economic sustainability by distributing hospitality profits more widely throughout the local community, but may also reduce economic sustainability by taking customers away from establishedbusinesses or working around tax codes' (p. 1036). However, in order to understand tourismeconomic sustainability, further research is needed to explore its driver and its dimensions (Qiu et al.,2019).

The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2004) in its guidebook titled ''Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourist Destinations'' proposed seven subdimensions of tourism economic sustainability: tourism seasonality, leakages, employment, tourism as a contributor to nature conservation, community and destination economic benefits, tourism and poverty alleviation, competitiveness of tourism businesses (see fig. 4). The manual aimed to be a guideline for destinationmanagers to create adaptable indicators to the specific context of the destination (Qiu et al, 2019). Although the following subdimensions are not universally recognized, they are up-to day the most comprehensive overview of what components are constituting the tourism economic sustainability dimension.

Tourism Seasonality

Seasonality can be described as a temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism in terms of number of visitors, visitors' expenditure, traffic, employment and admission to attractions (Butler, 2001). According to the UNWTO (2004), almost every destination is affected by seasonality, by different degree. Seasonality impacts the tourism sector as a whole, influencing also resorts, small and large scale tourism businesses of different nature (Lee, Bergin-Seers, Galloway, O'Mahony, & McMurray, 2008; UNWTO, 2004). Indeed, seasonality can be considered an intrinsic characteristic of tourism (Allcock, 1994; Baum & Lundtorp, 2001). Remarkably, seasonality is a major factor thathinders tourism from being economically sustainable (Qiu et al., 2019; UNWTO, 2004). The UNWTO guidebook recommends the use of indicators to measure seasonality and study its impacts on the main sectors of tourism (Qiu et al., 2019). In particular, the manual suggests using multiple indicators to measure the degree of seasonality and the results of management action to address it, tomeasure the degree of effort designed to reduce it, to assess the number of tourism business and attractions open all year round, and to assess the number of short-term and seasonal jobs (see paragraph 2.3).

Leakages

According to Sandbrook (2010), leakage is 'the failure of tourist spending to remain in the destination economy' (p. 125). Financial leakages occur in several industries and economic sectors, but it is highly remarked in the tourism one (Mowforth & Munt,

2009). Based on different studies of the UNEP, the leakages can reach 85 percent for the African Least Developed Countries (LDCs), 80 percent for the Caribbean, 70 percent for Thailand, and 40 percent for India (WTO, 2004). The UNWTO (2004) guidebook recommends to use several indicators to account for three types of leakages (Gollub Hosier, & Woo, 2003), namely the external leakages, the internal leakages and the invisible leakages. The first category includes the revenues that accrue to foreign investors funding tourism infrastructure and facilities, such as tour operators, foreign airlines and cruise ship, among

others. The second category includes the leakages that arise from tourism imports from other tourismregions within the same country. The third category includes the losses that are not accounted reliably, but their effect is significant. It includes tax avoidance, informal foreign currency exchangetransactions, off-shore savings and investments, as well as the environmental and social externalities.Externalities 'refers to situations when the effect of production or consumption of goods and servicesimposes costs or benefits on others which are not reflected in the prices charged for the goods and services being provided' (OECD, n.d.). Although the optimal level of leakage cannot be defined a priori, as every destination is unique, an in-depth leakage analysis will support worldwide destinations to identify latent opportunities to develop economic linkages and reduce the leakages (UNWTO, 2004).

Employment

Tourism is a major source of employment, creating approximately one every ten job worldwide (WTTC, 2018) and employing above all women and young people (Eurostat, 2019; WTTC, 2014). However, the sector faces different challenges related to employment (Baum, Cheung, Kong, Kralj, Mooney ,Hải, Ramachandran, Dropulić Ružić & Siow, 2016). Indeed, the majority of tourism jobs are seasonal, low-paid, low-skilled, while career opportunities and employment security are limited (Baum et al., 2016; Booyens, 2020; Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011). According to WTO (2004), this is also an issue affecting tourism economic sustainability as 'if there are no qualified employees to provide the services and to operate the facilities, tourism at the destination will not be sustainable' (p.119). Therefore, the WTO (2004) endorses the use indicators to measure the level of tourism jobs turnover, seasonality and pay levels, tourism employees professional and personal development, theirlevel of satisfaction, as well as to document the potential lack of skilled employees.

Tourism as a contributor to nature conservation

Tourism can be both a threat and an opportunity for nature conservation (WTO, 2004; Wolf, Croft, & Green, 2019). Hall & McArthur (1996) defined this situation as a paradoxical one. On the one hand, nature-based tourism activities can cause biosphere degradation, increase roadkill and disturbance of the fauna, among other risks (Liddle, 1997 in Wolf, Croft, & Green, 2019; WTO; 2004). On the other, tourism is an important tool that provides local communities economic incentivesand social benefits to engage in biodiversity conservation (Stem, Lassoie, Lee, Deshler, & Schelhas,2003; WTO, 2004).

Given that the relationship between tourism and natural conservation is a double-edged sword, the WTO (2004) emphasizes the need to monitor the impacts of tourism on this latter. In particular, it remarks the need the use indicators to measure the economic alternatives for local people to decrease the exploitation of wildlife resources, the creation of constituencies that promote tourist biodiversity conservation, the existence of site-specific protocols and the existence of opportunities for tourists participation in nature conservation.

Community and destination economic benefits

Different authors (Ap, 1990; Dwyer, Forsyth, Spurr, 2004; King , Pizam & Milman, 1993; Newsome& Hughes, 2016) acknowledged the tourism socio-economic contributions to host communities in terms of employment, standard of living, social status, as well as community sense of belonging andpride. Nonetheless, due to the economic leakage communities can lost much of the tourism revenuesto external suppliers (Sandbrook, 2010; UNWTO, 2004). Ideally, 'a balance must be found betweenthe overall welfare of the community and that of the tourism industry' (WTO, 2004, p. 128). Indeed,the WTO (2004) urges to monitor the tourism contributions to communities in terms of jobs, tourism enterprises, community expenditures, net economic benefits, as well as to assess the tourism-led changes in cost of living.

Tourism and poverty alleviation

Tourism is a vital economic source for many of the world poorest countries through the generation of foreign exchange earnings, employment and development funds. Moreover, tourism can create financial revenues for marginalised and indigenous communities living in isolated rural area, which cannot benefit from other traditional types of development (WTO, 2004). However, it cannot be assumed that tourism will immediately alleviate poverty as a destination becomes more competitive (Zhao & Ritchie, 2007). Indeed, from different case studies around the world it emerged that tourismnegatively impacted the lives of the poor (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019). Evidence from Peru, showedthat also pro –poor tourism programs had difficulties to reach the poorest individuals of the community (Llorca-Rodriguez, Casas-Jurado & García-Fernández, 2017). Therefore, the WTO guidebook (2004) recommends to assess the tourism contribution to the community's income, employment opportunity, operation and support of local enterprises, equitable distribution of tourismfounds, as well as to account for the intangible and non-economic effects.

Competitiveness of Tourism Businesses

According to Dwyer, Forsyth and Rao (2000) 'tourism competitiveness is a general concept that encompasses price differentials coupled with exchange rate movements, productivity levels of various components of the tourist industry and qualitative factors affecting the attractiveness or otherwise of a destination'(p. 9). The competitiveness of a destination and its business is a relative measure, that is to say it can only be expressed

in relation to others (WTO, 2004). Based on Porter'scompetitive strategy, firms can reach a competitive advantage because of cost advantages, product or service differentiation, or by focusing on a particular target market (Porter, 1980). Moreover, tourismat a destination level must also protect its natural and cultural resources, which constitutes part of itscomparative advantages. The guidebook recommends the use of indicators to measure the destination's cost advantages, product differentiation, focus strategy, level of cooperation and vitalityof the industry (WTO, 2004).

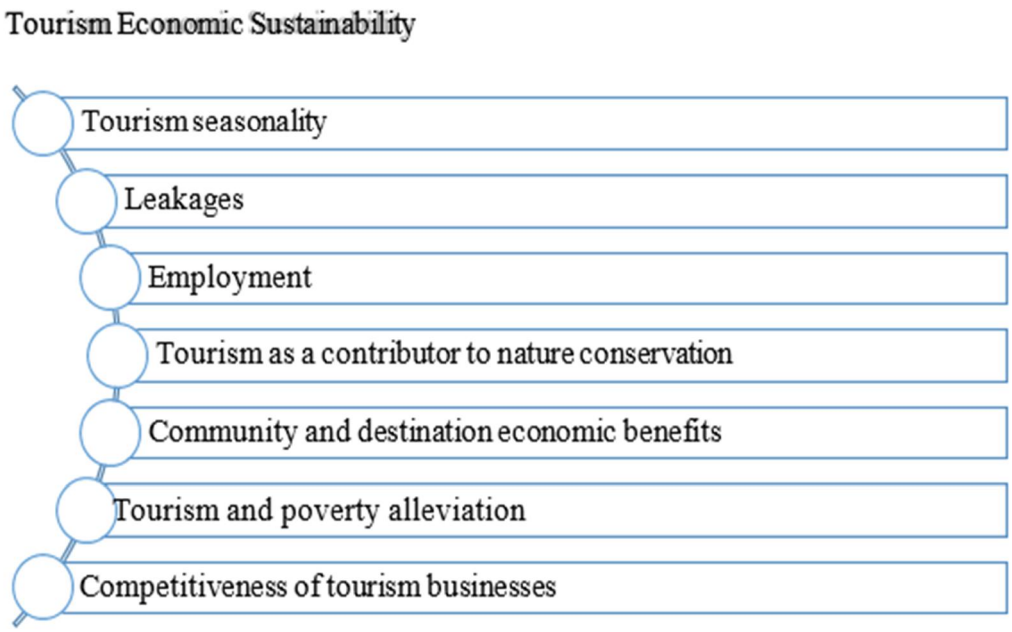

Figure 4: Tourism economic sustainability subdimensions according to UNWTO (source: own drawing adapted from UNWTO, 2004)

3. Tourism seasonality

Given that the present study is focusing on the subdimension of seasonality and its impacts on tourism economic sustainability, the phenomenon main characteristics will be reviewed hereafter. Accordingto Hinch & Jackson (2000), seasonality is one of the most challenging but least understood characteristics of tourism. In the academic literature, there are multiple definitions of the concept of seasonality in tourism (Fernández-Morales, 2003). According to Allcock (1989) seasonality is 'the tendency of tourist flows to become concentrated into relatively short periods of the year' (p.387). Butler (1994) defines tourism seasonality as 'a temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, which may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditureof visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admissions to attractions' (p. 332). Later on, Cooper, Wanhill, Fletcher, Gilbert & Fyall (2008) argued that seasonality is 'the temporal fluctuations of tourism on a daily, weekly, monthly or annual basis' (p. 686). Chung (2009) adds

‘seasonality is a global tourism phenomenon caused by temporary movement of people’ (p. 84). Although there is no general agreement upon the term (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005), Butler’s definition of seasonality is the most widely accepted, as it is the most detailed and complete (Chiutsi & Mudzengi, 2017; Þórhallsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2017). Interestingly, tourism seasonality is not based on any scientific theory (Lundtorp, 2001)

Butler and Mao (1997) distinguish among three forms of seasonality: one-peak, two-peak and non-peak. The first type is characterized by one significant peak tourist season, usually in summertime and lasting three to four months. This type of seasonality is the most common, particularly in Mediterranean countries. The second type of seasonality occurs when a destination has two peak periods: usually one in summer and the other one in winter. The third one occurs when there is no pronounced peak season and it is typical for city destinations (Butler and Mao, 1997 in Vergori, 2017).

There are two main causes for tourism seasonality in tourism: natural and institutional ones (BarOn,1975; Hartmann; 1986). The former one are caused by the cyclical changes in the climate and weatherconditions throughout the year. The latter one is caused by human socio-cultural factors, including religious, public and school holidays, among others reasons (BarOn, 1975; Hartmann; 1986). To thetwo above causes, Butler (1994) adds that other reasons for seasonality in tourism are social pressureand fashion, sport events, inertia and tradition. According to Butler and Mao (1997), seasonality canbe caused by factors in the origin and in receiving areas, which are in turn interrelated and dependenton one another.

Generally, seasonality is regarded as a problem for the destination, with severe implications for the supply-side (Baum 1999; Bigović, 2011; Vergori, 2017,). Indeed, tourism seasonality impacts the natural, socio-cultural and economic dimensions (Bigović, 2011). The environmental problems principally arises from the overuse of destinations ecological resources during the peak season (Butler, 1994; Manning & Powers, 1984), causing for instance congestion and erosion of rural paths, wildlife disturbance, as well as waste management issues (Grant, Human, & Le Pelley, 1997). The socio-cultural impacts of seasonality affect both the host communities and the tourists (Koenig-Lewis& Bischoff, 2005). These include congestion, overcrowding, need for additional police forces and medical personnel (Murphy, 1985), increased crime rate (Mathieson & Wall, 1982), among others. The economic problems of seasonality are the most prominent and range from loss of profit due to the inefficient use of assets, to employment and investment issues (Chiutsi & Mudzengi, 2017; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005; Chung, 2009). In times of crisis, such as the current COVID-19 pandemics, seasonal destinations and businesses are the most at risk as the tourist demand may be lost instead of shifted for the entire year (Kilpatrick, Barter & Dess, 2020).

On the other hand, the academic literature concerning the positive effects of seasonality is scant (Butler, 2001). Nonetheless, seasonality offers also some advantages for the destination. For instance,during the low season the ecosystem can recover (Bigović,

2011), host communities can preserve their own identity (Andriotis, 2005; Bigović, 2011), while maintenance work on buildings and attractions can be executed (Grant, Human, & Le Pelley, 1997).

Given that seasonality is mainly perceived as a problem, both the public and the private sector haveput much effort on how to reduce it through different approaches (Butler, 1994). The main strategiesfocus on the tourism product mix and price differentiation, in order to redistribute the demand and attract visitors in the low season (Allcock, 1994; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). Similarly, spatialredistribution of visitors during peak times can mitigate the negative impacts of overcrowding (Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). Allcock (1994) suggests the development of tourism circuits, twinattractions or two-centre holidays in order to spread visitors from overcrowded or environmentally sensitive areas to less visited ones.

3.1 Impacts of seasonality on tourism economic sustainability

As it emerges from UNWT0 (2004) guidebook, seasonality can be considered a subdimesion of thetourism economic sustainability pillar. Although different authors (Butler, 1994; Chiutsi & Mudzengi, 2017; Chung, 2009; Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Murphy, 1985) have focused on the economic impacts of seasonality, theseimpacts have received little attention from an economic sustainability perspective. Especially in a historical period when sustainability has become a central social paradigm, investigating exclusivelytourism impacts is not adequate anymore (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005).

Altinay (2000) and Shen, Luo, & Zhao (2017) approached the topic from the perspective of tourismbusinesses, arguing that seasonal operations were a central factor undermining the economic sustainability of tourism businesses, as they decreased occupancy rates, increased prices and create transportation difficulties in the peak season. However, no author has studied the impacts of seasonality on the tourism economic sustainability of a destination at the country level. Martín, Aguilera, & Moreno (2014) conducted a similar study but from the environmental perspective, in their study titled ‘impacts of seasonality on environmental sustainability in the tourism sector based on destination type: an application to Spain’s Andalusia region’. In order to study the phenomenon, the present study will focus on the impacts of seasonality on two key economic variables emerging from the literature: employment (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003; Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005; Yacoumis, 1980) and investment (Butler 1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000; Mathieson & Wall, 1982).

According the UNEP and UNWTO (2005) definition, tourism that is economically sustainable creates (or better should create) stable employment for host communities. However, seasonality undermines the job stability in different ways (Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). Usually, seasonalityhas been described as an issue for employment from a human resources management (HRM) perspective (Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005;

Murphy, 1985; Yacoumis, 1980). For instance,seasonal employment complicates staff recruitment and full-time retention (Yacoumis, 1980). Temporary jobs are perceived as less purposeful and tends to employ less educated, semiskilled or unskilled workforce (Mill and Morrison, 1998; Mathieson and Wall, 1982). In addition, only basic training is provided for seasonal employees (Murphy, 1985) hindering the product and quality standards (Baum, 1999). Shortages of seasonal employees drives employers to seek staff outside thelocal area and the higher recruitment costs are reflected in the lower wages (Commons & Page, 2001;Goulding, Baum & Morrison, 2004). Shortages of seasonal employees drives employers to seek staffoutside the local area and the higher recruitment costs are reflected in the lower wages (Commons &Page, 2001; Goulding, Baum & Morrison, 2004)

However, the repercussion of tourism seasonality on employment are much wider and serious. Seasonality significantly affects employment in the tourism sector, causing seasonal employment, underemployment as well as unemployment (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003). Seasonal jobs, which canbe defined as temporary paid job that will finish at a determined moment in time, once the tourist high season has passed (Marshall, 1999), create different issues for the employees, the local community and the economy as a whole (Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005). According to the International Labour Organization, non-standard forms of employment (NSFE), which include shift and night work, seasonal, temporary, part-time employment, outsourcing and subcontracting, are common in tourism (ILO, 2017). This non-standard type of contracts, although not negative a priori,can easily 'lead to decent work challenges, including inadequate social security coverage, low wages,income inequality and poor working conditions' (ILO, 2017, p. 12). Indeed, tourism employees oftenaccept seasonal jobs with long periods of unemployment, without the social security required by standard labor contracts (Cuccia & Rizzo, 2011).

Nonetheless, job seasonality is not adverse for all (Murphy, 1985). Mourdoukoutas (1988), in his study concerning tourism job opportunities in Greek islands, argues that seasonal jobs are appealingto some that some individuals as they can earn more and can pursue their non-market activities duringthe low season. The author adds that seasonal unemployment is not automatically created by seasonaljobs and that unemployment during the low season might be voluntary. He argues that unemploymentsubsidies for seasonal workers in the non-working period may do more harm than good to the economy. In Greece, unemployment subsidies 'generate positive wage differentials between tourismand other occupations which may induce laborers to quit any other seasonal or nonseasonal occupation and enter the tourist industry' (Mourdoukoutas, 1988, p.327).

Based on the above considerations, the following semi-structured questions will be asked to theselected tourism employees during the first part of the interview:

1. How does seasonality affect your employment situation throughout the year?

2. Does the length of the season affect your employment situation throughout the year?

3. Over the last years, have you received unemployment or other type of subsides during the lowseason?

4. Are you satisfied with your seasonal/ year round job from an economic point of view? Is thereanything you would you like to change?

5. Are you satisfied with your seasonal/ year round job from a social security point of view? Is thereanything you would you like to change?

For seasonal employees only:

6. Do you think that working as a seasonal worker economically sustainable for you and yourfamily? Why /Why not?

As it emerges from the tourism literature, investment constitutes another key economic variable for the sustainable development of tourism (Jackson, Brown, Hywood, Collins, Jacobs, Eslake, Kennett,Hingerty, & Lambert,2009; Paramati, Alam, & Lau, 2018.) Investment is the act of acquiring assetsthat will allow generating profit or other types of advantages in the future (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d). Evidence from a study among 28 EU states from 1990 to 2013 shows that tourism investments increased tourism revenue, while at the same time reduced CO2 emissions. (Paramati, Alam, & Lau,2018). Similarly, Jackson et al. (2009), argue that the tourism investment boosts tourism revenue, innovation in the sector, as well as sustainable tourism growth over the long-term.

Tourism investment can be generally categorized into public and private. Recently, also an alternative source of investment has emerged, known as public–private partnership (PPP) (WTO, 2015). Moreover, foreign direct investment (FDI) play an increasingly important role in tourism investment (Tang, Selvanathan, & Selvanathan, 2007). FDI can be defined as 'a category of cross- border investment in which an investor resident in one economy establishes a lasting interest in and a significant degree of influence over an enterprise resident in another economy' (OECD, 2021). Tang, Selvanathan, & Selvanathan (2007) highlighted that FDI is a significant contributor for expanding tourism in China. The authors argue that increased tourists arrivals would also increase the demand for accommodation and consequently lead to increased investment. A similar study wasconducted in the USA with similar results (Sanford & Dong, 2000). For instance, FDI through international companies (e.g. tour operators) allows host states to be integrated into international tourism systems, which lead to an increase in international tourist arrivals and income generation from tourism-related activities (Endo, 2006)

Nonetheless, tourism seasonality represents a major risk for investments (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Seasonality complicates finding access to capital and leads to instable returns on investment due to the volatility of tourism revenues over seasons and under-or-over use of the same assets and facilities(Butler 1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000). Given that seasonality causes low returns on investment, it creates difficulty to attract private investors; therefore, tourism may require investments from the public sector (Mathieson

& Wall, 1982). For instance, the high level of seasonality in Croatia is a major barrier for international investors. Consequently, in the country hotel chains are predominantly domestic (Horwath HTL, 2019).

Based on the above considerations, the following semi-structured questions will be asked to theselected participants during the second part of the interview:

7. Does the length of the season affect your personal and/or business-related investment decisions?How?

8. Where or in which sector are you investing the most?

9. Are you considering investing in a new business/sector?For seasonal employees only:
10. Does working as a seasonal worker allows you to satisfy your personal and/or businessinvestment decisions?

3.2 Measuring tourism seasonality

According to Lundtorp (2001), measuring seasonality in tourism is crucial for several reasons. Firstly,as showed in the previous paragraph, seasonality has a major economic impact. Secondly, seasonalityinfluences the level of prices during the peak and low season. Thirdly, seasonality measures must be available in order to analyse the opportunities and impacts of a potential season extension. Fourthly, seasonality implications must be considered for tourism forecasting. Moreover, concerning this last point, one must be able test to the stability or not of seasonality. Nevertheless, 'the question of what constitutes an 'optimal' degree of seasonality for a destination (...) remains largely unanswered in thepresent literature' (Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005, p.216)

Generally, the basic unit for measuring seasonality is the number of visitors. Other popular units include the number of overnight stays, visitors' length of stay, visitors' expenditure or occupancy rates. Concerning the time period, seasonality can be measured on a daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis (Bigović, 2011; Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010; Lundtorp, 2001). So far, different measures have been implemented to evaluate seasonal variations (Þórhallsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2017). Some of the most used ones are the seasonality ratio, the coefficient of variation and the Gini coefficient (Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff, 2005 in Þórhallsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2017).

First, the seasonality ratio (SR) is calculated by dividing the highest number of monthly visitors bythe average number of monthly visitors (Yacoumis, 1980). Formally, the seasonality ratio is calculated as follows (Þórhallsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2017):

$$SR = x_{max}/x \quad (1)$$

Where:

x_{max} = highest number of monthly visitors

x= average number of monthly visitors

The seasonality ratio can take a value from one to twelve. Whether the number of monthly arrival is constant, the seasonality ratio will be equal to one. For instance, if the number of arrivals is concentrated in one month, the seasonality ratio will be equal to twelve. In other words, the higher the level of seasonality, the higher the value of the seasonality ratio. One of the major disadvantagesof this type of ratio is that it does not take into account the skewness of the distribution and it is altered by extreme values (Karamustafa & Ulama, 2010).

Second, the coefficient of variation (CV) is obtained by dividing the standard deviation by the mean.Formally, it is calculated as follows (Þórhallsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2017):

$$CV = \sigma/\mu \quad (2)$$

Where:

σ= standard dev.

μ= mean

The coefficient of variation is a measure of spread, which represents the level of variability in relation to the average. Since it is dimensionless, it can be used to compare the spread of data sets that have different units or averages. According to Lundtorp (2001), although the CV is easy to calculate, it is difficult to interpret it.

Third, the Gini Coefficient (G) (Gini, 1912) is the most used 'statistical measure of inequality' (Black, 2002, p. 197), which is derived from the Lorenz curve (Lundtorp, 2001). The Lorenz Curve (Lorenz, 1905) which ''used by economists to assess income/wealth distribution and by demographers to quantify population distributions, is a visual representation of the cumulative proportion of population, ranked from the lowest income/wealth, against the cumulative proportion of income/wealth'' (Groves-Kirkby, Denman, & Phillips, 2009, p.2481). The Gini Coefficientmeasures the area between the Lorenz curve and the perfect equality line (Bellu & Liberati, 2006; Lundtorp, 2001) and it can take a value ranging from zero (perfect uniform distribution) to one (perfect inequality) (see fig. 5) (Groves-Kirkby, Denman, & Phillips, 2009).

In relation to tourism studies, the Lorenz curve shows the cumulated frequencies in rank with the lowest frequency (winter month) to the left and the month with the highest number of visitors to the right' (Lundtorp, 2001, p.30). Furthermore, the Gini coefficient ascribes a numerical value to seasonality from zero to one: the closer it is to zero, the

lower the level of seasonality in the destination, while the closer it is to one, the higher the seasonality level (Þórhallsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2017). Currently, it the most used seasonality indicator among all (Duro, 2016).

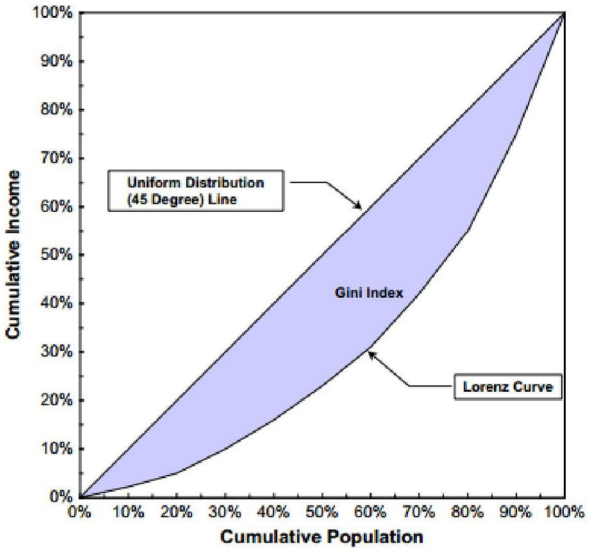

Figure 5: The Lorenz Curve and the Gini Index (source: Groves-Kirkby, Denman, & Phillips, 2009)Formally, it can be calculated as follows (Lundtorp, 2001 in Þórhallsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2017):

$$G = \frac{2}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} (x_i - y_i) \qquad (3)$$

Where:

–n= number of fractiles (days, weeks, months or other time units)

–xi = rank of fractiles: 1/12, 2/12…if using months, 1/52, 2/52…, if using weeks or 1/365, 2/365… if using days. So xi = i/n

–yi = cumulated fractiles in the Lorenz curve

Since the Gini coefficient is the proportion of area A to the total of areas A and B; it can be formulizedas follows: GC=A/(A+B) (Unsal, 2003)

Although the Gini coefficient has some drawbacks, as it is inadequate in determining the monthly distribution of tourist arrivals (Karamstafa & Ulama, 2010) and any equal distribution takes a value equal to zero proposing the total absence of seasonality

(Tsitouras, 2004), it offers different advantages vis-à-vis other indicators (Lundtorp, 2001; Wanhill, 1980; Yacoumis, 1980). Indeed, theGini has greater stability (Lundtorp, 2001), it considers the skewness of the distribution and it is lessinfluenced by extreme values than other indicators, such as the seasonality ratio (Wanhill, 1980; Yacoumis, 1980). Based on these considerations, the Gini coefficient will be taken as reference to study the level of tourism seasonality in the country.

4. Methodology

In the following section, the research paradigm and the methods used to collect and analyse data willbe presented, along with the rationale behind such choices.

4.1 The constructivist research paradigm

The present study addresses the research question through the lenses of the constructivism research paradigm. In the research context, a paradigm can be described 'a basic system or worldview that guides the investigator" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994 p. 105). In particular, a paradigm embraces the following four dimensions: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) (see table 1).

Paradigm	Paradigmatic guiding elements			
	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology	Axiology
Constructivism	Multiple realities/perspectives exist	Intersubjective	Qualitative	Ethics important, externally regulated, and intrinsic to the pursuit of research and the construction of meaning. Value-laden

Table 1: The constructivist research paradigm (source: adapted from Jennings, 2018 in Liburd,2018, p. 252)

First, ontology, the 'study of the nature of reality' (Jennings, 2009, p.672), inquires 'what is the nature of the 'knowable'? or, what is the nature of reality?' (Guba, 1990, p.18). In particular, the constructivist paradigm adopts a relativist ontology, acknowledging that multiple perspectives and realities exist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005;

Guba, 1990; Jennings, 2001). According to the constructivist stance, realities are a construct of the individual's perception of the world, and since there are multiple constructions, similarly there are multiple realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Second, epistemology, the 'study of knowledge' (Jenning, 2009, p.672), inquires 'what is the nature of the relationship between the knower (inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?' (Guba, 1990, p.18).From an epistemological stance, the nature between the researcher and the subject of study is intersubjective (Guba, 1990). Intersubjectivity can be defined as ' the extent to which relevant actorsshare a common understanding of the problems they face and possible solutions to those problems' (Gauri, Woolcock, & Desai, 2013)

Third, methodology regards with the procedures and techniques to do research (Denzin & Lincoln,2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Guba, 1990) and inquires 'how should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?' (Guba, 1990, p.18). It is a more practical dimension than the abovementioned components (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In terms of methodology, constructivist researchers collect and analyse data through qualitative methods (Jennings, 2009). These latter can be defined as a set of interpretive techniques that seek to study and analyse the meaning of phenomena occurring in thesocial world (Van Maanen, 1979). Generally, those methods are used to analyse data that cannot be counted or measured (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). Although, qualitative researchmethods have been criticized for being confusing, contextual (Davies, 2003) and not generalizableto the whole population due to smaller sample size and specificity of the study context (Flick, 2011;Harry & Lipsky, 2014; Thompson, 2011), they offer several advantages to the researcher when approaching a novel topic. Indeed, qualitative research methods are flexible, as they not use pre- defined testable hypotheses, which allows creating new knowledge based on participants' experiences (Ohman, 2005). Qualitative research methods produce detailed and in-depth description of participants' subjective feelings, beliefs, experiences and actions, in specific contextual settings (Denzin, 1989; Rahman, 2016), and allow researchers to discover how meanings are shaped by culture (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Lastly, axiology can be defined as the 'study of ethics and value' (Jenning, 2009, p.672) and it considers the ethical approach for making valuable or right decisions (Finnis, 1980). According tothe constructivist paradigm, axiology is value-laden, as ethics is central for research and the construction of meaning (Guba, 1990; Jennings, 2001).

In the present study research, the researcher decided to be driven by the constructivist paradigm as 'the paradigm seeks to understand a phenomenon under study from the experiences or angles of the participants' (Adom, Yeboah, & Ankrah, 2016, p. 5). Indeed, in order to understand how seasonality affects the tourism economic sustainability of a destination from the tourism stakeholders point of view, the researcher should be free of mental constructs and preconceptions and embrace the possiblemultiple realities that could emerge from the empirical study.

4.2 Data collection

In the first phase of the research design, data was collected through interviews, one of the most used forms of data collection in qualitative research (Marvasti, 2004; Cook, 2008; Persaud, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Brinkmann, 2013). The research design involves the ‘’plans andthe procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.’’ (Creswell, 2014, p.3).

To portray the population, a sample of thirty individuals was selected through a non-probabilistic method, commonly used and suitable for qualitative research (Marshall, 1996; Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Specifically, the researcher implemented a combination of criterion and maximumvariation sampling for selecting the participants. The criterion sampling is a type of purposeful sampling where participants are selected based on some pre-established criteria (Sandelowski, 2000),while maximum variation sampling is another type of purposeful sampling that seeks to maximize the participants heterogeneity relevant to the study purpose (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). In order to be eligible, the participants had to satisfy the following criteria: be a Croatian citizen, work in one of the tourism industries as defined by WTO (n.d), and work seasonally or all year-round in Croatia. According to WTO (n.d.), ‘tourism industries comprise all establishments for which the principal activity is a tourism characteristic activity. Tourism industries (also referred to as tourism activities) are the activities that typically produce tourism characteristic products’. The sampling criteria were selected in accordance to the case study focus and research purpose. The researcher focused on interviewing tourism employees, as these stakeholders are personally affected by seasonality from an economic standpoint (Marshall, 1999; Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003), and thereforecould share their own first-hand experiences and insights. According to the maximum variation sampling technique, the researcher selected interviewees with different job titles, levels of seniority and employment status. Moreover, the researcher selected participants who lived or worked in different coastal and inland regions of Croatia, in order to portray a more heterogeneous sample of the population. The participants were fifteen males and fifteen females, whose age ranged between twenty and fifty-three years. Of those, twelve were self-employed, fifteen were employed and three officially unemployed. The sample size, was chosen following the Morse (1994) and Creswell (1998)recommendations for grounded theory, who respectively suggested collecting between thirty-fifty interviews. Since theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was reached, as no new pieces of information nor patterns were arising, the researcher stopped at the thirtieth interview. Moreover, two preliminary interviews were held to check whether the questions were easily understandable for the interviewees. These were not included in the final study, in order to avoid any piloted answer. From the preliminary interviews arose that the questions were clear, but few terms changed or paraphrased.The final version of the questions is reported in paragraph 3.1.

The thirty semi-structured in-depth interviews were collected from March 9 to April 12, 2021. In this type of interviews, the interviewer has a list of predetermined questions, but the interview has theflexibility to unfold in a conversation in which the interviewees can express unanticipated issues important to them (Longhurst, 2009). Due to COVID-19 restrictions in force, the interviews were held by video call and in three cases by telephone call, due to technical issues or interviewees' preference for this latter method. The interviews lasted approximately thirty to forty minutes and were held in Croatian language in order to avoid language barriers and collect more expressive and accurate information (Cortazzi, 2011).

Concerning ethics and privacy, the interviewees agreed to be recorded and anonymously quoted. Atthe beginning of each conversation, the interviewer stated that the interviewees and companies' names will not be disclosed. Moreover, she stated that there were no right or wrong answers, in orderto make the interviewees feel comfortable and minimize the social desirability bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). Although, the interviewer could not be sure completely sure that the interviewee provided honest answers (Bergen & Labonté, 2020), several interviewees gave some sensitive pieces information, such as that they worked 'under the table' or had large financial issues, suggesting that they felt at ease and safe during the interview. Once all the interviews were collected, these were translated into English. In the present study, the researcher was also the translator, as Croatian is hernative language. The author adopted a rich and flexible descriptions of meanings , as well as paraphrased idioms that could not be literaly translated in English, in order to minimize the risk to lost meaning in translation (Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). Subsequently, the translated interviews were re-read, transcribed with the help of the software Otter, and then the spelling mistakeswere corrected.

4.3 Data Analysis

In the second phase, the interviews were analyzed through a thematic analysis, which 'is a practical data analysis approach' (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p.1). Thematic analysis is an appropriate and powerful method to use when seeking to understand a set of experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across a data set (Braun & Clarke 2012). Researchers can adopt two approaches to thematic analysis: inductive or deductive (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2012).The former one derives themes from the collected data, while the latter one identifies themes based on existing theories and existing frameworks (Braun & Clarke 2012; Varpio et al.2019).

In the present thesis, the thematic analysis was carried out through an inductive approach (Braun &Clarke 2006, 2012). The author opted this type of analysis for two main reasons: first, an inductive approach provides a richer and less narrow-focused analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke 2006), second tourism seasonality is not based on any scientific theory (Lundtorp, 2001), that could guide the researcher through a

deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Moreover, seasonality as subdimension of tourism economic sustainability was introduced by WTO (2004) in its guidebook titled ‘’Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourist Destinations’’, which as well does not constitute a theory. Specifically, the inductive thematic analysis was carried out from April 14 to May 12, 2021, by following the six steps indicated by Braun & Clarke (2006) in Kiger & Varpio (2020):

Step	Description
Step 1: Familiarize with the data	Listen, transcribe and actively read the data.
Step 2: Generate initial codes	Find initial codes in the data. These latter can be defined as the ‘’most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon’ (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63).
Step 3: Search for themes	In the inductive thematic analysis, derive themes from the produced codes.
Step 4: Review themes	Add, combine, divide or discard themes.
Step 5: Define and name themes	Label themes and subthemes in a brief and descriptive way.
Step 6: Produce the report	Write an interpretative final report.

Table 2: The six steps for thematic analysis (source: adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006 in Kiger & Varpio, 2020)

As laid down by Braun & Clarke (2006) and remarked by Kiger & Varpio (2020), the researcher followed the six steps in a circular process, not in a linear one, in view of newly emerged data or themes that need to be considered in the analysis. From the thematic analysis emerged seven main themes and ten subthemes, which are in-depth analysed in paragraph 6.

5. The case study of Croatia

In the present section, the case study of Croatia will be presented. After a brief overview of the county,Croatian tourism key facts will be analysed, as well as the impacts of tourism seasonality on the country’s economic sustainability. In particular, special attention will be given to the impacts of seasonality on employment and investment opportunities.

5.1 The Republic of Croatia: an overview

Croatia, officially The Republic of Croatia, is geographically located in southeast Europe. It borderswith Slovenia and Hungary in the north, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia in the east, Montenegroin the south , and it a shares maritime borders with Italy in the Adriatic Sea (see figure 6 and figure 7). The country covers an area of 56,594 km^2, of which 55,974 km^2 are on land, while 620 km^2 are on water (Opačić, 2014). The county is administratively divided in 20 counties plus the City of Zagreb, which is the capital city and has a special status of both town and county (European Committee of the Regions, 2021).

Figure 6: Geographic map of Croatia (source: Croatia.eu, n.d.)

Figure 7: Croatia in the EU (source: Croatia.eu, n.d.)

According to the 2019 estimate, it has a population of slightly over 4 million inhabitants, precisely4'065' 253. Remarkably, the population growth rate in Croatia shows an ongoing negative trend (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2020a). In 2001, the Croatian population amounted at 4'437'460 inhabitants, which means that the population decreased approximately by 8.39% over the period 2001- 2019. The principal reasons behind such trend are the decrease in the birth rate, the increase inthe mortality rate, as well as the increase in the emigration rate due to the lack of job and entrepreneurship opportunities (European Commission, 2020). According to the 2011 population census, the largest cities are Zagreb (790'017), Split (178'102) and Rijeka (128'624) (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, n.d.)

From a political standpoint, the Republic of Croatia is a relatively new independent country with a turbulent recent past. After holding a referendum, the country declared its independence on June 25th1991 from the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (European Committee of the Regions, 2021). However, the decision was not well accepted and the fact culminated in the Croatian Independence war (1991-1995), which saw colliding the Croatian Army against the Serbian and Yugoslav National Army (YNA) (Rivera, 2008; Cosovschi, 2019). Nowadays, the country is a parliamentary republic and it is a State Member of the European Union since July 1st 2013. Its national flag is the 'Tricolour' (see figure 8), its official language is Croatian, while its official currency is theCroatian Kuna. Nevertheless, the country has committed to adopt the Euro once it meets the necessaryrequirements (HNB, 2020).

Figure 8: Croatian national flag 'The Tricolour' (source: European Union, 2020)

From an economic standpoint, Croatia is a service-oriented economy. Indeed, the tertiary sector is the most prominent one, accounting for approximately 70% of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is defined as 'the total market value of final goods and services produced within an economy in a given year' (O' Sullivan, Sheffrin and Perez, 2013, p.102). On the other hand, the primary sector is the least vital one, accounting for less than 5% of the total GDP (Blažina et al., 2019). 'After a six-year downturn from 2009, the Croatian economy has been on a recovery path since 2015' (Tomić, Rubil, Nestić, Stubbs, 2019, p.8). However, the current COVID-19 poses new threats for the country's economy, which caused a decrease in the 2020 GDP by 8,4 % (Croatian Government, 2021). In 2019, Croatian nominal GDP at current prices was 53'937 million euros, whilethe GDP per capita at current prices was 13'251 euros (European Commission, 2020). In 2019, the unemployment rate was 8.2% one of the highest in the EU (Eures, n.d.). Remarkably, tourism is the most important economic activity, which contributes to 25% of GDP (WTTC, 2020).

5.2 Tourism in Croatia

Croatia has a long tourism tradition, which dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century (Blažina et al., 2019). The country developed mass tourism during the 1960s-1970s, following the economic policies of former Yugoslavia (Kapusta & Wiluś, 2017). Tourist arrival fell sharply duringthe Croatian Independence war in the early 90s, but since then tourist arrivals are increasing (see figure 9), reaching a record 19.6 million tourist arrivals in 2019 (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018; Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2020b). In the aftermath of the COVID-19, tourist arrivals fell sharply by 63% compared to 2019 (HTZ, 2021).

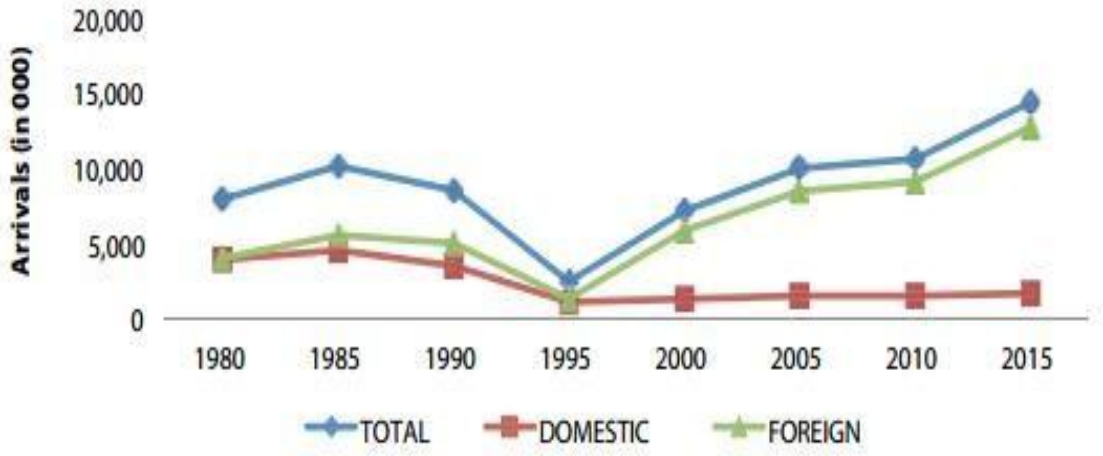

Figure 9: Tourist arrivals in Croatia over the period 1980-2015 (source: HTZ, 2019)

In Croatia, tourism is concentrated along the coastal areas and during the summer months, featuring a classic "sun and sea" tourism mode (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). Although, other types of tourism niches exist, including cultural heritage tourism, adventurous tourism, spa tourism, rural tourism, they are marginalized or under-developed (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018; Bartoluci, Hendija, Petračić, 2016; Perić, 2002). In 2019, the most visited destinations were Dubrovnik, whose popularity increased afterthe filming of the popular series Game of Thrones (Tkalec, Zilic, & Recher, 2017; Šegota, 2018), Rovinj and Poreč, in Istria, followed by Split, Medulin, Umag, Zagreb, Vir, Mali Lošinj and Crikvenica (Croatian Ministry of Tourism, 2020). In Croatia, more than 90% of international visitorsarrive by car (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018) and the main tourism inbound markets are represented by Germany (17%), Slovenia (9%), Austria (9%), Italy (7%), and Poland (6%) (WTTC, 2020). In 2016,the average length of stay in Croatia was 5.3 days, which is lower than the average length of stays in Cyprus (6.3) and Malta (5.9), but still higher than Spain (4.8) or Italy (3.6) (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018).

As mentioned above, tourism represents a key sector for the country (Blažina et al., 2019; Orsini &Ostojić, 2018). In 2019, tourism represented 25% of Croatian GDP and it created 383.4 thousand jobs, representing 25.1% of total employment. Tourism visitor spend generated HRK 80,247.5 MN, representing 38.6% of total exports. Of those, international spending represented 89% of the total, while domestic accounted only 11% (see table 2) (WTTC, 2020).

Croatian Tourism in Figures 2019	
Contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP	25.0% of total economy Total T&T GDP = HRK99,854.3MN(USD 15,025.8 MN)
Contribution of Travel & Tourism to Employment	383.4 jobs (000's) (25.1% of total employment)
International Visitor Impact	HRK 80,247.5 MN in visitor spend (38.6% of total exports)(USD 12,075.4 MN)

Table 3: Croatian tourism in figures 2019 (source: WTTC, 2020).

However, the Croatian tourism sector suffers from different inefficiencies that hinder it from achieving its latent potential (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). Indeed, Croatian tourism is characterized by high level of seasonality, limited variety of tourism products and services, as well as low average spending (Croatian Ministry of Tourism, 2013). In addition, Croatian accommodation sector is characterized by a high share of private rooms (63.2%) and camping sites (18.6%) compared to hotelsand aparthotels (10.3%) (HTZ, 2020; Orsini & Ostojić, 2018), which are less labour intensive types of accommodation and therefore create less jobs opportunities (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018).

5.3 Sustainable tourism in Croatia

Over the last years, the Croatian Government has increased its commitment towards tourismsustainability (Croatian Ministry of Tourism, 2013). However, there are different aspects that threatenthe country's tourism sustainable development (Krstinić Nižić, & Drpić, 2013).

From an environmental standpoint, Croatian tourism sustainability is challenged by different factors. First of all, Croatia, a country that is already lagging behind in terms of waste management, has to deal with an increasing amount of waste, particularly during the peak season. Indeed, Croatia will need to intensify the recycling of municipal waste in order to meet the EU recycling target of 55% by 2025. Currently, Croatia is producing approximately 403 kg of waste per capita per year. Ofthis, only 21.5% is recycled, 0.1% is incinerated, while 78.4% is placed in landfills. For comparison,some EU countries such as Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium only dispose 1% of the municipality waste in landfills. (European Parliament, 2018). Moreover, the country's environmentalprotection is threatened by the increase in volume of tourist arrivals and tourism constructions (UnitedNations Economic Commission for Europe, 2014). One major problem is that in Croatia tourism growth is not geographically evenly distributed, but concentrated in few coastal counties and nationalparks. For instance, between 2011 and 2016, tourist arrivals in the national parks of Kornati and Krkaincreased by more than

150% (World Bank, 2018). For instance, the development of nautical tourismthreatens the marine environment and the rich biodiversity of the Croatian Adriatic Sea (Kovačić, Gračan, & Jugović, 2015).

From a socio-cultural perspective, sustainability is challenged by the social pressure on local inhabitants arising from tourism congestion in terms of space and time (Krstinić Nižić, & Drpić, 2013;Marković & Klarić, 2015). In particular, the exponential tourism growth along Croatian coastal areas,'after the initial euphoria and empathy, it brought to the total alienation and antagonism of local inhabitants towards tourists and tourism as a phenomenon' (Krstinić Nižić, & Drpić, 2013, p.160). Marković & Klarić (2015) investigated the attitude of Croatians towards tourism, finding that the inhabitants that hold the most negative opinions about tourism are the one living along the coast, where tourism development has become too intense and tourism has become the predominant economic activity. Moreover, tourism has caused internal migrations from Croatian rural areas to coastal tourism destinations, leading to the socio-cultural and economic impoverishment of countryside areas (Krstinić Nižić & Drpić, 2013).

From an economic perspective, tourism sustainability is challenged by different structural and economic inefficiencies, as well as by the extreme level of tourism seasonality (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). Given that the tourism economic sustainability is the main focus of the present thesis, this dimension will be explored further in the next paragraphs.

5.4 Tourism economic sustainability in Croatia

Although, tourism is a key economic activity for Croatia, the country overdependence on tourism may not be economically sustainable in the long run (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018), particularly in the current COVID-19 crisis (Mazzocco, 2020; Milekic, 2020). Indeed, the tourism sector is volatile andvulnerable to external shocks (Ringbeck & Pietsch, 2009), such as terroristic attack, financial crisis, political turmoils, natural disasters and epidemics (Baker, 2014; WTTC, 2019).

One major drawback of the Croatian tourism is that the sector is not well integrated with the localeconomy, neither well linked with other sectors of the economy. For instance, 'Croatia's hotels and restaurants sells few intermediate inputs to other sectors (forward linkages), and only producesfinal products. Moreover, Croatia's tourism sector purchases fewer inputs from other sectors (backward linkages), compared to the level of purchases by the tourism sector in other countries' (World Bank, 2018, p.18). According to the World Bank (2018), Croatia should use the opportunityto link the tourism sector with other ones, particularly with the agricultural one. Payne & Mervar (2010) in their study investigating the relationship between tourism and economic growth found thatin Croatia economic development leads to tourism growth and not vice versa. The authors claimed that 'Croatian governmental policies should focus attention on the stability and transparency of its political institutions and continue to foster

adequate investment in both physical and human capital that promotes growth for the overall economy' (p. 1093).

Moreover, Croatia has one of the largest informal or shadow economies of the European Union, which hinders the country's fiscal sustainability (Schneider, 2015; World Bank, 2018). Indeed, the informal economy deprives the government of a substantial stream of tax revenues. In 2015, the shadow economy was estimated to account 27.7% of Croatian GDP. Given that agricultural sector plays a minor role in the Croatian economy, informal transactions and informal employment occur principally in the service sector, especially in tourism (Kesar & Čuić, 2017; Schneider, 2015; World Bank, 2018). Furthermore, Croatian tourism economic sustainability is strongly challenged by unbalanced regional development and pronounced seasonality (see paragraph 4.3) (Orsini & Ostojić,2018).

5.5 Tourism Seasonality in Croatia

As introduced above, Croatian tourism follows an extreme seasonal pattern, one of the highest one inthe EU (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018) (see figure 10). In 2016, more than 75% of tourist nights were spentin July, August and September (Eurostat, 2016 in Orsini & Ostojić, 2018).

Kožić, Krešić, & Boranić-Živoder (2013) attempted to quantify the level of Croatian seasonality through the use of the Gini coefficient, which ascribes a numerical value to seasonality from zero to one: the closer it is to zero, the lower the level of seasonality in the destination, while the closer it is to one, the higher the seasonality level (Þórhallsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2017) . From the study it emerged that for the period 2001-2010 the Gini coefficient was always above 0.65 for international visitors, while it ranged between 0,40 and 0,45 for domestic ones (Kožić, Krešić, & Boranić-Živoder (2013). Also, Ćorluka, Vukušić & Kelić (2018) quantified Croatian tourism seasonality with different methods obtaining similar results.

Seasonality challenges the country's economic sustainability on both a macro and micro level. On the one hand, seasonality limits the tourism spillover effect to other economic sectors; on the other, seasonality its problematic for small local tourism business as well as for large hotels, which usuallyhave high running expenses (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). The high of seasonality is partially related to the fact that Croatia is perceived as a sea and sun destination (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018) and that tourismis mainly focused along the coast (Demunter & Dimitrakopoulou, 2014). For instance, seasonality affects also National parks, such as Plitvice Lakes and Krka, which although are opened all year round, the majority of visitors come during summer months (Brosy, Zaninovic & Matzarakis, 2014). However, according to Čavlek, Bartoluci, Kesar, Čižmar, & Hendija (2010), 'the seasonal character of Croatian tourism cannot be explained merely through geographical conditions and established trend of holiday making in Europe'. The crucial problem is the structure of accommodation capacities, which is less favourable than with the Croatian competition '(p. 157).

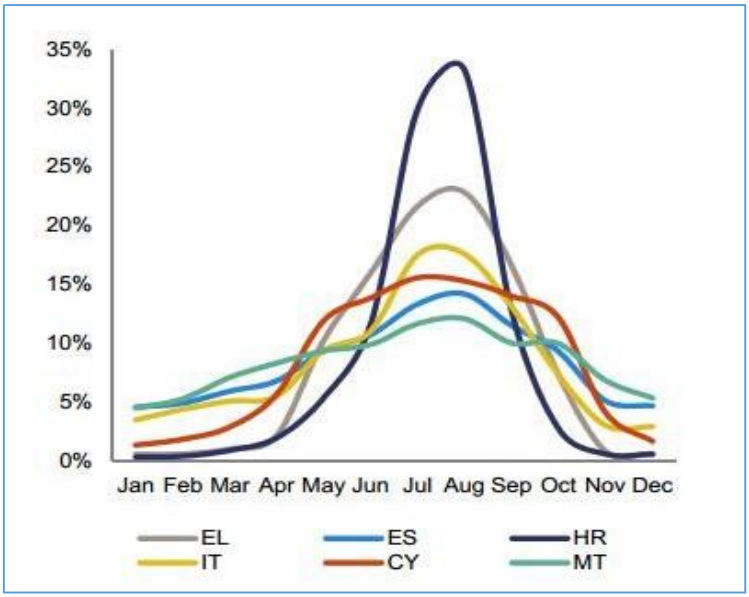

Figure 10: Yearly distribution of overnight stays by international tourists in selected EU countries, 2016 (Eurostat, 2016 in Orsini & Ostojić, 2018).

The high level of seasonality undermines tourism job stability throughout the year (Orsini & Ostojić,2018; Tomić, Rubil, Nestić, Stubbs, 2019). In Croatia, almost 45% of workers employed in the tourism industry are temporary workers, representing one of the highest share in the European Union(Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). In 2018, Croatia had the highest rate of 'contracts up to three months'(6.8%),which are precarious work contacts, largely above while the European Union averagefor the same period (2.2%). In Croatia, seasonal workers do not have benefits associated with contracttermination, nor Christmas bonuses, while overtime hours are paid less than on standard contracts (Bejaković & Klemenčić, 2018).

The country has introduced also a type of contract called 'permanent seasonal worker' (stalni sezonac), aimed at helping employers and employees 'to save time and effort spent on filling job vacancies from season to season' (Bejaković & Klemenčić, 2019, p.14). This type of contract, entitlesthe employer to request the government co-financing of the employee's pension insurance during thelow season, up to six months. In return, the employer must offer the seasonal worker a job for the following season and the employee must accept it, otherwise they must return the amount of the publicly funded pension insurance. However, this type of contract he institution of permanent seasonal work is challenging for both the employer and the employee worker. On the one hand, the employer must pledge to offer a job without knowing the performance of the next season, while workers cannot look for a better job or otherwise they must refund the contributions to their former employer (Ribičić & Jovanović, 2012).

Similarly, the high level of tourism seasonality in Croatia is a major barrier for investment in the sector. Indeed, Croatia has the lowest share of capital investment in tourism among the countries ofthe Adriatic and Ionian Region (AdriGov, 2017), as well as of the Mediterranean area (Obadić, & Pehar, 2016). Between 1993 and 3 quarter of

2020, Croatia received foreign direct investments in theamount of EUR 32.96 billion, but of those only 4.7% were directed in the tourism sector (Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, 2021). For instance, in Croatia hotel chains are predominantly domestic since seasonality is a major threat for international investors (Horwath HTL, 2019). Bezić & Nikšić Radić (2017), investigated the relationship between foreign direct investment(FDI) in tourism and tourism gross value added in the Republic of Croatia. From the study emerged that Croatia should create advantageous conditions to attract F.D.I. in tourism, as these latter have a high potential to boost sustainable tourism development, as well as sustainable economic growth in the country. Nonetheless, despite the wide ranging negative impacts of seasonality on employment and capital investment in Croatia, the topic is still underinvestigated and ill-documented.

6. Research findings

In the present paragraph, the research finding of the empirical study will be illustrated and analysed.As mentioned in the methodology (see paragraph 3.3), the collected interviews were analysed through an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The analysisresulted in seven main themes and ten subthemes summarized in the following table.

Themes	Subthemes
1. Seasonality and Tourism Employment	Affected by seasonality
	Not affected by seasonality
2. Tourism Seasonal Employment	Profitability
	Economic sustainability
3. Social Security dissatisfaction	
4. Government Subsidies	Covid-19 subsidies
	Unemployment subsidies
	Permanent seasonal worker
5. Seasonality and Investment	
6. Investment choices	Tourism
	Education
	Considering the primary sector
7. Banking issues	

Table 4: Thematic analysis results
(source: own drawing)

Seasonality and Tourism Employment

The first theme is labelled ‘seasonality and tourism employment’ and it comprehends two subthemes.The first subtheme, titled ‘affected by seasonality’, encapsulates comments of participants whose jobdepends on tourism seasonality. Some of the comments included in this category are the following:

- ‘I can say that the length of tourism season really affects me, because I principally

work during sevenmonths (…) during which I have to make enough money to live the entire year (...). Sometimes I can work up to nine months because the city where I live allows it. But I am minority, because the majorityof tourism employees cannot work that long, simply because there are no tourists in wintertime.' (Tourist guide)

- 'Of course we are affected by seasonality (…) We start working in May or June and then we work until October. We open when the first tourists arrive.' (Souvenir shop owner)

Remarkably, the present subtheme comprehends the vast majority of participants' comments. Indeed,in Croatia 45% of workers employed in the tourism industry are temporary ones, representing one ofthe highest share in the European Union (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). However, as it emerges from numerous comments, seasonality does not affect only seasonal employees, but also affects entrepreneurs whose businesses are officially open all year-round:

- 'We are open 365 days per year except for Christmas and Easter (…), but I work only in summertime.In wintertime, there is no one (…). I keep my business open, because it is time consuming to do all bureaucratic steps to close and reopen it. (...) I wish the tourism season could be longer' (Travel agency owner)

- 'Although I don't work in wintertime I keep my business open all year round, because sometimes I also work with translations' (Tourist guide)

To better understand these quotes, it should be observed that in the Republic of Croatia, business owners can decide whether they prefer to keep their business open all year round or only seasonally,up to nine months (HOK, n.d.). However, often entrepreneurs keep their businesses open on a yearlybasis, despite working only during the tourist season. Some travel agent and tour guides stated they preferred keeping their business open on a yearly-basis due to bureaucratic reasons, while others because they work with translations in wintertime. Similarly, an interviewed restaurant owner argued that although his restaurant operated only in summertime, it was officially open all year round, as otherwise he could not be eligible for bank loans. From these quotes, it emerges that seasonality haswider effect on Croatian tourism employment than official statistics report. Furthermore, all the participants stated that they would like to work longer, but they do not have the possibility as there are no or few visitors in wintertime. Indeed, in Croatia more than 75% of tourist overnights stays occur in July, August and September (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). Nevertheless, for some segments of the populations, such as students, being a seasonal employee does not represent an issue (Murphy, 1985; Mourdoukoutas, 1988). As one interviewee stated:

- 'I was only looking for tourism summer jobs, it's a good thing for me now, because during wintertimeI study, while in summertime I can earn some money'. (Student and seasonal waitress)

The second subtheme is labelled 'not affected by seasonality' and comprehends comments of participants whose job contract does not depends on tourism seasonality.

Remarkably, participants that identified themselves as managers working for hotel chains or tour operators gave all the statements falling under this category. Some of the comments included are the following ones:

- 'I am employed all year-round. (…) I am not affected by seasonality (…) My wage is fixed, it's alwaysthe same. Every manager in this company has a fixed contract, with a fixed wage.' (Wedding and event manager)

- 'I am not affected by seasonality, I work all year-round'

Then she continues:

- 'Honestly, I started looking for a full-time job since I graduated (...) I found it after two years (…), before I was a seasonal employee (…) It was very difficult to find the job I have now.' (Tour operator contract manger)

From the interviews it emerges that managers in hospitality and tourism are not affected byseasonality, as they are employed all-year round and their wage does not vary according to the season.In addition, different participants stated that finding a permanent job in tourism is a difficult and challenging mission that could take more than one year. However, although managers are not directly affected by seasonality, this latter challenges them to find employees:

- 'Seasonality does not affect me, because I work all year round since I am a manager. However, seasonality represents a problem for our employees and for finding them. We do not know when wewill need employees, in which month exactly'. (DMC manager)

Tourism Seasonal jobs

The second theme, labelled 'tourism seasonal jobs', as well encompasses two subthemes. The first one is labelled 'profitability' and it encapsulates comments that describe tourism seasonal jobs as being financially profitable, despite their drawback of being temporary short. Commentary in this category includes, amongst others:

- 'I've been working as a seasonal employee for four years. The main reason I decided to work as a waitress in tourism destinations is because of higher wages (…). It is more profitable (…) I can earnthree times more when I work a seasonal employee then when I work in my hometown where there are no tourists ' (waitress).

- 'I'm satisfied with having a seasonal business because I live in a tourist destination where you can work only few months per year, but you can earn a lot of money. I'm very, very satisfied with it (Boatrental owner).

As it emerges from the comments, working as an employed or self-employed seasonal employee in tourism destinations gives individuals opportunities to earn better wages, up to three times more, overa short period of time. Mourdoukoutas (1988) discovered

similar results in his study concerning tourism job opportunities in Greek islands, where he found that several individuals chose seasonal tourism jobs because it paid better and also allowed them to pursue other activities during the low season. Furthermore, as mentioned by an interviewee, a variable that makes seasonal jobs in tourismdestinations so profitable are gratuities:

- 'If you are a hotel maid or a cleaning lady or if you have any other job position where you don't usually receive tips, it's not really profitable to be a seasonal employee (…). However, if you are a waiter or a bartender, then you receive tips (…), then it's really profitable to work as a seasonal employee. I would say that then is even more profitable than working all year round. (Bartender)

Giving tips in tourism and hospitality, especially in restaurants, 'is a social norm in many countries and has important functions as a source of income, with significant social welfare effects' (Gössling,Fernandez, Martin-Rios, Reyes, Fointiat, Isaac & Lunde, 2021, p.811). The possibility to earn gratuities make some tourism seasonal jobs more appealing than others, and could make appear tourism seasonal jobs even more lucrative vis-à-vis permanent jobs. This happens also in other countries with a strong vocation for tourism. For instance, in Cuba, citizens are leaving their job position to work in the tourism industry as they earn gratuities exceed by ten times the base salary (Feinberg & Newfarmer, 2016). Nevertheless, as mentioned by another participant:

- 'Working as a seasonal employee, it's more profitable in the short term. However, over the long term,we realize that we could have earned the same amount of money as if we had worked all year round'.(Bartender)

Here, it emerges the short-term profitability of tourism seasonal jobs, as often the income earned during the short tourism season has to provide financial support for the entire year. Indeed, this comment is a preamble for the following subtheme.

The second subtheme is labelled 'economic sustainability' and it presents the other side of the coin of tourism seasonal jobs. The comments in the present subtheme state that tourism seasonal jobs, although profitable, are not economically sustainable over the long term:

- 'I think that working in the tourism sector, it's not sustainable economically over the long term. Although you can earn a lot in summer, it means also that during those six winter months in which you do not work you have no income (…) That's not an ideal situation. (Waitress)

- 'Over the long term, being a seasonal employee is not economically and physically sustainable. I cando it now that I am young, but it is difficult to work as a seasonal employee over the long term.' (Waiter)

As these quotes illustrate, tourism seasonal jobs are regarded as not being economically sustainable over the long term, due to their precariousness and short-term income generation. These features do not align with the UNEP and UNWTO (2005) definition of tourism economic sustainability. According to the definition, tourism that is

economically sustainable ensures viable long-term economic operations, provides fair socioeconomic benefits to all stakeholders, includes stableemployment, income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, as well as contributes to poverty alleviation. Moreover, different participants when stating that seasonal jobs are not economically sustainable added that those jobs are also not physically sustainable, as they are 'highly demanding' with 'long shifts, over 12 hours' and 'do not have a day-off'. Indeed, tourism seasonal job often involve unsocial working shifts and physical stress (ILO & WTO, 2014).

One the other hand, an interviewee stated that seasonal jobs could be economically sustainable for individuals that are single, as in her case, but not for families, as seasonal jobs also often involve interregional temporary displacement:

- 'I think that being a seasonal employee, it is economically sustainable over the long term for people that do not have a family. However, if you have a family it is difficult to move around from season to season.'

Indeed, often Croatian inhabitants of poorer rural counties move to coastal areas during summertimefor working as tourism seasonal employee (HZZ, 2018). Then she adds:

- 'Also, I think that if the tourism season is longer than six months, as it is here in the south, it can be economically sustainable. However, if it less than six, then it's difficult. I worked on different Croatianislands, and there tourism season lasts less than six months' (Hotel employee)

According to the interviewee, tourism could be sustainable from an economic perspective if the tourism season lasts more than six months. Although the existing academic literature does not state what makes an ideal level of seasonality (Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005), the majority of interviewees stated that for them a 'good tourism season' meant one that lasted 'more than six months'.

Social security dissatisfaction

The third theme is labelled 'social security dissatisfaction'. As the label suggests, the present theme encapsulates comments expressing dissatisfaction with the social security, namely the health insurance & pension funds. Dissatisfaction with the social security was expressed by both permanentand seasonal tourism employees. In particular, permanent employees expressed dissatisfaction for the pension fund and stated that the social contributions for them and for their employees ere too expensive:

- 'Social Security funds, which include pension and health insurance, are too expensive. Since I have to pay a lot the social security funds, I cannot offer my employees high wages. The Social Security contribution is almost the same amount the wage I pay to my employee (Travel agency owner and manager).

- 'So with the health insurance, I'm partially satisfied, because it works quite well (...), while with the pension plans, I'm not really satisfied. I pay almost 150 euros per month and it's likely that I will notsee this money ever again. I would be

better off if I would pay this money to a private pension fund,but unfortunately I cannot. I think they should give us the opportunity to choose which pension fund we would like to have and pay for' (Travel agent owner and tour guide)

On the other hand, seasonal employees stated that they were not satisfied with the social security as they did not felt safe and that often their employees were not paying their social contributions:

- 'I'm not satisfied from a social security standpoint, because I have health insurance and pension fundsonly when I am working during those six months.' (Bartender)

Remarkably, seasonal workers are the most affected by the problem, as seasonal jobs do not offer thesocial security coverage required by standard labor contracts (Cuccia & Rizzo, 2011; ILO, 2015, 2017). Moreover, as stated by different participants, seasonal employees are often underreported anddo not benefit from social security funds:

'Before when I was working for private small restaurants they were not paying me all the social contributions, and that makes me really angry. (…) It's not only the wage that matters, it matters the social security' (hotel employee).

Similarly, some interviewed private renters and apartment housekeepers affirmed that they were working 'under the table' and not paying the social contributions:

- 'Honestly, I do not pay any pension fund nor health insurance. I have the minimum health insurancethat the government grants.' (Apartment renter)

As it emerged from different comments, undeclared work is most common among tourism small andmedium-sized enterprises as opposed to large companies and hotel chains. Remarkably, in the Republic of Croatia the shadow economy negatively affects employees, who cannot fully benefit of social contributions such as health insurance, pension funds and unemployment subsidies (EuropeanCommission, 2016). Therefore, some participants described to be 'angry' with their previous employers that did not fully pay their social security contributions.

Governmental subsidies

The fourth theme is labelled 'governmental subsidies' and it comprehends three subthemes. The firstone is titled 'Covid-19 subsidies' and it encapsulates comments of employees who were or still receiving the Covid-19 measures for them or their employees. Comments in this category were given by both seasonal and permanent employees. Some of the comments are the following:

- 'So currently, I am using the COVID subvention and when the government will stop to give it to me,I will be obliged to close my business.' (Tour guide)

- 'I am using the COVID government measures, because really the COVID affected us a lot. However,since I just opened one year and a half ago, I couldn't receive the COVID-19 subsidies all year around.Really the government has thrived to help tourism employees, but the measure are sometimes are notenough.'(Travel agent)

- ‘Our wages were cut by 25% and we were on the COVID measures (…) a large part of our wage wasgiven by the government. So we were depending on that measures, the State was giving 4000 kunas per month per employee. So until the government is giving you some subsidy evasion, you feel safe,but when the government will stop to do it. We don't know how are future will be like’ (DMC manager)

As it emerges from the comments above, the Covid-19 subventions are considered vital for tourism workers, as the pandemics hardly hit their finances. Different interviewees voiced that without the government measure they would have been obliged to close their businesses. Indeed, the travel and tourism sector are one of the most affected by the Covid-19 and the following travel restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus (UNWTO, 2020). According to the Croatian Tourism Bureau, due to the pandemics tourist arrivals in the country in 2020 fell by 63% compared to previous year (HTZ, 2021). The Croatian Government adopted different measures aimed at maintaining liquidity and preserving jobs in tourism, which so far amount at 6.3 billion kunas. In particular, include travel andtourism-related activities could receive a subsidy of 4,000 kunas per employee, whether they turnoverdropped more than 60 percent (Croatian Government, 2020).

The second subtheme is labelled ‘unemployment subsidies’. Remarkably, comments falling under this category were given exclusively by seasonal employees:

- ‘I receive unemployment subsidies every two years, because only every two years I am eligible for it. ‘(Waiter)

- ‘Every two years, I can receive unemployment subsidies because I worked at least nine months. Thenthe government gives me subsidies, where I receive 70% of my wage for the first three months. That’s ok. Therefore, I can say that the government cares about us. They are financing to help people that are not working.’ (Bartender)

All the seasonal employees interviewed stated that they were receiving unemployment subsidies every two years, as in order to receive unemployment subsidies workers have to be employed at leastnine months over the previous 24 months. According to Croatian law, unemployed individuals can receive 70% of their average wage and later they can receive up to 35% of their average wage (HZZ,n.d.). Interestingly, Mourdoukoutas (1988) in his study concerning tourism job opportunities in Greek islands, stated that unemployment subsidies for seasonal workers in the non-working period only harms the economy. According to the author, unemployment subsidies ‘generate positive wage differentials between tourism and other occupations which may induce laborers to quit any other seasonal or nonseasonal occupation and enter the tourist industry’ (Mourdoukoutas, 1988, p.327). However, the interviewed tourism seasonal workers stated that the unemployment subsidies were important as they helped them mitigating the effects of tourism seasonality.

The third subtheme, labelled ‘permanent seasonal worker’, encapsulates participants

point of view concerning the permanent seasonal worker (‘stalni sezonac’) measure. Generally, participants statedthat the measure is too ‘strict’ and poses several limitations:

- ‘I never was on the permanent seasonal worker’ measure, because for having that benefit you have towork six months and the employee has to guarantee that you will come back to work for him. I didn't have that opportunity because my seasonal job lasts only five months and not six’ (Bartender)
- ‘We never used the full time seasonal contracts because there are a lot of rules and regulations concerning that status. Because full time seasonal employees have to work six months and six monthshave to stay at home. However, sometimes we work seven months in our business and we couldn’t even use that measure. Moreover, when people are on that type of contract, they cannot find an additional job. This type of contract is not very used, because for instance, our employees during winter times, like working in some other cafes or clubs, but if they were permanent seasonal workersthey could not (…) Our employees do not like that measure, because it's very strict’ (Restaurant and hostel owner)
- ‘Last year, I was on the full time seasonal employee measure, so I couldn't work during winter time.You are not allowed to work because when you are on that measure the government is co-financing your health insurance and pension funds (…). It is not such a good measure as it may seem. I was notsatisfied with that measure.’ (Hotel employee)

As it emerges from the above comments, different employers and employees remarked the drawbacksof the measure. Above all, it was highlighted that the measure lacks of flexibility, as it requires seasonal employees to work exactly six months in order to be eligible for it. However, different participants stated that their seasonal job last five or seven months and thus they are not eligible for the measure. Moreover, some participants stated that the fact that you cannot ‘legally work’ while being on that measure is a major drawback for them:

- ‘The government should allow also full time seasonal employees to find additional job during wintertime in order to create economic stability’ (waiter)

These limitations are reflected in the low level of implementation of the measure. In 2017, there were 2831 only permanent seasonal workers, in 2018 there were 1550, while seasonal tourism employees are more than 40000 (Bejaković & Klemenčić, 2019).

Seasonality and Investment

The fifth theme is labelled ‘seasonality and investment’ .Within this theme, commentators voice thatthe length of the tourism season does affect their investment decisions. Commentary in this categoryincludes, amongst others:

- ‘Although a longer tourism season does not immediately mean more profit, as some businesses can earn more in two months then other businesses can or in five months, the length of tourism season really affects my personal and business

investment decisions, because your income is more stable when the season is longer'. (Tourist guide)

- 'Of course the length of the tourist season affects my investment decisions. Now that the 2020 touristseason was very short, I reduced my investments (….). Similarly, if you plan to work over a longer period, then you have to think about investing money In rearranging your business. You have to closethe terrace, you have to buy energy for the heating, you have to think about how to heat your business.(Restaurant owner)
- 'Depending on the length of the tourist season then you decide whether you will invest or not, you will decide whether you will invest in your boat or not, whether you will paint the boat or not. This will be the first time that due to the pandemics I will not invest that much in my boat. The boat requires lots of investment in order to stay attractive and well-functioning.' (Taxi boat owner)

According to the majority of interviewees, the length of the tourism season affects their readiness toinvest as a longer tourism season means more income stability. Vice versa, different participants stated that the shorter the tourism season the lower their level investment. Interviewees specified thatdue to the Covid-19 the tourist season 2020 was extremely short, 'less than two month', and that forthe first time over the last few years they will invest as little as possible. According to the literature, tourism seasonality represents a major risk for investments, also creating difficulties to attract private investors (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). For instance, the high level of seasonality in Croatia is a majorbarrier for international investors and thus hotel chains in the country are predominantly domestic (Horwath HTL, 2019).

However, two participants argued that the length of the tourism season only partially affects their investment decisions, as they need to invest in their businesses independently on how long they work.

Investment choices

The sixth theme labelled 'investment choices' contains three subthemes. The first subtheme titled **'**tourism investments' is the largest one and it embrace comments of interviewees who have investedor are planning to invest in tourism. Some of the comments included are the following:

- 'I am still investing in tourism. That's the way it works here. Maybe I know I should change something, but we're always hoping that tourism will recover'. (DMC manager)
- 'I'm investing only tourism. Because tourism is the most profitable sector, and you have the return on investment in the shortest period of time. And it's the safest, at least until now. Now the COVIDhas changed things, but tourism will be back. I think that there is no other sector, as profitable as tourism' (Apartment renter and souvenir shop owner)

- ‘I am exclusively investing in the tourism sector, because I do not have anywhere else to invest my money (…) After the COVID-19, I started to change my opinion concerning tourism, I realized that investing only tourism is not that safe as it seemed. I'm starting to question myself where else I couldstart investing money, maybe I could invest in some other sector.’ (Apartment renter)

- ‘I am planning to build some luxurious villas, because also now after the COVID-19 we saw that tourists are looking for places where they are isolated. These villas outside the city centers have hugepotential.’

As it emerges from the comments, the majority of the interviewees are still investing only in the tourism sector despite the Covid-19 crisis. Specifically, the majority of interviewees stated that they are investing in building tourism accommodations or upgrading their existing tourism businesses. The main reasons given behind such choice were that in Croatia tourism is the major and most profitable economic activity and that they are used to invest in tourism. Nonetheless, investing exclusively only in one sector increases risks and not only is not safe for individuals (Knuth, 2015), but neither for the Croatian economy (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). Indeed, in banking, investors manage investment risks by investing across diverse sectors (Knuth, 2015). Although few participantsacknowledged that the Covid-19 crisis showed them that investing tourism sector is not ‘safe’, they are still investing in it as they hope that tourism will recover soon:

- ‘We have been investing in the design of the packaging in order to make our souvenirs attractive. I hope to stay and invest in tourism. We still believe that tourists will be back. Last year was a bad year, but economic recessions can happen, any economic activity has up and downs.’ (Souvenir shopowner)

Although crises in tourism are not a new phenomenon (Scott, Laws, & Prideaux, 2013), epidemics can create more negative pressure on tourism demand than terrorism (Breitsohl & Garrod, 2016; Novelli, Burgess, Jones, & Ritchie, 2018).Furthermore, different participants stated that they were not aware where else they could invest their money besides in tourism.

The second subtheme is titled ‘education’ and it encapsulates comments of participants who are investing in their or their employees’ education. Some of the statements included are the following:

- ‘I have been investing the most in my education because I am a chef. The more I am educated, the easier I can find a better job. (…) I had to pay for myself all the courses, as the employer does not really care. He only cares about the profit. Also my friends who are chefs had to pay the courses for themselves. Only luxurious restaurants and hotels with five stars pay the employees’ training ‘(Chef)

- ‘Five years ago, I did a cocktail master course, because I wanted to educate myself (…) I had to payfor the course’ (Bartender)

The majority of participants stated that they invested in their education in order to have better job opportunities. The majority of interviewees added that they paid for the courses and that their employer never offered them any training. Also, few interviewees added that only high class restaurants and hotels offer some kind of formal or informal education to employees As it emerges from the literature, often employers do not recognise the importance of education (Peacock & Ladkin,2002) and only basic training is provided for seasonal employees (Murphy, 1985) , hindering the product and quality standards (Baum, 1999). According to Hjalager & Andersen (2000), family business and mid-range hotels cannot afford employees' trainings, while larger companies that train employees face the issue problem of retaining their skilled workers, which tend to move to businessesthat provide higher wages. However, few participants stated that they were offering education to theiremployees:

- 'Before the COVID we were investing a lot in our employees education, especially the employees that were working in our restaurant, because we think that what makes a restaurant good is not only its hardware and the physical elements, but its employees… We were focusing a lot on the employees'education while our competitors did not do that' (Restaurant and hostel owner)

- 'When I had five or six employees, I paid them the tour guide courses, wine tasting courses. I paid also the tour guide license for my brother. I'm always investing money to upgrade my travel agency in order to be better than the competition. (Tourist guide and travel agent owner)

As it emerges from the comments, the entrepreneurs who were providing training for their workers saw it as their competitive advantage to stand out from the crowd, as quality is very important for them.

The third subtheme is labelled 'willingness to invest in the primary sector'. Here, participants statedthat they were willing to invest in the primary sector, particularly in agriculture and fishery, howeverthey had not done it yet due to the different barriers:

- 'I would like to become a fisherman, but it is difficult to make a living out of it. I do not have any equipment yet. I would need a subvention from the government in order to be able to buy the equipment.' (Apartment renter)

- 'My parents have their own fields where they grow tangerines and I also was thinking about investingsome money to upgrade our agriculture family business. However, that's difficult (…) we need moremeasures that make feel farmers safe, more security that we will sell your products.' (Hotel employee)

- 'I wanted to invest in the agricultural and farming sector because I could link it with the gastronomy;the problem is that I do not have enough money to invest in that.' (Chef)

- 'The major problem is that we worked the fields, but no one grants you that they will buy your products, you can lose money. We used to give fruit for free as we could not sold it (…). The government should help small agricultural families to

sell their products to large retail chains… thenit would be much easier and safer to work in the agricultural sector.' (Waiter)

Currently, the Croatian primary sector is the least vital one, accounting for less than 5% of the total GDP (Blažina et al., 2019). This latent potential of the Croatian agricultural sector fails to materializedue to different reasons. First, participants stated that they would need government subventions for purchasing land and modern equipment. Second, different participants stated that in Croatia there areno measures that make feel farmers feel sure that they will be able to sell their products. Remarkably, different tourism employees are willing to invest in agriculture to link the sector with tourism, which is also a recommendation of the World Bank 2018 Country Report. Indeed, Croatian tourism sector fails to link with other economic sector, such as the agricultural one (World Bank, 2018). However, according to an interviewee, one reason behind this issue is that:

- 'Croatian farmers are limited in size and capacity. They cannot satisfy the demand of large hotels, large restaurants''. (Tourist Board Director of a Croatian rural destination)

Bank issues

The seventh theme is labelled 'bank issues'. This theme encapsulates the difficulties that tourism employees, both permanent and seasonal, face with receiving bank credits. The majority of interviewees have stated that the bank issues are hindering their investment decisions and different participants stated that they had to give up with their investment projects:

- 'I had problems because I needed a bank credit but the bank didn't give it to me, so I gave up on my investment project.' (Apartment renter).

In particular, seasonal employees and business were the most exposed to the problem:

'Banks are very reluctant to give loans to seasonal businesses and seasonal employees, as they thinkthat seasonal businesses and seasonal employees cannot be trusted (…). The bank does not want to talk with us (…) Although we work very well during those few months and we are earn a lot of money, still the bank is reluctant to give credits to you' (Restaurant owner).

As it emerges from the above statement, seasonal business face severe issues with receiving bank loans, despite the amount of their business turnover. This confirms the findings of the previous studies that claim that seasonality complicates finding access to capital (Butler 1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000). Moreover, few participants stated that they needed a loan when they opened their businesses, but after facing issues with the bank they turned to private money lenders:

- 'If you want to earn you must invest. However, at the beginning, it's difficult because the bank does not give you any credit. When I started working, I remember that banks told me: oh, you just open your business, we cannot give

you any loan. So I had to ask for a loan to private parties. This is something not really legal. It's to say a gray area, but if you want to work you have to do like this.' (Travel agent and tourist guide)

- 'Well, at the beginning, I need a credit from a bank, but in the end people who sold me the first two boats, they gave me it on a debit (...) So actually, I had a debit with other people instead of the bank'.(Boat rental owner)

According to different authors (Aryeetey & Nissanke,1998; Germidis, Kessler, & Meghir, 1991) millions of individuals and SMEs face issues to access to financial services. In particular, according to a research conducted by the World Bank in Croatia in 2013, enterprises rated ''tax rates'' and ''access to finance'' as the major obstacles for doing business in the country, respectively with 28.3%and 21.6% of votes (World Bank, 2013 in Kolaković, 2019).

7. Discussion and recommendations

Tourism seasonality, defined as a temporal imbalance in the number of tourism arrivals, tourism traffic and expenditure, employment and admission to attractions (Butler, 2001), has been recognizedas a major problem by the majority of the interviewees, in line with previous studies results (Baum 1999; Bigović, 2011; Vergori, 2017). In particular, interviewees stated that tourism seasonality was causing them several economic issues, ranging from employment instability to credit denial. In the Republic of Croatia, where tourism represents a vital economic sector accounting for approximately25% of GDP (WTTC, 2020), seasonality affects almost one in two tourism employees, representing one of the highest ratios in the European Union (Blažina et al., 2019; Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). However, as it has emerged from the thematic analysis, seasonality does not only influence seasonalemployees and entrepreneurs, but also those tourism businesses that are officially open all year round.Indeed, different interviewed travel agents and tour guides stated they kept their business open on a yearly-basis exclusively to bypass bureaucratic procedures or pursue other non-touristic activities inwintertime, such as translations and language classes. Similarly, an interviewed restaurant owner argued that although his restaurant operated only in summertime, it was officially open all year round,as otherwise he could not be eligible for bank loans. Hereby, tourism seasonality could have wider and more significant effects on Croatian tourism employment than documented.

Nonetheless, from the thematic analysis it has emerged that managers, operating in either hotels, tour operators or restaurants, represent the only sub-category of tourism employees that are not economically affected by seasonality, as their job-contract is annual and their monthly wage is fixedthroughout the year. The interviewed managers' stated that seasonality only represented them a challenge for finding and retaining employees. This is a well-documented issue, as seasonality represents an issue for human resources management (HRM) (Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005; Yacoumis, 1980; Murphy, 1985). In particular, seasonal employment complicates staff recruitment and retention (Yacoumis, 1980). Moreover, shortages of temporary workers forces employers to recruit staff outside the local area, leading to higher recruitment costs,

which are later reflected in employees lower wages (Commons & Page, 2001; Goulding, Baum & Morrison, 2004).

On the other hand, from the analysis it emerged that seasonal employees were the most exposed to the issue of seasonality from a socio-economic standpoint. Indeed, the interviewed seasonal employees argued that due to seasonality not only their job contract was temporary and that their wage varied according to the effective amount of work, but also that they did not receive any pension fund contribution during the non-working period. Remarkably, from the thematic analysis it emergeda significant contrast between tourism seasonal jobs profitability and their economic sustainability. On the one hand, tourism seasonal job were described as 'highly profitable', 'good paying', with 'fast return-on-investment' and 'well tipped'. Moreover, different interviewees coming from rural areas ofCroatia stated that they moved to the coast in summertime as they could find higher paying jobs andearn up to three times more. On the other, these jobs were described as not economically sustainableas they were 'temporary short', 'instable', and often 'paid under the table'. Indeed, the majority of the interviewed seasonal employees voiced that they were aware their jobs were not economically sustainable over the long term, but that they continued to choose them due to better wage opportunities. In light of this, finding a balance between the Croatian short-term tourism profitabilityand long-term economic sustainability appears to be the next prominent challenge for Croatian tourism policymakers.

Moreover, different interviewees added that seasonal jobs were not also physically sustainable overthe long term due to 'long-shifts, lasting ten-twelve hours', 'no day off', and 'no work life balance'. This significant issue has been investigated and documented by Cuccia & Rizzo (2011) and the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017). According to the International Labour Organization,non-standard forms of employment (NSFE) are highly implemented in tourism and often cause poorworking conditions, low wages, inappropriate social security coverage and lead to income inequality(ILO, 2015; 2017). In addition, tourism seasonal job usually involve unsocial working shifts and high physical pressure (ILO & WTO, 2014).

From a theoretical standpoint, tourism that is economically sustainable ensures viable long-term economic operations, provides fair socioeconomic benefits to all stakeholders, includes stableemployment, income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, as well as contributes to poverty alleviation (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). However, as it has emerged from the interviews, tourism seasonal jobs in Croatia do not offer job stability nor social protection. Remarkably, dissatisfaction with the social security, namely the with the health insurance and pensionfunds, was a prominent theme voiced by both permanent and seasonal tourism employees. However,these latter were the most affected one, not only because during the non-working period they did not receive any pension contribution, but also because often they were employed 'under the table' and thus had no social security coverage. As it merges from the academic literature, SMEs often undeclareworkers in order to avoid tax and social security burdens, at the expense of the workers (Schneider, 2011). In particular, Croatia has one of the largest

shadow economies of the European Union, whichin 2015 was estimated to account 27.7% of Croatian GDP, where most of the informal transactions occur in tourism (Schneider, 2015; World Bank, 2018).

Interestingly, different interviewees stated that they mitigated the precariousness of tourism seasonaljobs through the unemployment subsidies they are entitled to receive every two years. However, unemployment subsidies could mitigate the seasonality financial issues, but do not solve the problemat hand. For instance, Mourdoukoutas (1988), in his study concerning tourism job opportunities in Greek islands, argued that unemployment subsidies for seasonal workers in the non-working period may could be harmful for the country's economy as they 'generate positive wage differentials between tourism and other occupations which may induce laborers to quit any other seasonal or nonseasonal occupation and enter the tourist industry' (p.327).

Moreover, the majority of the interviewees stated that beyond unemployment subsidies the receivedCovid-19 subsidies or used the 'permanent seasonal worker' measure ('stalni sezonac'). This type ofcontract, entitles the employer to request the government co-financing of the employee's pension of insurance during the non-working period. In return, the employer must offer the seasonal worker a job for the following season and the employee must accept it, otherwise he must immediately returnthe amount of the publicly funded pension insurance (Bejaković & Klemenčić, 2019). However, different interviewed employers and employees remarked the several drawbacks of the measure. Above all, it was highlighted the rigidity of the measure, as it requires seasonal employees to work exactly six months in order to be eligible for this type of contract. Different participants voiced that although they were interested in the measure they were not be eligible for it as their seasonal job lasted five or seven months. Moreover, the majority of participants argued that the fact that permanentseasonal workers were not entitled to find an additional job, while benefitting from the measure, was 'a major mistake' as it induced permanent seasonal workers to find underreported jobs. Unsurprisingly, this measure has a low level of implementation. In 2017, there were 2831 permanentseasonal workers, while 2018 there were only 1550, taking into account that seasonal tourism employees were than 40000 (Bejaković & Klemenčić, 2019). Based on the above consideration, it is recommendable to revise and add flexibility to the 'permanent seasonal worker' measure. For instance, different interviewees commented that allowing permanent seasonal workers to find an additional job, would make the measure more 'appealing', 'fair' and would help them to achieve a major 'economic stability'.

Concerning the impacts of seasonality on investment, almost the totality of interviewees voiced thelength of the tourism season affected their investment decisions, in line with previous studies results(Butler 1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000; Mathieson & Wall, 1982). In particular, the interviewees statedthat a longer tourism increased their readiness to invest, as a longer tourism season meant for them major income stability. For instance, different interviewees commented that since the tourist season in 2020 was very brief due to the COVID-19 pandemics, they could not invest as they planned to do,

but only focused on saving. Indeed, as it emerges from the literature, tourism seasonality does represent a major risk for investments (Mathieson & Wall, 1982), it complicates finding access to capital, and it leads to instable returns on investment due to the volatility of tourism revenues (Butler1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000).

As far as it concerns investment choices, the interviewed tourism employees stated they were investing in the tourism sector, in their education and were considering the primary sector. Despite the Covid-19 crisis, the majority of the interviewees stated they were investing exclusively in the tourism sector, as they perceived tourism the major and most profitable economic activity in the country. Nonetheless, investing exclusively only in one sector increases risks for both individuals (Knuth, 2015) and the country's economy as a whole economy (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). Here it re-emerges the theme of Croatian tourism short-term profitability, at the cost of the country's economicsustainability over the long-term. Although few participants acknowledged that the Covid-19 crises showed them that investing tourism sector is risky, they continued to invest in tourism accommodations sector as they expected Croatian tourism to recover soon. In addition, different interviewees voiced that they were not aware where else they could invest their money in alternativeto tourism.

Furthermore, several participants commented that they were investing in education, as this latter was fundamental for career advancement. However, several seasonal employees complained that their fellow employers never offered them any training and that they had to pay expensive courses and trainings by themselves. This is a common issue as frequently employers do not recognise the importance of education (Peacock & Ladkin, 2002) and only provide basic training to seasonal workers (Murphy, 1985) , hindering the product and quality standards (Baum, 1999). However, as it emerged from the interviews many participants voiced they would be interested in participating in education courses during the low season:

- 'The local Tourism Board during the winter months should offer some type of training and educations to tourism and hospitality employees (…) for instance English courses. (…) During winterwe are not working and we could really educate ourselves'' (Private accommodation renter)

Given that education and training are key factors for success in the tourism and hospitality industries(Boisevert, 2000), offering free or price accessible courses should be regarded as a priority by both public and private parties. This could be done in cost-effective ways during the non-working season.For instance, e-learning platforms and webinars are technological solutions with an untappedpotential to support seasonal tourism employees to develop their skills, at a reduced cost (Haven & Botterill, 2003; Sigala 2002; Sigala & Christou, 2003).

Furthermore, the majority of the interviewees stated that they were willing to invest in the primarysector, particularly in agriculture. The participants voiced that they saw the possibility of linking agriculture with tourism, in line with the recommendation of the World Bank 2018 Country Report (World Bank, 2018). However, the participants stated

that government subventions and innovative policies were needed to materialize the latent potential of the Croatian primary sector, which currentlyhas only a peripheral role in the country's economy, accounting for less than 5% of the total GDP (Blažina et al., 2019). As it emerges from the academic literature, the linkage between tourism and agriculture helps maintaining a sustainable economy at the destination, by creating additional job opportunities, increasing the possibility to earn foreign currencies and improving the living standardsof the local population (Brătucu, Băltescu, Neacșu, Boșcor, Țierean, & Madar, 2017; Villanueva- Álvaro, Mondéjar-Jiménez, & Sáez-Martínez, 2017). According to Han, Akhmedov, Li, Yu, & Hunter (2020) 'gastronomy and consumption of locally grown agricultural products can create economic benefits and contribute to the sustainable competitiveness of the tourist destination and hotels operating in the local area' (p.2). Hereby, Croatian policymakers should not disregard the opportunity to integrate and link the agricultural sector with tourism in order to achieve a more sustainable economic model (World Bank, 2018), which is already challenged by the high level of tourism seasonality in the country (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). In order to achieve the abovementionedintegration, the Tourism Board should not merely promote some niche forms of tourism, such as rural or gastronomic tourism, but incentivize Croatian hospitality enterprises to offer Croatian eno- gastronomic products, without violating EU regulations. Indeed, locally sourced gastronomic products can benefit both hosts and visitors, as well as the destination economy (Boniface, 2003; Clark & Chabrel, 2007; Ilbery, Kneafsey, Bowler, & Clark, 2003; Torres, 2002; Woodland & Acott,2007). For instance, incentives could range from special rates and pre-sales for purchasing Croatian products to special access to marketing and advertisement campaigns.

Furthermore, different interviewees voiced that they were hindered from their investment decisions due to banking issues and loan denial. In particular, seasonal employees and SMEs were the most exposed to the problem, in line with previous studies results (Butler 1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000). Indeed, every year millions of individuals and SMEs face issues to access to financial services (Aryeetey & Nissanke; Germidis, Kessler, & Meghir, 1991). In particular, numerous seasonal business owners stated that they experienced credit in spite the amount of their business turnover. They voiced that this was an issue especially at the beginning of their entrepreneurial career. Remarkably, few participants stated that after facing issues with the bank they turned to private moneylenders on 'the black market', pointing out once again the existence of a shadow economy in the Croatian tourism sector. Given that investment is constitutes a key economic variable for the sustainable development of tourism (Jackson et al., 2009; Paramati, Alam, & Lau, 2018), supporting entrepreneurs to find access to financial services and loans should not be an overlooked issue. For instance, national and local tourism associations should not disregard helping entrepreneurs to attemptto access the EU funding for tourism or other funding opportunities, as often single individuals do not have the required knowledge to apply to those funds (Grubišić Šeba, 2013).

Lastly, although the existing academic literature does not state what makes an ideal level of seasonality (Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005), the majority of interviewees stated that for them a sustainable tourism season from an economic standpoint meant one that lasts

‘more than six months’.As it emerged from the interviews, the length of the tourism season does play an important role in theeconomic sustainability of tourism employees and their families. Indeed, Croatian Tourism Board efforts should be directed towards promoting the shoulder seasons, in order to create a tourism model that is more economically sustainable for both individuals and the country as a whole. In order to mitigate seasonality different approaches could be taken, ranging from product mix and price differentiation (Allcock, 1994; Koenig-Lewis & Bischoff, 2005), to creating tourism circuits, twin attractions or two-centre holidays (Allock, 1994). However, firstly, destination marketing efforts should focus on changing the visitors’ perception of Croatia as primarily a sand and sea destination (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018; TOMAS, 2019), which causes the extreme level of seasonality in the country(Orsini & Ostojić, 2018). Secondly, Croatian DMO should focus on incentivizing product diversification (Allcock, 1994; Andriotis, 2005; Baum & Hagen, 1999) and promote tourism forms that are less sensitive to seasonality, such as cultural (OECD, 2009) and sport tourism (Forradellas, Alonso, Vázquez, Fernández, & Miró, 2021). For instance, in Croatia, new outstanding tourism products could be created by connecting stakeholders from the more developed coastline regions withthe resources offered by continental areas (Banožić, Žalac, & Sumpor, 2014). Nonetheless, real tourism de-seasonalization could not be accomplished without stakeholders collaboration, public- private partnerships and an integrated management framework (Foris, Florescu, Foris, Barabas, 2020). Indeed, tourism is not an industry itself, but a collection of related industries (Gartner, 2005);it is a complex system composed by different internal elements, such as tourism demand and supply,supporting institutions, intermediaries, tourists’ flows, and external elements , such as the socio-cultural, natural, technological, political and economical factors (Jere Jakulin, 2017; Vanhove, 2018;Holocek, 1981). As it emerged from the interviews, different tourism employees living and workingon Croatian islands, stated that issues such as poor connection with mainland, closed attractions andlack of events during the low season should be solved collectively, in order to extending the tourismseason. Thus, reducing the level Croatian seasonality and make Croatian tourism economically sustainable over the long term could not be achieved by the single individual, but requires a holistic approach, joint forces and supportive tourism policies.

8. Conclusion

To sum up, the present thesis aimed to investigate the impacts of seasonality on the tourism economicsustainability of a destination, since despite its major importance, the economic pillar of tourism sustainability had received the least attention from the academia (Qiu et al., 2019). In particular, thepresent thesis focused on the case study of Croatia, a country in which tourism represents a vital economic sector but where the extreme level of seasonality creates several negative consequences on the tourism economic sustainability of the country and its tourism workers (Orsini & Ostojić, 2018).

Tourism seasonality, defined as a temporal imbalance in the number of tourism arrivals, tourism traffic and expenditure, employment and admission to attractions (Butler, 2001), has been recognizedas a major problem in the tourism literature (Baum

1999; Bigović, 2011; Vergori, 2017). As it emerges from WT0 (2004) guidebook, seasonality can be considered as a subdimesion of the tourism economic sustainability pillar and one of the factors that can significantly hinder destinations from being economically sustainable (Qiu et al., 2019; UNWTO, 2004). Specifically, the present study focused on the impacts of seasonality on two key economic variables emerged from the literature review: employment (Yacoumis, 1980; Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003; Koenig Lewis & Bischoff, 2005) and investment (Butler 1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000; Mathieson & Wall, 1982).

In order to study the problem at hand the study adopted a qualitative research approach as the method's flexibility and versatility allowed the researcher to create new knowledge based on the participants experiences (Ohman, 2005). In particular, thirty tourism workers (from different levels of the tourism value chain were interviewed in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of how seasonality affects their livelihoods from a socio-economic perspective.

In line with previous studies results (Baum 1999; Bigović, 2011; Vergori, 2017), almost the totalityof the interviewees described seasonality as a major issue that was causing them several economic issues, ranging from employment instability to credit denial. As it emerged from the thematic analysis, in the Republic of Croatia, seasonality does not only influences seasonal employees and entrepreneurs, but also those tourism businesses that are officially open all year round. Indeed, different interviewed travel agents, tour guides and restaurant owners stated they kept their businessopen on a yearly-basis to avoid bureaucratic procedures, pursue other non-touristic activities, or for being eligible for bank loans. Thus, tourism seasonality could have wider and more significant effects on Croatian tourism employment than documented and further studies are required to investigate theoverall impacts on seasonality on employment.

However, the Croatian seasonal tourism employees were the most exposed to the issues of seasonality in terms of employment instability, poor work-life balance and social security, as seasonaljobs do not offer the social security coverage required by standard labor contracts (Cuccia & Rizzo, 2011; ILO, 2015, 2017). Interestingly, during the interviews it emerged a remarked duality existing between tourism seasonal jobs profitability and their economic sustainability. On the one hand, tourism seasonal job were described as 'highly profitable', 'good paying', with 'fast return-on- investment' and 'well tipped'. On the other, these jobs were described as not economically sustainable as they were 'temporary short', 'instable', and often 'paid under the table', but that the Croatian residents continued to choose them due to better wage opportunities. Interestingly, different interviewees stated that they mitigated the precariousness of tourism seasonal jobs through the unemployment subsidies they were entitled to receive every two years. However, unemployment subsidies only partially mitigate the seasonality financial issues, but do not solve the problem at hand.Moreover, the majority of the interviewees stated that beyond unemployment subsidies the receivedCovid-19 subsidies or used the 'permanent seasonal worker' measure, which however was defined as having several pitfalls.

Concerning the impacts of seasonality on investment, almost the totality of Croatian tourism employees voiced the length of the tourism season affected their investment decisions, in line with previous studies results (Butler 1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000; Mathieson & Wall, 1982). In particular,the interviewees stated that a longer tourism increased their readiness to invest, as a longer tourism season meant for them major income stability. In spite of the Covid-19 crisis, the majority of the interviewed tourism employees were investing solely in the tourism sector, as they perceived tourismthe major and most profitable economic activity in the country, remarking again the Croatian tourismshort-term profitability, at the cost of the country's economic sustainability over the long-term. Several tourism employees commented that they were investing in education, as they perceived it as

a vital element to advance in the job career, but complained that their employers never offered themany type of training. In addition, the seasonal employees voiced that they were often hindered from their investment decisions due to banking issues and loan denial, in line with previous studies results (Butler 1994; Hinch & Jackson 2000). Notably, different interviewees stated that they were willing to invest in the agriculture as they spotted the potential to link the primary sector with tourism, but were stopped by the lack of access to finance and governmental support. Lastly, Although the existing academic literature does not state what makes an ideal level of seasonality (Koenig Lewis & Bischoff,2005), the majority of interviewees stated that for them a sustainable tourism season from an economic standpoint meant one that lasts 'more than six months'.

In light of the study results, different recommendations have been proposed in order to mitigate the level of Croatian seasonality, which undermines the tourism economic sustainability. First of all, Croatian Tourism National Board and policymakers were recommended to increase their destinationmanagement and marketing efforts to promote the shoulder seasons, incentivize product diversification (Allcock,1994; Andriotis,2005; Baum & Hagen,1999) and promote tourism forms thatare less sensitive to seasonality, such as cultural (OECD, 2009) and sport tourism (Forradellas & al.,2021). At the same time, it was advised to revise the existing permanent seasonal worker measure and consider offering free or price accessible courses to seasonal tourism employees through e- learning platforms and webinars (Haven & Botterill, 2003; Sigala 2002; Sigala & Christou, 2003), inorder to increase the Croatian tourism products and quality standards (Baum, 1999). In addition, it was remarked the opportunity to integrate and link the agricultural sector with tourism in order to achieve a more sustainable economic model (World Bank, 2018). Nonetheless, based on the interviews considerations, it was advised that real tourism de-seasonalization could not be accomplished without stakeholders collaboration, public-private partnerships and an integrated management framework (Foris, Florescu, Foris, Barabas, 2020). Indeed, reducing the level Croatianseasonality could not be achieved by the single individual, but requires a holistic approach, joint forces and supportive tourism policies.

Nonetheless, the findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. The primary source of potential bias arises from the fact that the existing knowledge concerning tourism economicsustainability is limited. Given the novelty of the topic at

hand, there is a blurring line of what elements should be considered or not as impacting the tourism economic sustainability of a destination. Second, the present case study was conducted in the Republic of Croatia and the results therefore cannot be generalized to other nations. Third, the results of the empirical study are based exclusively one the answers kindly provided by the tourism interviewees, and could be subject to personal bias or formal trade secrets. Moreover, the interviews were hold by video call or phone call, due to the social distancing measure introduced by the Croatian Government, in order to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. It is believed that more valuable meaning would be constructed whether the researcher would have be able to engage in face-to-face interview.

As a follow-up to the present study, it might be beneficial to conduct the study later in time througha mixed methods approach, in order to expand and complement the limited body of knowledge concerning the topic at hand (Molina-Azorín & Font, 2016). Indeed, mixed research methods are particularly suitable for the exploratory stages of a topic (Walker & Moscardo, 2014; Molina-Azorin& Font, 2016; Mason, Augustyn, & Seakhoa-King, 2010) and 'provide sustainable tourism academics with more opportunities for pragmatic transformative research for societal change, and increasing research reliability in relation to social desirability bias, stakeholder comparisons and transdisciplinarity' (Molina-Azorin & Font, 2016, p.549). Moreover, further research should focus on how tourism seasonality affect the tourism economic sustainability on a regional level, in order to investigate whether there are significant regional disparities and support policy makers in takingaction in a more geographically focused way.

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