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[Pilar Gago-de Santos](#)*, [Marinela Krstinić-Nizic](#), Elisa García-Abajo, [Adolfo Hernández-Estrada](#)

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Article

Assessing EU Tourism Workforce Perceptions and Attitudes towards Tourism Development in Sun and Sea Destinations: Nationality and Gender do Matter

Pilar Gago-de Santos ^{1,*}, Marinela Krstinić-Nizić ², Elisa García-Abajo ³
and Adolfo Hernández-Estrada ⁴

¹ Faculty of Economics and Business, Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), Spain; pgago@ucm.es

² Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Rijeka University, Croatia; marikn@fthm.hr

³ Faculty of Economics and Business Sciences, Rey Juan Carlos University, Madrid, Spain; mariaelisa.garcia@urjc.es

⁴ Faculty of Commerce and Tourism, Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), Spain; adolfher@ucm.es

* Correspondence: pgago@ucm.es

Abstract: Measuring host communities' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development has been increasingly common since the mid-1970s. The greater the growth of the tourism industry worldwide, the more relevant it has become to assess the impact of tourism activity on the local residents. In this paper we present the results of a study carried out in two EU countries highly dependent on tourism act though at a different stage of development. Our findings are based on qualitative and quantitative data obtained via a questionnaire survey designed in pre-covid 19 times to analyze the perceptions and attitudes of tourism college students from Croatia and Spain, today's tourism employers and employees, towards tourism development in sun and sea destinations. Our aim is to contrast the hypothesis that the nationality of our sample is a significant variable when evaluating the socioeconomic and environmental impact of the development of the tourism industry. Croatia's workforce, the most highly dependent on the EU travel and tourism industry show to be much more aware of the negative impacts of tourism development than their Spaniards counterparts; showing a tourism workforce more reluctant to further tourism development.

Keywords: Pre-Covid 19 tourism attitudes/perceptions; tourism development; EU tourism workforce; tourism sustainability; nationality; gender; Spain; Croatia

1. Introduction

In the 1960s, travel and tourism was seen worldwide, but particularly in the developed countries, as a new industry with considerable potential for job creation and income growth; thus, at that point scholars and policymakers highlighted the positive impact in terms of economic development disregarding the potential negative impacts on the environment and on the local residents¹. One decade later, Doxey [1] in his seminal work introduced to tourism research the concept of assessing the impact of tourism in the host communities². In particular, he conceived a classification of the local residents based on their attitudes towards tourism from being very enthusiastic to being very critical. Later on, Pizam [2] emphasized the concern of negative impacts and developed an attitude index, while concluding that residents highly dependent of the tourist sector would tend to be more positive towards tourism development than the rest of the local residents. Based on these findings, they would focus on the benefits they would get (income, jobs, mainly) more than on the costs (negative externalities such as congestion or poorer services and/ or

¹ Tourism sustainability implies a focus on the three pillars of sustainability: economic, environmental and social (1990, Sustainability Chart of the United Nations).

² Host communities would be the local residents "hosting" the visitors (tourists and one-day travellers).

higher prices). Based on the premises of social exchange theory³, the respondents of our study, given their particular condition of tourism university students, and thus, future leaders and future workforce of the tourism sector, would theoretically be biased to perceiving a net benefit of tourism activity. Indeed, prior empirical evidence has shown that those residents economically dependent of the tourism sector, directly or indirectly, tend to have a more positive attitude towards tourism development ([3];[4];[5]). More specifically, Getz [6] suggested that those who personally benefit from tourism perceive greater economic benefits and fewer negative social and environmental impacts from its development than other residents⁴. Andereck et al. [7] underlined not only that it is easier to be more supportive when locals perceive more benefits but that negative impacts are not ignored either and in their study they seem similarly perceived by all locals (those who benefit more from tourism but also less). Akis et al. pointed out, for the case of Cyprus, that there was a net benefit created by the tourism industry and local residents believed in the advantages of tourism development [8]. More recently, Peters et al. findings confirmed in their study that advantages outweigh the disadvantages and that local residents' attitudes towards tourism development depends on their perceived impacts [9]. Furthermore, they showed that a more positive attitude towards tourism development is influenced particularly by perceived socio cultural impacts rather than the environmental and economic impacts. Tourism labor is therefore assumed to have a more positive attitude than the local population that is not employed in the tourism sector. Certainly, in this context it seems vital for an optimal tourism management and planning to understand the differences in the perceived impacts by different local populations within the EU tourism industry based on nationality and gender. Malalla et al. investigated the influence of nationality on resident's perceptions of tourism impacts and their support for tourism development in UAE by discriminating nationals from expatriate residents [10]. They found differences in perceptions but in spite of it both were supportive of tourism development within the same territory. Our main contribution is based on the hypothesis that nationality is a significant variable firstly in residents' perception, secondly in tourism development attitude and lastly in tourism management strategies. In this study, our main goal has been to measure the pre-covid 19 perceptions and more precisely the overall attitude of a very specific population, representing at the time of data collection the future sector leadership and workforce, which, to the best of our knowledge, has not been assessed, yet. In particular, to assess the attitude towards tourism development of the tourism employers and employees we decided to choose samples from two EU countries highly dependent on the tourism industry though at different levels of development: Spain and Croatia. It is worth noting that, before the Covid-19 pandemic, Spain and Croatia were placed among the EU member economies most highly dependent on tourism activity. However, Croatia, a small EU economy, depends on tourism (production, employment, exports) to a much larger extent than Spain. As a matter of fact, Croatia, by some parameters, may be considered the EU economy most dependent on tourism activity [11]. However, we are very aware of the fact that Croatia and Spain's tourism industry is at a different stage of development and that the former has grown more rapidly over the past decade than the latter. We could say that Spain's tourism sector is at a more mature stage than the Croatian sector. Empirical evidence on residents' attitudes towards tourism development already distinguished between responses from host communities at different development stages of their tourism sectors [12] (but not focusing specifically on the perception of tourism university students, who would be the sector's future workforce, as we present in this study). Within this framework, and differentiated to some prior empirical evidence, our main hypothesis is that we observe the nationality of the respondents to be a significant variable in the assessment of local residents' attitudes towards the impact of tourism in their host community, contrary to their perception of the overcrowding, overbuilding and excess of carrying capacity. Gender do matter as well in the young generations but to a lesser extent. Furthermore, Allen et al. concluded that residents' perceptions would become less enthusiastic as the

³ Social exchange theory (SET) explains residents' opinions and attitudes depending on their perception of the benefits and costs coming out of the tourism activity,

⁴ This is known as the tourism dependence hypothesis.

level of tourism activity in a community would rise[13]. Perdue et al. would also state that after reaching a threshold, residents' support for tourism would decline[14]. Milano et al. underlined that residents prone to more negative perceptions of tourism developments could be a consequence of overtourism [15]. As we know, global tourism activity peaked in 2019, and by that time the term overtourism was already coined in the industry [16]. Our data dates back to the pre-covid 19 times, in a scenario in which our respondents were already aware of such concern in the industry. Very recently, Berselli et al. suggested several indicators influencing residents perception of overtourism[17]. Ramkissoon pointed out that Covid 19 pandemic and its devastating effects in the global tourism industry made residents more tolerant of tourism impacts [18]. Our findings are based on qualitative and quantitative data reflected in a questionnaire designed to analyze the perception and attitude of tourism university students from Croatia and Spain towards tourism development. We report the results of a questionnaire survey administered in 2019 to 129 Spanish College students and 148 Croatian College students. Generally speaking, as Pizam had stated in his work, we do find that tourism college students show an overall sound positive attitude regarding the impact of tourism in the three dimensions of sustainability⁵[2]. However, we report differences in the students' perceptions of the impact of the tourism sector. In other words, the perception of the benefits and the costs coming out of the tourism activity are different based on the nationality of the respondent. Our findings report students from Croatia perceive more the negative impact or the negative externalities of tourism development than the tourism college students from Spain. Based on our study we can state that their net perception (benefits minus costs) though positive is less supportive than their counterparts from Spain. The absolute outcome for Croatia is partly aligned with some empirical evidence which considers the more developed the tourism sector becomes, the greater the decline in residents' support towards tourism development [13,14,15]. However, it is the relative outcome the most surprising one: Spain's tourism workforce with a more mature travel and tourism industry seems more enthusiastic to their tourism development than the Croatian Tourism labor. There could be many different hypotheses to understand this differential behavior: size of the country, seasonality stress, stronger negative impacts, higher demand pressure, closer to overcapacity, among other factors. Within this social exchange trade theoretical framework, our goal was to identify differences in the response of the two samples given two major variables: nationality and gender. In short, the main goal of this research has been to understand if local residents' responses to tourism and its sustainability vary while taking two different samples in a cross-cultural analysis. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study taking into consideration the perception of tourism college students and the research results and policy implications would be the paper's main contribution to the existing literature dedicated to assess local residents' attitudes and perceptions towards the socioeconomic impact of the tourism activity. In this framework, Schubert et al. who underlined that the host communities perception of economic, environmental and social sustainability would influence their support of national tourism policies [19]. If so, every country's tourism planners and marketers should focus on understanding well how their host communities perceive all economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism.

The structure of the article is as follows. After this introduction, section two describes the data collection process and the research methods. Section three presents the preliminary data and the results of the non-parametric analysis. Section four discusses the results, some of the policymaking implications and brings up issues for future research work. Finally, section five draws the main conclusions of the research.

2. Materials and Methods

The aim of this study has been to measure the perception of a specific part of the local residents: tourism university students having studied tourism economics during at least one year of University. We have in practice segmented the population of research given that our respondents are residents of Croatia or of Spain but confined to being first year tourism college students, which means they

⁵ Economic, environmental and social dimension

have some knowledge of tourism sustainability and of the socioeconomic and environmental impact of tourism. All in all, it is worth noting that this population was meant to be the tourism sector's future labor force. Understanding their attitudes towards tourism development is essential and very valuable for tourism sustainability management. Our findings are based on two samples: the first of the samples is based on Croatian tourism college students' responses from the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija, Rijeka; the second sample is based on Spanish tourism college students' responses from the Faculty of Commerce and Tourism in Madrid at Complutense University of Madrid (UCM).

To measure the perception and attitude of tourism college students from Croatia and Spain towards tourism development, we first design a questionnaire based on the 3 pillars of sustainability: economic, social and environmental pillars. It is worth mentioning that the questionnaire proposes eighteen questions, out of which thirteen focus on *a positive impact*⁶ of tourism activity while the other five questions focus on *a negative impact*⁷. In particular, two out of 18 questions, question 17 (negative impact of tourism activity) and question 18 (positive impact of tourism activity) clearly query about the *environmental impact* of tourism. More than half the questionnaire (a total of 10 questions)⁸ focus on the *economic impact* (questions regarding the impact on macroeconomic variables such as GDP; employment, inflation, and investment, and others such as: entrepreneurial opportunities awareness, the perception of a net positive impact of tourism, among others). Questions 4 and 10 ask about the need for involvement of the local population in its tourism planning and its satisfaction with the tourism planning strategy. Finally, four questions are meant to emphasize the *social impact* of tourism: impact on safety and security, impact on traffic congestion, impact on street cleanliness and impact on customs and traditions revitalization. A 5 point-Likert scale has been used to measure the weight of the respondents' perception towards tourism impact in their domestic economies; a scale in which 1 means "the respondent totally disagrees with the proposed sentence"; 2 means "the respondent partially disagrees with the proposed sentence"; 3 "the respondent neither disagrees nor agrees with the proposed sentence"; 4 "the respondent highly agrees with the proposed sentence"; and 5 "the respondent totally agrees with the proposed sentence". In addition to the 18 questions, the questionnaire proposes 2 dichotomous questions and one question in which respondents had three alternatives regarding their overall attitude: positive, negative or neutral. At the end, there was some room reserved for students' further comments. We carry out a questionnaire survey in which data was collected by paper and pencil mode and students' were some weeks ahead asked to voluntarily attend the specific class to be surveyed on their perception on tourism impact on their domestic economy. In the case of Spain, students were asked to answer having in mind their preferred sun and sea destination during their summer holidays. This was done so the responses in Madrid would be provided based on the most similar scenario as the one of their counterparts in Croatia: given that the Faculty of Tourism in Opatija is located by the sea while the Faculty of Commerce and Tourism in Madrid is placed in an urban city, where urban tourism and cultural tourism prevail. The goal was to minimize the item bias derived from similar respondents responding to different tourism impacts because of taking into account different types of tourism (urban and/or cultural versus sun & sea). There are many examples in the questionnaire where not having fixed this premise, the item would have introduced bias and

⁶ Question Q1: Local population life standard improvement; Q2: Economic Benefits for the local population; Q4: Local population involvement planning; Q5: Net benefits; Q8: Infrastructure Investment promotion; Q9: Destination attractiveness; Q10: Local population tourism planning satisfaction; Q12: Customs and traditions revitalization; Q13: Jobs, Income, social well-being growth; Q14: Labour market tourism oriented. Q15: Destination economic improvement perception. Q16: Entrepreneurial opportunities awareness, Q18: Ecological value strengthening.

⁷ Q3: Inflation; Q6: Safety & Security; Q7: Congestion traffic; Q11: Street Cleanliness; Q17: Undermining Ecological value.

⁸ Question Q1: Local population life standard improvement; Q2: Economic Benefits for the local population; Q3: Inflation; Q5: Net benefits; Q8: Infrastructure Investment promotion; Q9: Destination attractiveness; Q13: Jobs, Income, social well-being growth; Q14: Labour market tourism oriented. Q15: Destination economic improvement perception. Q16: Entrepreneurial opportunities awareness.

jeopardized the comparison between our two samples. For example in question 14, when respondents were asked if local people were changing occupations and were increasingly oriented towards tourism-related jobs or in question 11 when asked if tourism has increased the amount of rubbish in the streets. In these two questions, it would have been less likely to totally or highly agree if based their responses in Madrid rather than in a coastal destination. The questionnaire, in English language, was administered to a random sample of college students at the end of their first year of University, during 2019. The Spanish Sample (hereafter "sample S") includes 129 responses; out of which, 92 were female and 37 were male. In parallel, the questionnaire was passed to a sample of 148 College students in Opatija, Croatia (hereafter "Sample C"). In both samples college students were aged between 18-21 years old. Both administrators were the college students' own teachers, and as well part of the research team. Before passing the questionnaire, the translation into Spanish was provided in the case of Madrid to ensure the equivalence in cross-cultural research [20]. Moreover, students were informed that the answers would be treated anonymously and all individuals in the sample gave their consent to participate in the experiment. To contrast our hypotheses we employ the IBM SPSS Statistics software.

3. Results

3.1. Research Hypotheses

We believe there are differences on the attitude and on the perceptions on tourism socioeconomic and environmental impact of local residents based on nationality and to a lesser extent on gender. In particular, we cite our null hypotheses: a) There are no differences in the attitude of tourism college students towards tourism sustainability (economic, social, environmental dimension) based on nationality and/ or gender and b) The alternative hypothesis 1: There are differences in the attitude based on nationality plus c) the alternative hypothesis 2: There are differences in the attitude based on gender. Our preliminary analysis based on the frequency of the analysis agrees with the premise and state of the art while showing an overall supportive perception and attitude towards tourism development by both samples.

3.2. Tables and results

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the level of agreement on the 18 statements of the questionnaire. The ordinal variable was the level of agreement expressed by a five point-Likert scale. The grouping variable was the nationality of the respondents, Croatian and Spanish students.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution on the Level of Agreement on the 18 Statements of the Questionnaire (%).

Questionnaire statements	Nationality	1 ^a	2	3	4	5
Q.1 The tourism development significantly improves the quality of life of the local population	Croatian	4.7	5.4	22.1	37.6	30.2
	Spanish	0	7	28.7	48.1	16.3
Q.2 Population benefits economically from Tourism	Croatian	0.7	4.7	18.8	47	28.9
	Spanish	1.6	6.3	20.3	41.4	30.5
Q.3 Tourism development leads to raised prices, which causes dissatisfaction among the population	Croatian	0.7	2.7	24.8	32.2	39.6
	Spanish	3.9	13.4	40.2	36.2	6.3
Q.4 Local population must be involved in the development and planning of tourism	Croatian	0.7	1.3	13.4	36.2	48.3
	Spanish	3.1	12.6	30.7	33.1	20.5
Q.5 Benefits of tourism are greater than the negative aspects of tourism	Croatian	0.7	2.7	24.2	42.3	30.2
	Spanish	2.3	7	35.9	25.0	29.7
Q.6 Tourism has an impact on the growth of organized crime	Croatian	10.7	24.2	34.9	17.4	12.8
	Spanish	10.1	38.8	31.0	16.3	3.9

Q.7	Tourism significantly increases traffic issues in the destination	Croatian	2	7.4	21.5	40.3	28.9
		Spanish	4.7	18.6	38.8	28.7	9.3
Q.8	Tourism has encouraged investment in infrastructure (roads and parking)	Croatian	0.7	4.8	12.9	42.9	38.8
		Spanish	0	6.2	15.5	51.2	27.1
Q.9	The development of tourism has improved the appearance of the destination	Croatian	1.3	2	14.8	40.9	40.9
		Spanish	0	6.3	21.4	37.3	34.9
Q.10	The population is mostly satisfied with the ways of tourism planning of the destination	Croatian	4.7	7.4	37.8	35.9	14.2
		Spanish	1.6	15.5	41.1	34.1	7.8
Q.11	Tourism has caused an increase in the amount of rubbish in the street	Croatian	1.3	7.4	27.5	36.2	27.5
		Spanish	3.1	8.6	39.1	34.4	14.8
Q.12	Tourism interest has encouraged the revitalization of customs and traditional cultural activities of local population	Croatian	0.7	6.1	28.6	44.2	20.4
		Spanish	0.8	6.2	24.0	42.6	26.4
Q.13	By creating jobs and generating income, tourism leads to a growth of the social well-being of the population	Croatian	0.7	2.7	22.1	49.7	24.8
		Spanish	0	4.7	25.6	51.2	18.6
Q.14	The local people change occupation and are increasingly oriented towards tourism-related-jobs	Croatian	2	3.4	18.8	43.6	32.2
		Spanish	0.8	12.7	42.1	34.9	9.5
Q.15	Tourism has already significantly improved the economic state of the destination	Croatian	0.7	6	26.2	48.3	18.8
		Spanish	0.8	3.1	18.8	44.5	32.8
Q.16	Population is adequately informed of the possibilities of entrepreneurial activity in tourism	Croatian	7.4	13.4	40.9	22.8	15.4
		Spanish	7.1	24.4	45.7	18.9	3.9
Q.17	Tourism destroys the ecological value of the destination	Croatian	6.7	14,1	41,6	24,8	12,8
		Spanish	3.9	18,6	34,9	32,6	10,1
Q.18	Tourism contributes the strengthening the quality of the destination's ecological value	Croatian	2	13.4	36.9	34.9	12.8
		Spanish	3.9	18.1	50.4	21.3	6.3

^a The level of agreement is expressed by means of a 5-point Likert scale where 1 means completely disagree and 5 means completely agree.

Table 2 and Table 3 illustrate the frequencies expressed in percentages for questions 19, 20 and 21 respectively. However, questions 19 and 20 are dichotomous and 21 offers three response categories that refer to the level of positivity ranging from not at all positive, neither positive nor negative to positive. In Table 2 the distribution of frequencies tell us that Spaniards are quite aware of the fact of the threat of overbuilding and of exceeding the carrying capacity in the summer season. Spaniards apparently feel the pinch better of the pressure of the demand. By contrast, less than a fourth of the Croats seem to be concerned about such threats. This could be explained by the fact of the Croatian Travel and Tourism industry at a lower level of maturity than Spain's T&T. In table 3, Spaniards show a relative more positive overall attitude towards tourism development than their Croatian counterparts.

Table 2. Distribution Frequencies of Questions 19 and 20 in Percentages (%).

Questions	Nationality	Yes	No
Q.19 Is your destination threatened by over-building of apartments (and other rental units)	Croatian	22.1	77.9
	Spanish	66.4	33.6
Q.20 Do you consider your destination to have exceeded its carrying capacity in the summer season? (Carrying capacity is made up for a maximum number of tourists without lowering the quality of stay for visitors)	Croatian	22.8	76.5
	Spanish	68.5	31.5

Table 3. Distribution Frequencies of Question 21 in Percentages (%).

Question	Nationality	Not positive	Neither negative nor positive	Positive
Q.21 What is your attitude towards the development of tourism in the destination?	Croatian	12.8	26.4	60.8
	Spanish	3.1	17.1	79.8

Hereafter, table 4 displays the statistically significant results obtained by applying the non-parametric Mann Whitney U test to the data obtained from the sample under study in this research case. Specifically, we have chosen Mann Whitney U test for its appropriateness to test our null hypothesis on the differences in the responses given by the two independent groups we are analyzing, Croatian and Spanish students. Moreover, the contrast variable is an ordinal one.

Table 4. U Mann Whitney Statistical Significance Results.

Questions	Nationality	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U- Whitney	P-Valor*
Q3: Prices inflation	Croatian	166,81	24854.00	5244.000	.000
	Spanish	105,29	13372.00		
Q4: Local population involvement-planning	Croatian	164,56	24519.00	5579.000	.000
	Spanish	107,93	13707.00		
Q5: Net benefits	Croatian	147,88	22033.50	8213.500	.037
	Spanish	128,67	16469.50		
Q6: Safety and security	Croatian	149,78	22317.50	8078.500	.017
	Spanish	127,62	16463.50		
Q7: Traffic congestion	Croatian	163,36	24341.00	6055.000	.000
	Spanish	111,94	14440.00		
Q11: Street cleanliness	Croatian	150,87	22480.00	7767.000	.005
	Spanish	125,18	16023.00		
Q14: Labour market tourism oriented	Croatian	162,28	24179.50	5769.500	.000
	Spanish	109,29	13770.50		
Q15: Destination economic improvement perception	Croatian	127,53	19001.50	7826.500	.006
	Spanish	152,36	19501.50		
Q16: Entrepreneurial opportunities awareness	Croatian	151,19	22527.00	7571.000	.003
	Spanish	123,61	15699.00		
Q18: Strengthens the ecological value	Croatian	151,92	22635.50	7462.500	.001
	Spanish	122,76	15590.50		

* Significant results $p \leq 0.05$.

Table 5 represents the statistically significant results obtained from the chi-square test, which allowed us to confirm the association between the two categorical variables analyzed, since we were able to reject our null hypothesis indicating the non-existence of any relationship between the two variables studied. The two contrasted variables are dichotomous. On the one hand, the variable response to questions 19 and 20 has two categories, yes and no. On the other hand, the grouping variable also has two categories, Croatian and Spanish nationality.

Table 5. Chi Squared Significant Results of Questions 19 and 20.

Questions	Nationality	Yes ^a	No	Chi Square	DF	P-Value*
Q.19: Is your destination threatened by over-building of apartments and other rental units?	Croatian	22.1	77.9	54.526	1	0.000
	Spanish	66.4	33.6			
Q.20: Do you consider your destination to have exceeded its carrying capacity in the summer season?	Croatian	22.8	76.5	58.931	2	0.000
	Spanish	68.5	31.5			

* The null hypothesis H_0 : independence between the two variables was rejected because $P_{\text{value}} \leq 0.05$

The statistical significant relationship between the variable attitude towards the development of tourism in the destination and the variable nationality is shown in Table 6, which reflects the results from the application of the nonparametric Mann Whitney U test.

Table 6. Tourism College Students attitude towards Tourism development.

<i>Question 21: What is your Attitude towards the Development of Tourism in the Destination?</i>							
Nationality	Not Positive	Neither negative positive ^a	norPositive	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann- Whitney U	P value*
Croatian	12.8	26.4	60.8	125.84	18624.00	7598.000	0.001
Spanish	3.1	17.1	79.8	154.10	19879.00		

Note: The sum of ranks is higher for Spanish students than for Croatian. ^a The three categories of the attitude variable are not positive, neither positive nor negative and positive. The data are expressed in percentages. * The null hypothesis H_0 : the median of the two independent groups is equal but since the $P_{\text{value}} \leq 0.05$ then the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, the medians of the two groups are different.

Table 7 indicates the significant results obtained from the Mann Whitney U-statistic when the grouping variable is gender and the contrast variable, the level of agreement is an ordinal one.

Table 7. The Mann Whitney U-Statistic Questions 8 and 12.

Questions	Gender	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U Whitney	P Value*
Q8: Infrastructure involvement	Male	117.54	9285.50	6125.500	.003
	Female	146.91	28940.50		
Q12: Customs and tradition encouragement	Male	124.73	9604.50	6601.500	.058
	Female	143.83	28621.50		

Table 8 shows the median and the cumulative percentage in each of the categories of the level of agreement expressed by five points Likert scale and classified by nationality.

Table 8. Cumulative Percentage in Each Response Categories and the median.

		Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q11	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q18
Croatian	1	0.7	0.7	0.7	10.7	2.0	1.3	2.0	0.7	7.4	2.0
	2	3.4	2.0	3.4	34.9	9.4	8.7	5.4	6.7	20.8	15.4
	3	28.2	15.4	27.5	69.8	30.9	36.2	24.2	32.9	61.7	52.3
	4	60.4	51.7	69.8	87.2	71.1	72.5	67.8	81.2	84.6	87.2
	5	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Median*	3.68	3.95	3.53	2.43	3.47	3.38	3.59	3.35	2.71	2.93
Spanish	1	3.9		2.3	10.1	4.7	3.1	0.8	0.8	7.1	3.9
			3.1								
	2	17.3	15.7	9.4	48.8	23.3	11.7	13.5	3.9	31.5	22.0
	3	57.5	46.5	45.3	79.8	62.0	50.8	55.6	22.7	77.2	72.4
	4	93.7	79.5	70.3	96.1	90.7	85.2	90.5	67.2	96.1	93.7
	Median*	2.81	3.10	3.18	2.03	2.68	2.97	2.86	3.61	2.40	2.55

* The median range from 1 to 5 (1 = completely disagree, 2=disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree and 5 = completely agree).

Table 9 illustrates the median as a measure of central tendency for female and male respondents and the cumulative percentage in each of the categories of the level of agreement expressed by five points Likert scale.

Table 9. Cumulative Relative Frequencies of questions 8 and 12 and the Median.

	Options ^a	Infrastructure Investment (Q.8 %)	Customs and Tradition Encouragement (Q.12 %)
Female	1	0.0	0.5
	2	3.0	6.0
	3	15.7	28.6
	4	62.9	76.4
	5	100	100
	Median	3.72	3.44
Male	1	1.3	1.3
	2	12.7	9.1
	3	30.4	45.5
	4	75.9	77.9
	5	100	100
	Median	3.43	3.54

^aThe answer options are 1 = completely disagree, 2=disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree and 5 = completely agree.

Table 10 presents the positive Rho correlation coefficient (but only for females) for questions 5 in which we ask students about the net benefit of tourism activity (benefits of tourism are greater than the negative aspects of tourism) and question 25 where students are being directly asked about their attitude towards the development of tourism in the destination. For female students there is a correlation between the perception of net benefits and their attitude towards tourism development but not for males.

Table 10. Correlations between question 5 and question 25.

Nationality	Gender	Spearman's RHO	Significance Level*
Spanish	Female	0.266	0.011

Discussion

This study pursued to test the differences in the tourism impact perception of a particular segment of the population; tourism college students between 18-21 years of age, coming from two EU highly dependent tourism economies, who would probably be directly or indirectly employed in the tourism sector in the medium term. In this section, we firstly report the results based on the data collected from a questionnaire survey administered before the covid 19 pandemic to 129 Spanish College students and 148 Croatian College students. Secondly, we present the conclusions after analyzing the responses and testing our hypothesis by employing non-parametric statistical techniques. Our preliminary analysis based on the responses' frequencies agrees with the theoretical premise of local residents, tourism college students in particular, being rather supportive as they show an overall optimistic perception and attitude towards tourism development. Generally speaking, as Pizam had stated in his work, we do find that tourism college students show a sound positive attitude regarding the impact of tourism in the three dimensions of sustainability⁹[2]. Notwithstanding, we believe there may be significant differences based on two nominal variables: the nationality and the gender of the respondent of the questionnaire. The results showed that most of the differences were due to the cultural aspect, the nationality. Indeed, we report differences in the students' perceptions of the impact of the tourism sector given their nationality. Furthermore, we did find some differences based on the gender of the respondent. In particular, in the following topics related to tourism development (economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability), we reject the null hypothesis of our study and we do accept the alternative hypothesis, which means that we do find differences in the medians of the samples and thus, we can conclude the nationality is a significant variable. In other words, tourism college students, based on their country of origin, show a different perception of the impact of tourism development when we ask them about i) how tourism development explains higher prices in the destination; ii) about how tourism development creates an impact on the violence rate, iii) how much traffic congestion rises and iv) how the cleanliness in the streets decreases. Therefore, Croats perceive more the net cost of tourism activity in the socioeconomic dimension. They seem to be more aware of the negative externalities; however, our study cannot provide conclusions with regard to the reasons behind those results. We could speculate about the reasons they do perceive the negative factors to a greater degree. However, we understand these are limitations of our research and we do prefer to leave the study of these potential reasons open for future research.

On the other hand, Croats versus Spaniards have a different perception on how the local population is increasingly leaving old jobs and getting more tourism related jobs. Also, nationality is a significant variable when being asked about how adequately informed the local population is about the entrepreneurial opportunities in the tourism sector. Croats consider that the local population should be more involved in the development and planning of tourism. From the environmental dimension, Spaniards are more skeptical about how tourism can help strengthen the environmental value of the recipient country of visitors. There are significant differences in the responses while

⁹ Economic, environmental and social dimensions

testing if the benefits outweigh the costs and if the population is already benefiting from the tourism activity. While we contrast categorical questions through the Chi-squared test (binary responses or positive, negative, neutral attitude), we employ the SPSS and we confirm again that the nationality is a significant variable while testing the residents' attitude towards tourism activity. In other words, our main hypothesis has been confirmed since that our evidence show that the perception of the benefits and the costs coming out of the tourism activity are different based on the nationality of the respondent. Our findings report students from Croatia perceive more the negative impact or the negative externalities of tourism development than the tourism college students from Spain. Based on our study we can state that their net perception (benefits minus costs) though positive is less supportive than their counterparts from Spain.

In particular, our research shows significant differences due to nationality in the following 10 issues related to the impact of tourism development:

Q3: Inflation	Q4: Local population involvement planning
Q6: Safety and Security	Q5: Net benefits
Q7: Traffic congestion	Q15: Destination economic improvement perception
Q11: Street Cleanliness	Q16: Entrepreneurial opportunities awareness
Q14: Labor market tourism oriented	Q18: Ecological value strengthening

In all those 10 questions (except in question 15) we reach the same conclusion: Croats, on average, compared to Spaniards show a higher level of agreement on all the 10 statements. That is to say, Croats perceive a greater impact of tourism development on inflation than Spaniards. Croats' perception of the negative impact on safety and security is higher than the Spaniard perception. Croats also perceive more the negative impact of tourism development on traffic congestion and its impact on the street cleanliness. Croats also perceive that there is an employment bias towards tourism employment (tourism activity growth has developed a labor market more tourism oriented). Moreover, Croats also perceive that the local population should be much more involved in the task of tourism development and planning of the destination (local population should play a more active role in tourism planning) than their Spaniards counterparts. Question 5 outcome shows one of the most interesting results of our research: Croats understand better the positive net benefits of the tourism industry development despite their more negative attitude towards tourism development. Besides, Croats seem more aware of the need of the local population being informed about the entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism. Last but not least, from the environmental point of view, Croats show a more positive perception than the Spaniards when being asked about how tourism may contribute to the strengthening of the quality of the destination's ecological value. However, in question 15, Spaniards show once again their more positive perception when being asked about how tourism has already improved the economic situation of the destination. All in all, our findings state that Croats are more aware of the negative impacts of tourism development than Spaniards though at the same time their perception of the net benefits is higher. With regard to questions 19, 20 and 21, we used a Chi-squared contrast. Answers show that Spaniards consider that their destination is far more threatened by overbuilding than what Croats reckon; Spaniards also perceive to a greater extent than Croats that their carrying capacity has been already exceeded, but even if their awareness of the risk of the high pressure of the demand they still show a higher positive attitude towards tourism

development Croats. Certainly, Croats show a more negative and neutral attitude than their Spaniards counterparts. Therefore, Croats overall attitude (question 21: renumbered for the purpose of this research) is more pessimistic than the Spaniards attitude even if they seem to be more aware of the positive net benefits of tourism development, in spite of the costs of tourism development. In a nutshell, our research unveils differences in the perception of the impact of the Travel and Tourism Industry (particularly on the negative impact) due to nationality. That is to say, our results show that Croats seem to be more realistic¹⁰ than Spaniards, which tell us that they understand better the scope of the negative impact of tourism development. From the gender perspective, we do find several significant results. On the one hand, the overall attitude of women is more optimistic than of men. Besides, women answer in a correlated manner when being asked about their overall attitude towards tourism development and about the net benefits of the tourism activity. Moreover, being a female is a significant variable when being asked about how tourism has encouraged investment in infrastructure (question 8). Also females respond in a different manner than their male colleagues when considering the issue of tourism being a tool to revitalize their country's customs and local traditions (question 12). Our findings report students from Croatia perceive more the negative impact or the negative externalities of tourism development than the tourism college students from Spain. Based on our study we can state that even if Croats higher awareness of tourism development net benefits (benefits minus costs) they end being less supportive towards tourism development than their counterparts from Spain. Even while depending more on tourism jobs than Spaniards. This outcome in Croatia may be explained by prior research that considers the more developed the tourism sector becomes, the greater the decline in residents' support towards tourism development. Maybe it is because the Croatian travel and tourism sector has grown too fast while the Spanish T&T industry growth rate has been more steady. Based on the body of literature exploring the perception and the attitude of residents towards tourism development, we would have expected our data to indicate that tourism college students should be rather supportive and optimistic regarding tourism development ([2]; [4]) but in Spain, as a more mature tourism market, with apparently a greater deal of congestion and over tourism prior the pandemic, local residents should have perceived more the negative effects than the benefits. However, our research reaches the contrary conclusion in this respect.

5. Conclusions

In this study, our aim has been to contribute to the existing literature by measuring perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development of today's tourism workforce representing two EU countries highly dependent on the tourism industry though at different levels of development and with different paces of growth rates: Spain and Croatia.

In the aftermath of covid 19 pandemic, tourism sustainability has emerged as a major concern for the world travel and tourism industry. We believe that understanding better EU workforce perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development is essential and very valuable for tourism sustainability management policies.

Because nationality is a significant variable, based on our evidence, we must make sure that national and subnational governments consider obtaining a greater knowledge of their own residents' perceptions and spur a deeper involvement of their host communities in their tourism planning policies. Prior literature and empirical evidence on residents' attitudes based on the hypothesis of the sector dependence would have predicted a relative more optimistic attitude in Croatia than in Spain given their higher dependence on the T&T industry and jobs plus a larger gap to its potential tourism output. However, our findings suggest that that is not so. Croats, while being less concerned of the demand pressure, measured by the risk of overbuilding and excess of carrying capacity, seem more aware of the negative impacts of tourism development than the Spaniards. Thus, in this paper we report that the country much more dependent on tourism activity and on tourism

¹⁰ Results could also be explained as Croats being rather more pessimistic towards their tourism development.

jobs, precisely the one which has grown more rapidly over the past decade, show a tourism workforce more reluctant to further tourism development.

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