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Measuring Tourism Intensity and its Impact on the Environment at Subnational Level

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Topic addressed:

Tourism is a fundamental industry for the French economy and society. However, concentrated in both time and space, it generates a massive influx of visitors in destinations that are sometimes sparsely populated throughout the year. These significant population changes raise the issue of the carrying capacity of tourist destinations, aiming at estimating the level of tourist frequentation not to exceed without affecting the destination's environment.

In order to approach this concept, the French Ministry of the Environment carried out a study on the environmental impact of the population changes caused by tourism. Locally, the ambition is to identify tourist destinations likely to generate significant variations of population. In this view, the 'tourism intensity rate' (ie number of tourist beds per 100 residents) of each municipality of the territory has been calculated. The study focuses on 6,000 municipalities likely to host at least as many visitors as permanent residents. While only 6% of the national population resides on a yearly basis in these destinations, they concentrate on their territory 60% of the French tourist beds studied.

In order to measure environmental impacts of tourism in these destinations, the study analyzes the management of natural resources in relation to the rest of the territory: water use and management, waste management, land use, level of protection of natural areas, etc. Data analysis points out, in particular, a high demand for water drinking abstraction, a complex management of waste (large municipal waste generation, complex waste treatment) and natural spaces confronted with increasing artificialization of soil.

However, landscapes' quality and preservation of the natural spaces of destinations are important factors of tourist attraction. In order to preserve their natural resources, some tourism stakeholders are developing local projects and involvements (labels, certifications, etc.) to move towards a sustainable tourism.

Source:

Gauche (M), La fonction touristique des territoires : facteur de pression ou de préservation de l'environnement ? CGDD, Datalab, SOeS, mars 2017

Also available in English version: Gauche (M), Tourism intensity at a local level: environmental pressure or preservation factor? CGDD, Datalab, SOeS, march 2017

Keywords:

Tourism intensity – carrying capacity - subnational indicators