

Dynamics of the Impact of Labor Expenditure on the Profitability of Companies in the HoReCa Sector in the Romanian Coastal Area

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Abstract

As it is known, coastal tourism is the most significant economic sector in the coastal area due to the activities and associated benefits. The MARSPLAN BS-II project (2019-2021) which aims to develop a common strategy to lead to the development of maritime spatial plans for Romania and Bulgaria, was an opportunity to analyze labor costs and productivity of economic agents in Constanța County whose activity. The most spectacular evolution in terms of profitability was registered for hotels and other accommodation facilities groups, starting with 2017. The major investments made in infrastructure have generated tempting profits for companies, this situation being correlated with the investments made by Romanians abroad in the coastal area and by the large increase in the number of tourists. The catering activities revealed an interesting evolution; if during 2010-2014 this activity was quite little visible, starting with 2015 there is an accentuated dynamics of this sub-activity, this evolution indicating, first of all, a change in the population's consumption habits. The labor analysis was also developed by observing the allocations of expenses for the remuneration of the employees, the average values being fluctuating in time, and showing differences both between periods and between subsectors. High average values were observed in all the analyzed years, in the companies carrying out activities included in the sub-sector other food services, with significant increases in 2018 and 2019, and in the hotels' subsector and other similar accommodation facilities especially during 2018-2019. In conclusion, the hospitality sector, by creating jobs and increasing profitability can play a key role in supporting and significantly improving the business environment, generating direct, indirect, and induced effects on the performance of companies.

Keywords

Tourism; profitability; labor costs; HoReCa; Constanța county; coastal area; Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP).

Introduction

The coastal area is the link between marine and terrestrial space, a complex, dynamic environment with a fragile balance, in which water and land interact, but which also concentrates high anthropogenic pressures in its coastal and offshore areas given by maritime traffic, coastal tourism, and maritime, oil and gas research and extraction, cables, and pipelines, aquaculture, fishing (Depellegrin et al., 2017). Thus, the coastal and marine space is the “home” of a constantly growing number of human activities and facilities, of which the most important are those related to coastal and maritime tourism (Papageorgiou, 2016).

Coastal and maritime tourism is a major economic activity in the European Union, with a broad impact on economic growth, employment, and social development, and is a powerful tool to support economic development. Recent research (Dimitrovski et al., 2021) shows that coastal and maritime tourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry and the European Union has recognized the potential of encouraging the development of sustainable EU Blue Growth Agenda.

In the European Union, maritime spatial planning (MSP) has been seen as a means of promoting the sustainable growth of the “blue” economy, as it can strongly stimulate economic growth and development, as well as job creation, especially for the coastal regions. According to Article 5 (2) of the 2014/89/EU Directive, among other objectives of maritime spatial planning is the promotion of sustainable tourism.

Romania, in partnership with Bulgaria, is currently running the MARSPLAN BS-II project (2019-2021) which aims to develop a common MSP strategy based on the results obtained so far and which should lead to the development of maritime spatial plans for both countries in 2021. Ehler (2014) argues that the maritime spatial management plan must present an integrated vision of the spatial aspects of their sectoral policies in the fields of economic development, maritime transport, environmental protection, energy, fisheries, and tourism, which is also established by 2014/89/EU Directive.

Coastal tourism is the most significant economic sector in the coastal area due to the activities and associated benefits. In Romania, a country with an emerging economy, coastal tourism plays an extremely important role, representing a significant branch of the tourism sector. In the context of the extension of the integrated phenomenon at the European level, a scientific approach to the complex aspects of the development of Romanian tourism on the Black Sea and especially of coastal tourism appears more than necessary.

This study performs an analysis of labor costs and productivity of economic agents in Constanța County, whose activity, according to CANE classifications, is included in the group *Hotels and Restaurants*, in correlation with profitability aspects.

Tourism development and economic growth in the coastal area

Today, worldwide, tourism is a significant economic activity, considered by many authors as the largest branch (industry) in the world, an appreciation supported by the level and evolution of its main indicators. Although it is a well-individualized economic activity, tourism must be analyzed as a component of the global economic system in close connection with other economic sectors. The very complex nature of the tourism sector determines an interconditional approach; it is, first of all, the fact that, in its content, tourism includes economic activities of great diversity: accommodation, food, transport, leisure but also administration and organization; also, many of these activities are addressed not only to tourists but also to residents (restaurants, museums, etc.); at the same time, some activities from the composition of tourism are found in the structure of other fields or branches of the economy, their development being dependent on their dynamics (the classic example of transport). Last but not least, the tourism sector is made up of public or semi-public sector structures (destination management organizations, promotion offices, information centers).

It is accepted and agreed at the international and European level the importance of the tourism industry sector whose activity is the provision of accommodation and food services. According to World Travel and Tourism Council statistics, the tourism and hotel industry contributed 10% of global GDP until the global COVID-19 pandemic, which changed the paradigm of the global tourism and travel market.

Coastal areas are some of the world's main tourist areas; in the European Union, more than half (51.7%) of tourist accommodation units are located in coastal areas. Coastal tourism attracts the number of tourists to visit and creates essential income resources for locals (Petrișor et al., 2020). Therefore, tourism activity has a positive impact on the economic development of areas with tourist potential, such as the coastal area, by creating job opportunities by capitalizing on cultural and natural heritage, diversification opportunities of local economies by capitalizing revenues locally, and not only.

The tourism industry is that part of the economy made up of several activities (hotels and restaurants, transport, tour operators/organizers, etc.) whose common function is to meet the needs of tourists. At the same time, the development of the tourism industry, to meet the requirements of different categories of tourists, has led to a considerable increase in the number of people engaged in providing these services. There is no doubt that tourism is an important generator of jobs; the labor force in tourism is firmly based on the economy and takes into account the economic value of employment in tourism (Ladkin, 2011).

The transition from a command economy to a modern and efficient market economy is a relatively long process, which has inevitably generated from the very beginning economic hardship and major social costs. For Romania, the period 2000–2006 was

characterized by a whole series of reforms, preparing Romania to become a member of the EU, the next period being marked by a contradictory economic development, which registered a socio-economic boom, followed shortly by a strong economic crisis (Petrișor, Sirodov, & Ianoș, 2020), then the exit from the recession and the recovery of the economy. In terms of public funding, there have been several changes over time, reflected in several public regulations (Oprisan et al., 2020) or in monitoring corporate performance from the perspective of sustainable development (Munteanu et al., 2020), thus being encouraged the development of certain sectors of activity that have had a direct and/or indirect impact on tourism. To maintain these benefits, the activity of economic agents involved several categories of costs, such as management costs (equipment, infrastructure, human resources, etc.), opportunity costs to stimulate certain activities, and indirect costs, such as be those generated by the impact of tourism on the local economy (Grigorescu, Frinculeasa, & Chitescu, 2019). As observed in other studies (Marin (Barbu) & Condrea, 2020), to obtain the best results at the level of an industry, such as tourism, it is necessary to use holistic, integrated management, so that tourist destinations in the coastal area to provide a competitive advantage in the market competition with other tourist destinations of the world aimed at the same target group.

Quantification of tourism in the specialized companies is important, which is why the use of the tourist indicators allows an in-depth analysis of the tourist activity and of the factors that influence it. Several studies (Sequeira & Nunes, 2008; Lee & Chang, 2008; Scarlett, 2021) that examine the relationship between tourism and economic growth have found a positive long-term relationship between them. A series of criteria and indicators are used to assess the economic efficiency of tourism. The socio-economic share of each of the economic activities (accommodation services, catering services) is characterized by a series of common indicators such as the number of people employed, the number of enterprises, gross profit, exports, and turnover (Fernández-Macho et al., 2015).

Research methodology

The purpose of this article is the dynamic analysis of the impact of labor costs on the profitability of companies in the *Hotels and Restaurants* sector in Constanța County to examine how coastal tourism influences maritime planning (MSP), this sector being a defining one for coastal tourism.

Thus, the research aimed at a systematic raid to highlight some aspects of labor force dynamics on different sub-structures of HoReCa, as well as the evolution of the average number of employees and profitability indicators - gross profit / gross loss on a period of 10 years, in the horizon 2010-2019.

Using an exhaustive database, provided by Romania's Public Finance Ministry, that included the companies that operate and are registered in Constanta County, the investigated statistical units were filtered according to the CANE classification, selecting the economic agents whose main activity is *Hotels and Restaurants*. For the statistical analysis undertaken in this study, indicators from the financial accounting statements (balance sheets) were taken into account, indicators that formed the

following research variables: number of employees, salary expenses, return on staff costs, average gross profit, and average loss gross.

The study area, which overlaps with a territory rich in natural, anthropic, and cultural tourist resources, has developed a great diversity of activities that fall into the following categories:

1. *Hotels and other similar accommodation facilities* (code 5510). This class includes providing short-term accommodation, usually daily or weekly, for visitors.
2. *Accommodation facilities for holidays and short periods* (code 5520). This class includes the provision of short-term accommodation, usually daily or weekly, for visitors in separate (independent) dwellings consisting of fully furnished rooms or dining and sleeping areas with fully equipped cooking facilities or kitchens.
3. *Caravan parks, campsites, and camps* (code 5530). This class includes the provision of accommodation services in caravan parks, recreational camps and fishing and hunting camps, recreational vehicle parks.
4. *Other accommodation services* (code 5590). This class includes providing temporary or long-term accommodation in rooms with one or more beds or bedrooms for students, seasonal workers, and others.
5. *Restaurant* (Code 5610). This class includes the activity of providing dining services for customers, whether they are served sitting at the table or serve themselves from a window shop products, whether eating meals prepared on-site, take them home, or are delivered to them.
6. *Event catering activities* (code 5621). This class includes the provision of catering services based on contractual arrangements with the customer, at the location specified by the customer, for a specific event.
7. *Other food services* (code 5629). This activity includes industrial catering, ie the provision of food services based on contractual arrangements with the customer, for a specified period of time.
8. *Bars and other beverage service activities* (code 5630). This class includes activities of preparing and serving beverages for immediate consumption on the premises.

Data processing, systematization of results, and obtaining indicators used for statistical analysis were performed using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results and discussion

The Black Sea coastal area has a natural tourist potential imposed by both the long sandy beaches and the seawater, as well as the spa resources, which gives the Romanian coast a wide range of tourist motivations: rest, leisure sports, spa treatment complex, etc. The anthropic tourist potential is dominated by the archeological remains and the ruins of the fortresses, historical monuments, art and architecture, museums, and memorial houses.

According to the Master Plan for Tourism Development in Romania 2007–2026 developed by the World Tourism Organization in collaboration with professional and employers' associations in tourism, the proportion of coastal tourism in the national total is estimated at approx. 60% of the total tourist registrations at the national level.

Therefore, tourism is one of the most important and representative economic activities in the coastal area.

Although tourism is defined as a branch of the national economy, with complex functions and multisectoral implications, which includes all activities carried out to produce goods and services for tourists, for the analysis of the coastal tourism sector this study includes a single class, *Hotels and Restaurants*, divided into two main groups of economic activities (hotels and other similar accommodation facilities and restaurants and other foodservice activities). The analyzed database, which includes all the companies from Constanța County, whose main activity is *Hotels and Restaurants*, was formed by applying several filters: CAEN code (companies with codes between 5500 and 5800 were selected) and turnover strictly higher than zero. Thus, 2211 companies remained under study in 2010, 2211 companies in 2011, 2178 companies in 2012, 2158 companies in 2013, 2257 companies in 2014, 2314 companies in 2015, 2444 companies in 2016, 2556 companies in 2017, 2674 companies in 2018, and 2856 companies in 2019.

As a first aspect, numerically, it is notable the increase of the number of entities operating in the targeted field. This dynamic suggests a special economic interest through the perspective of rising profitability in the HoReCa sphere. Viewed in structure, most companies carry out *activities to provide dining services for customers* (activities with CAEN codes 5610). However, as we shall see below, these companies do not meet the highest profits, as they have very high levels with the average number of employees and staff costs. However, the share of these companies in the analyzed group remained approximately the same throughout the examination period. This can be interpreted from multiple perspectives, taking into account the profit obtained, the funding sources, and customers' need for such services which could justify an increase in supply.

The analysis of staff costs during the analyzed period presents a series of interesting developments. Taken as a whole, at the level of the entire analyzed group, the general trend of the HoReCa sector is an ascending one, the average personnel expenses revealing a big increase, from 79276.96 lei in 2010 to 205697.39 lei in 2019. However, in a structural analysis of the HoReCa sub-activities, respectively of the various activities in this sector, uneven and particular dynamics are observed. According to Romanian regulations, companies operating in the HoReCa sector, and not only, are forced to opt for the main activity that they plan to carry out with priority. As a company that opts for the main activity subsector may also opt for other secondary activities, we consider that the total trend, in dynamics, of the group includes the most comprehensive information on the upward economic trend of HoReCa.

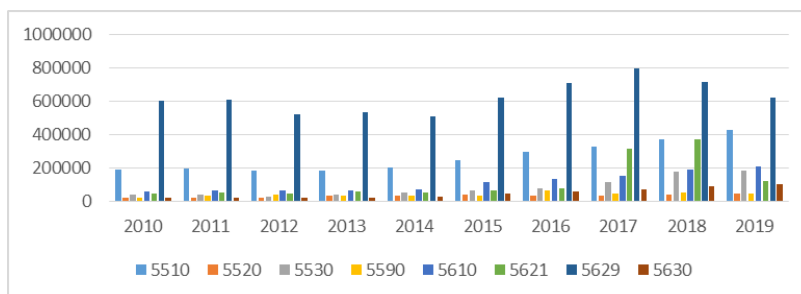


Figure 1. Staff costs
(authors' processing from the database of Public Finance Ministry)

Thus, as can be seen in Figure 1, the highest average values of staff costs were recorded in the subsector *other food services* (code 5629) followed by the subsector *hotels and other similar accommodation facilities* (code 5510). The situation indicates a predilection of the entities towards the provision of food services, based on contractual arrangements with the customer, activities that have some peculiarities: they are varied, specialized, and personalized.

Figure 2 highlights the dynamic evolution of the average number of employees in each HoReCa subsector. The average values indicate unbalanced situations between the analyzed subsectors, the companies focused on *other food services* (code 5629), registering the largest number of employees, at a significant distance being the activities of *hotels and other similar accommodation facilities* (code 5510). As expected, given the seasonal nature of the activity, the entities whose main object of activity is *accommodation facilities for holidays and short periods* (code 5520), registered the lowest average number of employees.

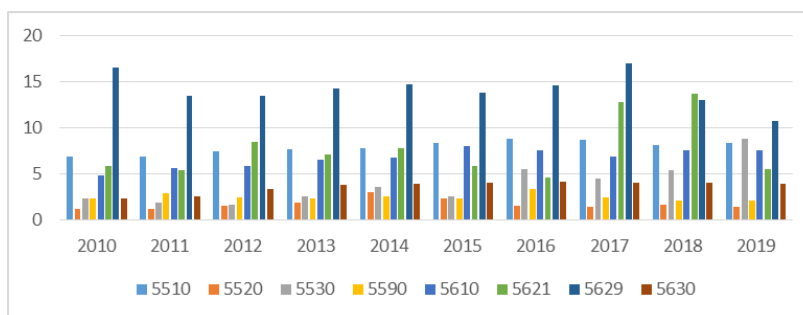


Figure 2. The average number of employees
(authors' processing from the database of Public Finance Ministry)

The graph (Figure 1) of average staff costs, analyzed in correlation with the graph of the average number of employees by activity subsectors (Figure 2), confirms the conclusions on employment and areas of activity that attract specialists in other food services. There are also noteworthy the low values of these indicators in the subsector *accommodation facilities for holidays and short periods* (code 5520) and the subsector *other accommodation services* which includes student housing, dormitories, dormitories, boarding houses and schools, bedroom coaches (code 5590). Although these two sub-activities indicate a very low activity, they have an increased social

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impact in the community, which is why we believe that the involvement of local and national authorities should be aimed at boosting the interest of economic agents in this area.

The return on staff costs highlights three obvious grouping situations: the highest-yielding activities in subsector 5629, the mid-level activity group 5530 and 5621, and the other low-yielding activities.

Labor analysis is also developed by observing the allocation of expenses for employee remuneration (Figure 3). Average values fluctuate over time and differ between periods and between subsectors. High average values were observed for companies operating *other food services* (code 5629) in all years analyzed, with significant increases in 2018 and 2019, and in the subsector *hotels and other similar accommodation facilities* (code 5510) especially during 2018-2019. The situation may suggest the allocation of higher salary expenses during these periods for the remuneration of employees compared to other companies in the same subsectors of activity. Following the average values that are fluctuating, we cannot formulate a conclusion regarding the size of the salary income. The presence of non-uniform dynamics indicates a need to deepen the study, by introducing new variables in the analysis.

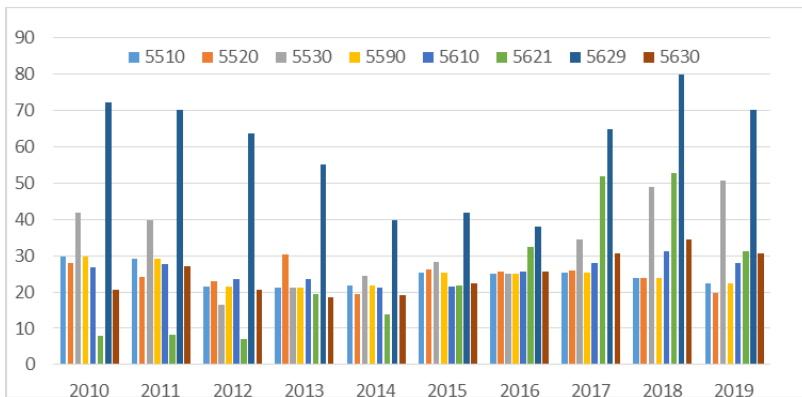


Figure 3. The yield of staff costs
(authors' processing from the database of Public Finance Ministry)

Event catering activities (code 5621) show an interesting evolution. If between 2010 and 2014 this activity was quite little visible, starting with 2015 there is an accentuated dynamics of this sub-activity, this evolution indicating, first of all, a change in the consumption habits of the population. Undoubtedly, the current epidemiological threat situation has been a difficult period for the HoReCa sector, but, on the other hand, the food market (already booming) may have a surprising and unexpected gain from this pandemic. The current situation has led consumers to order packaged food or to opt for food delivery voluntarily and more often. Catering establishments have been faced with two options: either to close their business or to change the package delivery system, which means that the food is delivered to customers or collected personally by them. Thus, for many restaurants, this option meant the need to

implement strategic changes in the operating system, in the delivery system, or even in the menu.

Regarding the dynamics of the average salary, Figure 4 shows an accelerated increase in sub-sectors 5629, 5510, and in the last 3 years analyzed in all sub-activities of the *Hotels and Restaurants group*. Undoubtedly, the coastal tourism industry has become increasingly tempting for the entities involved, proving its contribution to both increasing the profit of economic agents and increasing the income of employees.

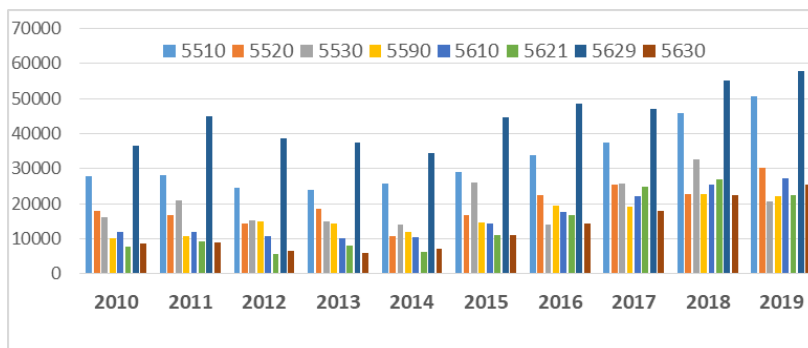


Figure 4. Average salary
(authors' processing from the database of Public Finance Ministry)

The dynamics of the average gross profit reported by the HoReCa companies according to Figure 5 has a special significance for the study because the dynamics of profitability is a first indication of the financial maturity and sustainable operational development in the investigated group.

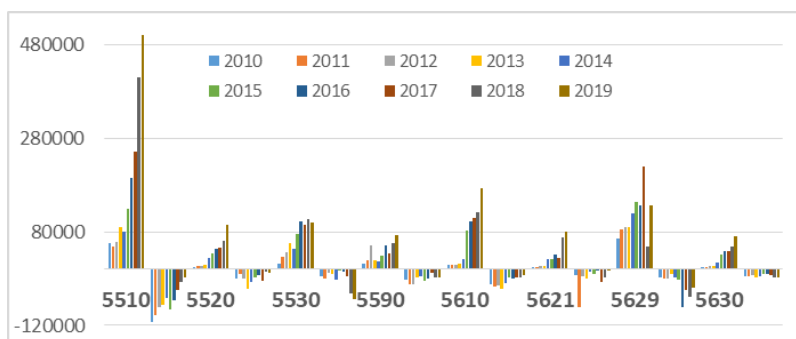


Figure 5. Gross profit / Gross loss
(authors' processing from the database of Public Finance Ministry)

The growth trend is obvious and sustained, being observable as per the entire activity sector and in the component subsectors. In various proportions, each sub-activity registered increases of the average profitability in the analyzed period, being observable the indications regarding the prospects of sustainable economic development in the entire sector of activity. The most spectacular dynamics had the group *Hotels and other accommodation facilities* which, starting with 2017, was decisively ahead of the other activities of this group. The major investments made in

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infrastructure have generated tempting profits for companies with this object of activity, this situation being correlated with the investments made by Romanians abroad in the coastal area but also by the large increase in the number of tourists.

The analysis perspectives suggest increases in market demand that resonate with the supply of services, a change in the competitiveness of prices, as well as divergent developments between companies, with accents of faster development of some companies compared to others. These indices/indications can be analyzed and developed through individual studies. The attention of this study is captured by the general growth trends of this sector and follows the area of interest of the suggested directions by conducting an impact analysis of the economic indicators of the HoReCa sector from social and economic perspectives.

Conclusions

This study aims to contribute to outcomes research initiatives for sustainable development initiatives in coastal areas, helping to clarify whether and how, the parties involved in MSP, especially HoReCa economic agents, really perceive the efforts made by tourist destinations to implement and develop sustainable strategies in Constanța County.

This research is part of Romania's and Bulgaria's concerns to support coherent activities on maritime spatial planning and the establishment of a long-term mechanism for cross-border cooperation in the Black Sea basin with MSP. Within the MARSPLANBS-II project, the research team started a whole series of studies through which useful information was collected from stakeholders, public and private authorities, whose activities are directly or indirectly related to this space to establish a common strategy (Aivaz et al., 2021; Stan et al., 2021). Given the complexity of the terrestrial-marine interaction and the concept of multiple-use, the studies also focused on the most important economic sectors, analyzing in this regard several relevant economic indicators from agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, and support services (Aivaz, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

Mucharreira et al. (2019) consider that economic performance is a key issue in the development of the hospitality industry, tourism productivity being an important measure of performance, growth, and competitiveness in an area that contributes to the long-term growth of economic and living standards, representing one of the key elements of tourism management systems (Kim et al., 2021). As it can be seen from this research, the tourism industry that is increasingly appreciated for its contribution to economic growth, employment, poverty reduction, capital formation, tax revenues, promoting economic diversification (Endo, 2006; Cró & Martins, 2020), can help stimulate the development of areas with tourist potential, namely coastal areas.

We can say without hesitation that tourism through its interdependence with economic growth, is the backbone of the economy. The HoReCa sector, by creating jobs and increasing profitability can play a key role in supporting and significantly improving the business environment, producing direct, indirect, and induced effects on company performance. In this context, the practice of MSP is not only a scientific and

technical challenge but also a social and political process with major economic consequences (Friess & Grémaud-Colombier, 2019).

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