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The role of regionalism for tourism: an analysis of responses to Covid-19 in the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

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The role of regionalism for tourism: an analysis of responses to Covid-19 in the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

O papel do regionalismo para o turismo: uma análise das respostas ao COVID-19 na União Europeia e na Associação das Nações do Sudeste Asiático

El papel del regionalismo para el turismo: un análisis de las respuestas al COVID-19 en la Unión Europea y la Asociación de Naciones del Sudeste Asiático

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ABSTRACT:

This article analyses the role of regional integration schemes in the management of the COVID-19 crisis and the policies towards the tourism sector, focusing on the policies and strategies developed by the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) during the pandemic crisis. It presents the concepts of old and new regionalism from the International Relations field of studies and how regional integration correlates with policies and strategies for tourism, which have been put to the test by the need to bring the activity to a halt. This is an exploratory article, which relies on a qualitative methodology based on documental research, content analysis and access to secondary data. It presents the hypothesis that the tourism sectors from countries which are part of regional organisations benefit from these structures, once they provide mechanisms for developing coordinated recovery plans and the management of tourism mobilities. As a conclusion, the article provides a possible scenario where tourism will take place in a “world of regions”, with long-haul transit between continents returning at a slower pace in comparison with a faster restart of the activity within “intra-regional bubbles”, such as the EU and ASEAN.

KEYWORDS: Tourism, COVID-19, Regionalism, European Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

RESUMO:

Este artigo analisa o papel dos esquemas de integração regional na gestão da crise do COVID-19 e das políticas voltadas para o setor de turismo, enfocando as políticas e estratégias desenvolvidas pela União Europeia (UE) e pela Associação das Nações do Sudeste Asiático (ASEAN) durante a crise pandêmica. Apresenta o conceito do velho e novo regionalismo do campo de estudos das Relações Internacionais e como a integração regional se correlaciona com as políticas e estratégias para o turismo, postas à prova pela necessidade de paralisar a atividade. Trata-se de um artigo exploratório, que conta com metodologia qualitativa baseada em análise de conteúdo, pesquisa documental e acesso a dados secundários. Apresenta a hipótese de que os setores de turismo de países que fazem parte de organizações regionais se beneficiam dessas estruturas, uma vez que fornecem mecanismos para o desenvolvimento de planos coordenados de recuperação e de gestão das mobilidades turísticas. Como conclusão, o artigo apresenta um cenário possível onde o turismo ocorrerá em um “mundo de regiões”, com viagens de longa distância entre continentes retornando em um ritmo mais lento em comparação com um reinício mais rápido da atividade dentro de “bolhas intrarregionais”, como a UE e a ASEAN.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Turismo, COVID-19, Regionalismo, União Europeia, Associação das Nações do Sudeste Asiático.

RESUMEN:

Este artículo analiza el papel de los esquemas de integración regional en la gestión de la crisis de COVID-19 y las políticas hacia el sector turístico, centrándose en las políticas y estrategias desarrolladas por la Unión Europea (UE) y la Asociación de Naciones del Sudeste Asiático (ASEAN) durante la crisis pandémica. Presenta el concepto de “regionalismo” desde el campo de estudios de

Relaciones Internacionales y cómo la integración regional se correlaciona con políticas y estrategias para el turismo, que han sido puestas a prueba por la necesidad de paralizar la actividad. Se trata de un artículo exploratorio, que cuenta con una metodología cualitativa basada en el análisis de contenido, la investigación documental y el acceso a datos secundarios. Presenta la hipótesis de que los sectores turísticos de países que forman parte de organizaciones regionales se benefician de estas estructuras, una vez que brindan mecanismos para desarrollar planes coordinados de recuperación y gestión de las movilidades turísticas. Como conclusión, el artículo proporciona un posible escenario en el que el turismo se desarrollará en un "mundo de regiones", con viajes de larga distancia entre continentes que regresan a un ritmo más lento en comparación con un reinicio más rápido de la actividad dentro de las "burbujas intrarregionales". como la UE y la ASEAN.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Turismo, COVID-19, Regionalismo, Unión Europea, Asociación de Naciones del Sudeste Asiático.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism as an economic activity plays a relevant role in the globalised capitalist world economy. The global mobilities are in part a result of and the fuel for globalisation, which can be noticed with the exponential growth in the numbers of international tourists in the last decades, with 1.5 billion travellers in 2019 (United Nations World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO], 2020), 10.3% participation in the global GDP and the creation of one in every ten jobs around the world (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC], 2019).

Despite its importance in economic terms, tourism is a fragile sector and very reliant on an orderly international environment for its functioning. War, terrorism, economic crises, diseases, and environmental catastrophes are among some of the most common threats to this activity, which has suffered in past events such as the 9/11 attacks, the 2008-2009 financial crisis and SARS, MERS and H1N1 outbreaks (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). Recently, the tourism industry is facing perhaps its most challenging scenario with the COVID-19 pandemic. With most countries putting all non-essential travel to a halt, there has been a 94% reduction of flights around the world (International Air Transport Association [IATA], 2020). According to the UNWTO, 189 countries had some form of travel restriction put in place as of June 2020, which varied from the need for 14-days quarantine after arrival to full border closures (UNWTO, 2020). An OECD study indicates that, depending on the duration of the crisis, the decline in the international tourism economy may range between 60% to 80% in 2020 (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2020).

The disruption in global mobilities might continue until entire populations are vaccinated and immunised against the COVID-19 (Hall, Scott & Gössling, 2020). Therefore, it is expected that the tourism practice as we once knew it will not come back anytime soon, and many are already discussing if it is desirable to try to do so. Some view the pandemic as an opportunity to rethink tourism development and avoid going back to the same formula (Gössling, Scott, Hall, 2020; Ioaniddes, Gyimóthy, 2020), others tend to pay more attention to the questions of sustainability (Romagosa, 2020; Sheller, 2020; Galvani, Lew, Perez, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020), while some are assessing the economic impacts for the sector and aiming at its recovery (Sigala, 2020; Assaf, Scuderi, 2020; Yeh, 2020). In sum, the current debate for tourism, at least among scholars, divides “between those that support the status quo through a return to business as usual versus those that envision possibilities for greater sustainability, equity, and justice” (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020 p. 16).

Although proposals for the future of tourism are necessary and it is desirable to discuss new possibilities, the analysis of the current events may also contribute to better understanding how tourism is managed during time of crises, what can be expected in the short term for this industry and what policies are being developed for its survival. There is a multitude of possible actors in the international system worth analysing and understanding in the current scenario, ranging from nation-states, non-state actors, transnational, and supranational organisations, among others.

At the time of writing (December 2020) the world seems to have been divided between regions with asymmetrical scenarios. While the European Union (EU) has focused on a coordinated effort to restrict

mobilities and then reopen its border for intraregional travellers during summer season, regions like Latin America and North America have suffered heavily from the effects of the pandemic, especially Brazil and the United States of America as a result of their poor decisions in terms of controlling the spread of the virus - and evasive efforts towards a massive vaccination programme. This has prompted the EU to impose a ban on citizens from these regions, which is a new event in historical terms, but something that has been taking place since the beginning of the pandemic.

But why are there so many differences in how each region deals with the pandemic? And how is the European Union reopening for intraregional tourism? The answers for these questions may lay in the capacity for cooperation and action from each country and region, which is heavily influenced by their ability to coordinate policies and resources.

In this context, the research aims at understanding the role of regions, especially those organised under supranational arrangements such as the European Union, and their political framework for tourism. More specifically, it draws attention to the processes of regionalism/regionalisation in a historical perspective, as to understand the processes of regional integration and its correlations to tourism policy and how such structures are dealing with the pandemic. By understanding regions as a social construction with multiple actors, this research will focus on identifying the responses from supranational bodies within the regional context.

To do so, the article takes examples from the European Union (EU) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). We first present the concepts of regionalism and analytical categories from the international relations field and its links with tourism, then we identify the main policies developed for or that impact tourism and discuss them considering the theoretical framework proposed for this research.

Although the global scenario is marked by uncertainty, after nearly a year since the pandemic was declared the reactions by regional structures have already shown some interesting patterns that might be useful for analysis of tourism in times of worldwide health crises. Therefore, far from trying to predict scenarios, the article sets a possible view of a “world of regions”, which seems to be in process of formation with economic blocs uniting to preserve their tourism industries by stimulating intraregional travel, while at the same time barring tourists from other regions.

REGIONALISM AND ITS LINKS WITH TOURISM

Tourism, due to its multifaceted and multidisciplinary character, moves and is driven by analyses that cross several disciplines. Tourism and tourists are complex entities, and a greater plurality of epistemological approaches and methods are necessary to unveil their complexity (Coles, Hall & Duval, 2005). Therefore, one of the possible fields for interdisciplinary analyses of the touristic phenomenon is that of international relations, since its theories have the purpose of formulating methods and concepts that allow understanding the nature and functioning of the international system, as well as explaining phenomena that shape the world politics (Messari & Nogueira, 2005).

The development of supranational institutional arrangements that generate agreements between countries in a regional context is one of the phenomena commonly analysed in International Relations within the studies of “Regionalism”. Regionalism may be linked to the increase in the number of nation-states after the Second World War and the Cold War, and to changes in the behaviour of the international system, causing states to seek greater integration for economic or security reasons (Fawcett, 2008).

It is possible to analyse regionalism in three major waves (Fawcett, 2008). The first took place between 1945 and 1965, in which the spirit of regionalism was revived and strengthened in the post-World War II scenario and the creation of several international organisations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the Bretton Woods/GATT system. The second wave, between 1965 and 1985, is characterised by the search to improve regional self-sufficiency and cooperation in a modified international system which

provided a certain flexibility to regional actors. With the decrease in bipolarity arising from the détente, many developing countries consolidated themselves as autonomous states, thanks to the process of African-Asian decolonization and sought to engage in some type of regional integration, both for economic and security reasons. Finally, the third wave, from 1985 to the present day, comes after the end of the Cold War following a new panorama of the international system. Some institutions moved forward and embraced new responsibilities, such as the newly created European Union and others, as in the Pacific with Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), were created in response to the new order of the international post-cold war system.

Hurrell (1995) discusses the ambiguity between the definitions of "region" and "regionalism", since there is no consensus on what actually determines one and the other. This is because issues such as geographical limits, social, economic, and political cohesion and interdependence open a range of varied analyses. In addition, "all regions are socially constructed and, therefore, politically liable to be challenged" (Hurrell, 1995: 25). Thus, these debates employ the broad term "regionalism" to explain various phenomena, and it is from this perspective that the author proposes to divide the notion of regionalism into five major categories:

1. Regionalisation: also called "soft regionalism", it concerns the integration of regions through an autonomous process linked to economic issues. These forces of economic regionalisation come from markets, private trade and investment flows and business policies and decisions. In addition, regionalisation involves increasing circulation of people and the development of social channels and networks, creating transnational regional civil societies. In this way, regionalisation is configured as an endogenous process, linked to the networks that are formed between non-state agents, rather than arrangements based on concrete state policies;

2. Regional awareness and identity: just like nations, regions can also be seen as imagined communities that rely on mental maps, whose lines highlight certain characteristics and ignore others. Regional awareness and a shared perception of belonging to a particular community can be supported by internal factors, often defined in terms of common culture, history, and religious traditions. They can also be defined in opposition to an external "other";

3. Regional cooperation between states: these are instruments for institutionalising regional cooperation between states, which in general aim to give up certain legal freedoms or parts of its sovereignty for greater practical influence on the policies of other states and on the management of common problems;

4. Regional economic integration promoted by the state: one of the aspects most cited among the subcategories of regional cooperation. So-called "European model", regionalism is very often simply equated with regional economic integration, although this is only one aspect of a more general phenomenon;

5. Regional cohesion: refers to the possibility that, at some point, the combination of the first four processes described will result in the emergence of a cohesive and consolidated regional unit.

The role of globalisation in the discussions on regionalism during the beginning of the "third wave" has to be grasped, a period marked by the emerging theories of the "end of history and geography" (Fukuyama, 1989) and "the clash of civilisations" (Huntington, 2000). As in the past, regionalism was viewed positively by some as a mere springboard to a more integrated world and with suspicion by others as potentially obstructive and detrimental to broader global processes (Fawcett, 2008). In this historical context, the role of the nation-state itself came into question in the face of an international system in rapid transition to a scenario with multiple agents of political change. Thus, as highlighted by Valérie Mello (1999), the debate on globalisation is fundamental since countries, policies and peoples are increasingly affected by international factors and global forces.

This can be illustrated by the practices, representations and impacts of contemporary "mobile social lives", in which corporeal travel, physical movement of objects, imaginative travels, virtual travel and communicative travel are intertwined (Urry, 2007; Elliot & Urry, 2010). With no room for doubt, this is an unequal, asymmetric intricate process, in which the mobility of some is enhanced by undesired immobility

of many others. Tourism is both the product of and one of the sectors most affected by globalisation and its consequent changes in the international system and the international economy.

In order to summarize the theoretical body about Regionalism, it is important to mention the steps for economic integration between countries. According to Malamud (2011), such stages include:

1. Free trade zone: a territorial area without national customs, which means that products from any member-state can enter others without imposition of tariffs, as if they were sold anywhere in the country of origin;
2. Customs union: a common tariff to be paid for products from third countries. It requires member-states to form a single entity on international trade;
3. Common market: a customs union to which the free mobility of productive factors (capital and labour) is added to the existing mobility of goods and services. It requires the adoption of a common trade policy and usually involves the coordination of macroeconomic policies and the harmonization of national laws;
4. Economic union: the adoption of a single currency and monetary policy.

Thus, regionalism constitutes a set of middle-level adjuncts or alternatives in policy and practice as well as analysis (Söderbaum, 2003). The theories and concepts brought here so far intended to give an introduction to regionalism, but they are more related to what has been dubbed “old regionalism” in face of a new world order after the Cold War and the expansion of a globalised neoliberal economy. New approaches to the study of regionalism began to be formulated from the 1990’s onwards, with a strong theoretical body forming at the beginning of the new millennia.

Therefore, beyond Fawcett’s proposal to analyse it in waves, it is possible to divide the study and theories of regionalism into “old regionalism” and “new regionalism”. The old form was mainly dominated by neorealists with a rationalist, pragmatic and rather pessimistic view of the world, and neoliberal institutionalists, who were more concerned with the regulating influence of regional institutions and their capacity to generate a common platform to solve conflicts and promote cooperation, a clear challenge to the neorealist core assumptions of the international system as anarchical and the dominance of states as self-seeking egoists (Söderbaum, 2003; Messari; Nogueira, 2005). The new approach comes with a more reflectivist and critical view of regionalism, broadening the scope of analysis to various actors involved in its processes, not only the nation-state as their main conductor. To Neumann (2003, p.162), ‘instead of postulating a given set of interests that actors are supposed to harbour before their social interaction with other collectives, the region-building approach investigates interests where they are formulated’. Therefore,

reflectivists postulate that actors’ interests and choices are developed according to a different rationality, with a broader set of variables than assumed by the logic of ‘rational choice’ and ‘economic man’. From this perspective, agency is often motivated and explained by ideas, identity, accumulation of knowledge and learning rather than by traditional routines, structural factors or established institutions (Söderbaum, 2003, p. 11).

The new ways to look at regionalism and to analyse other actors within its dynamics were mostly influenced by speeding globalisation processes and its ambiguous results. While still acknowledging the influence from the State, this approach delves into other political actors who are part of processes of “making the region into a region” (Bøås; Marchand; Shaw, 2003, P. 201). It also pays attention to how sometimes various regionalizing actors tend to work in similar and opposing directions, thus cooperating, and also getting in conflict with each other.

With the widening of the debate within regionalism studies and the acknowledgment of the role of different actors in the international system beyond the nation-state, the links between regionalism and tourism began to be investigated. These links are most commonly found within the studies of specific regional organisations, especially the European Union, and their framework for tourism policy and stakeholders involved, case studies of tourism destinations within regional arrangements or questions related to economic and sustainable development.

However, though it is possible to find a growing number of studies on the relations between regionalism and tourism, this is still an incipient area and rather fertile ground for research. During a non-exhaustive literature review, in scientific bases such as Google Scholar and Web of Science, at least 30 works were found by using keywords such as “Tourism”, “Regionalism” and “Regional Integration” in English, Portuguese and Spanish. Some of the initial studies that attempted to correlate the processes of regionalism with tourism are from the 1990s, with Hall (1994; 1997) analysing the relationship between tourism and politics, with economic regionalism as one of the concepts used to study regions such as the Pacific. Silva (1995) grasps the trends in globalisation and regional integration for tourism in his discussion about the Mercosur, while Chang (1998; 2001), Diek (1998) and Smith & Pizam (1998) and Timothy (2000; 2001; 2003) analysed the links of regionalism and tourism in Singapore, Africa, North America, the Caribbean and South and Southeast Asia, respectively.

During the first decade of 2000s, the research on the connections between tourism and regionalism grew with an extensive analysis of the European Union (Anastasiadou, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, Anastasiadou & Sausmarez, 2006), as well as study cases on New Zealand (Shone, 2008), the links of tourism, public policy, and regional development under the New Regionalism Approach (Shone & Memon, 2008) and the case of Bhutan within regionalism and tourism policy (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010).

The most recent works reflect a broader scope of analysis, with questions on tourism mobilities (Anastasiadou, 2011) and sustainability (Milenkovic, 2012) appearing in the studies. However, the Eurocentric approach is still evident with most works related to the European Union (Anastasiadou, 2013; Estol, Camilleri & Font, 2018; Florek, 2018), though other perspectives on international tourism and regional integration also contributed to the advancement of this field of studies (Pieri & Panosso, 2015), with views from regional integration in Latin America (Toselli, 2014; Pieri, 2018) and the New Regionalism applied to tourism studies (Romero, 2020).

So far, it was possible to notice that regionalism has great influence not only on the economy, but also in a multilevel of policies, strategies, practices and identities of countries that decide to participate in this type of arrangement. Tourism and its imbrications on processes of regional integration has been recognised, studied and described by a number of authors, with different theoretical and conceptual perspectives.

As previously mentioned, perhaps the biggest and most frequently studied example is the European Union, considered the most advanced model amongst regional projects. Tourism is regarded as a strategic sector by the European Commission, which develops specific policies for this industry at the regional level, also acting as a driver for European integration and cohesion of its common market (Estol, Camilleri & Font, 2018).

In regional terms, tourism appears as an important strategy of international cooperation and one of the tools to achieve a greater unification of economic blocs. For Anastasiadou and Sausmarez (2006),

the majority of regional trading blocs acknowledge tourism as an area of involvement, because their barrier-removal effects act as stimulants to further tourism development co-operation and increase mobility. The level of involvement in tourism in each bloc depends on tourism's contribution to the economies of member states and its relative levels of development. (2006, p. 318)

The European Union provides a good example of the dialectical relation between regionalism for tourism development and of tourism as a force for expanding regional integration. An example of such policies is the general framework “Europe, the world's No. 1 tourist destination - a new political framework for tourism in Europe”, which in its prospects aims to encourage a coordinated approach to tourism-related initiatives and define a new framework of action to increase its competitiveness and its capacity for sustainable growth. Such structures, however, are being shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic and the EU's response will be discussed in the next section.

From the examples of political organisation in the European Union, it is possible to identify the importance of regionalism for the development of tourism, as well as the role of tourism in expanding economic integration between countries that are part of regional arrangements. The current world scenario indicates that supranational organisations might gain further relevance (and, also, criticism) for their capacity (and limitations) to provide a space for the management of common problems and crises. Thus, the next sections analyse the main actions taken by two traditional blocs where tourism

relevance is high and has been put at the top of their current agendas: the European Union and Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

RESEARCH METHOD

Writing an article about events that are currently taking place is an enormous challenge, which is being undertaken by researchers around the globe in multiple areas. Tourism is perhaps one of the most disrupted activities due to its characteristics and reliance on global mobilities. Therefore, there is a growing movement to analyse many of the phenomena taking place since the pandemic was recognised and heavily impacted tourism destinations, leaving many of its professionals and scholars scrambling to make sense of it.

This article intends to contribute to the knowledge being built by tourism academics and professionals, by making use of comparative case studies. For King, Keohane and Verba (1994: 44) “in fields such as comparative studies or international relations, descriptive work is particularly important because there is a great deal we still need to know, because explanatory abilities are weak, and because good description depends in part on good explanation”. The will to investigate what is currently happening in the world comes with the hurdles of exploratory analyses, which takes place in a highly volatile interdependent world that seems to be facing an abrupt change in its globalised order. In this sense, beyond specific discussions and answers provided by the following analyses, we are particularly interested in the role of regional institutional bodies in tourism development - in this case, having the disruptions caused by the pandemic as the main reason to react.

The links between regionalism and tourism are explored and discussed under the concepts of “old regionalism” (Hurrell, 1995; Fawcett, 2008) and the New Regionalism Approach (Söderbaum, 2003; Hettne, 2003; Falk, 2003; Neumann, 2003; Bøås, Marchand, Shaw, 2003), in the context of globalization and the coronavirus pandemic. These concepts are useful for understanding region-building processes and making sense of current world events. Therefore, this exploratory work aims at identifying political decisions regarding tourism initiatives as responses to tackle COVID-19 impacts, within the context of the European Union and Association of Southeast Asian Nations, particularly.

To do so, we undertook the process of documental research and content analysis from July to December 2020 based on information provided by both organisations, such as statements, official policies and guidelines. Secondary data found in websites from organisations such as Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNTWO), World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) and the Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) were particularly helpful to assist with the discussions of the current scenario for tourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

COVID-19, Tourism and Regional Crisis: Responses from EU and ASEAN

Despite different approaches, most countries and regions seem to be adopting similar measures in response to the pandemic and its consequential economic crisis. According to the OECD's Tourism Policy Response to the Coronavirus, these initiatives have been taking the form of economy-wide stimulus packages, “often including some liquidity injections and fiscal relief (e.g., through loans, tax holidays or postponements, guarantee schemes)” (OECD, 2020 p. 19). Given the great economic impact it has suffered, the tourism sector appears to be benefitting from such arrangements and figuring among more targeted measures to mitigate its crises (by assisting tourism workers with income continuity and tourism businesses with access to credit) and support its recovery, especially in tourism-dependent countries.

Europe is the leading tourism destination in the world, attracting 40% of international arrivals. The sector represents 10% of the European Union's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), generates 23 million direct and indirect jobs among its 2.4 million tourism businesses, 90% of which are Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Some of its countries are highly dependent on tourism, such as Croatia, Cyprus and Greece with the activity accounting for 25%, 22% and 21% of their GDPs, respectively (European Commission [EC], 2020). These numbers show how relevant the tourism sector is for the EU's economy, not to mention its importance in terms of maintaining one of its fundamental pillars: freedom of movement amongst its member-states. Thus, the regional bloc has put tourism at the centre of some of its initiatives to respond to COVID-19, such as the package on "Tourism and Transport in 2020 and beyond" published on 13 May 2020 by the European Commission, which includes guidelines and recommendations for gradually lifting travel restrictions among EU countries, as well as for businesses for reopening during the summer season. Overall, the package covers four aspects: 1) safely restore unrestricted free movement and reopen internal borders: guidance on restoring freedom of movement and lifting of internal border controls; 2) safely restore transport and connectivity: guidance on transport; 3) safely resume tourism services: guidance on tourism, in particular hospitality; 4) address the liquidity crunch and rebuild consumer confidence: recommendation on vouchers (EC, 2020).

Despite the criticism it has initially received about its ability to deal with the health and economic impact of the crisis (Beeson, 2020), the EU remains a relevant organisation in terms of its capacity to articulate political and economic resources to respond to difficult moments. How such policies and movements will translate into benefits for recovering (or reforming) tourism and other sectors opens many possibilities for assessment and analysis through its complex frameworks and different levels (regional, national and local). So far, the most relevant initiatives taken by the EU for (or that involved) tourism are the following:

- Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (10 March): it allowed countries to redirect unused investments under the European Structural and Investment Funds to inject liquidity into the most affected businesses, such as the tourism industry (OECD, 2020);

- Temporary State Aid Framework (19 March): enabled member-states to use the full flexibility foreseen under State aid rules to support the economy in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak (EC, 2020).

- European Investment Fund (6 April): the European Commission released EUR 1 billion as a guarantee for this fund to issue special assurance for available financing of up to EUR 8 billion, incentivising banks and other lenders to provide liquidity to 100.000 European SMEs and small mid-cap companies (OECD, 2020);

- Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency - SURE (2 April): EUR 100 billion allocated for a solidarity instrument aimed at helping workers keep their income and business maintain liquidity (EC, 2020);

- Member States invited to prolong restriction on non-essential travel to the EU until 15 May (8 April): after assessments and revisions, the EC prolonged travel restrictions for more than a month (EC, 2020);

- Commission invites Member States to extend restriction on non-essential travel to the EU until 15 June (8 May): after new assessments and revisions, the EC prolonged travel restrictions for another month, while it was working on guidance and measures to lift such restrictions (EC, 2020);

- Guidance on safely resuming travel and rebooting Europe's tourism in 2020 and beyond (13 May): package of measures and guidance to assist member-states in gradually lifting travel restrictions and resume tourism (EC, 2020);

- Commission recommends partial and gradual lifting of travel restrictions to the EU after 30 June, based on common coordinated approach (11 June)

- Re-open EU (15 June): a web platform to help safely resume free movement and tourism in the EU;

- Next Generation EU (21 July): new long-term recovery instrument which shall mobilise between 2021-2027 EUR 1.85 trillion, aimed at supporting member-states with investments and reforms, recover the economy and prepare for future crises. According to the EC, the European Green Deal will serve as the EU's recovery strategy (EC, 2020);

● Innovative response and recovery partnerships between EU regions (27 July): a project call for proposals to incentivise business investment projects accelerating commercialisation and scale-up of inter-regional innovation. One of the areas of interest was Sustainable and Digital Tourism (EC, 2020).

● Commission lists key steps for effective vaccination strategies and vaccines deployment (15 October): after signing up contracts with most of the companies producing COVID-19 vaccines, the EU commission set out the key strategic steps for member-states to organise the vaccination of its citizens (EC, 2020).

● Stepping up action to reinforce preparedness and response measures to coronavirus resurgence (28 October): facing a looming continental second wave of COVID-19, the EU Commission set out measures to control the spread of the virus, such as well-targeted testing, better contact tracing, improve preparations for vaccination campaigns “while keeping all goods moving in the single market and facilitating safe travel” (EC, 2020).

● Commission presents “Staying safe from COVID-19 during winter” strategy (2 December): with most countries imposing new restrictions to deal with the second wave of the virus, the EU presented strategies for “continued vigilance and caution throughout the winter period and into 2021 when the roll out of safe and effective vaccines will occur” (EC, 2020). With vaccinations coming soon, the EU Commission will provide new guidance for gradual and coordinated lifting of the containment measures.

By analysing the measures set out by the European Union it is possible to identify the significance of regionalism for crisis management. The COVID-19 has certainly shaken the EU’s institutions and exposed its problems and divisions, but such a crisis requires collective action and the policies, measures and guidance provided by the European Union tend to show that a shared platform might be a useful and more productive way to develop and implement containment and recovery strategies.

However, the EU is the most advanced regional project in the world, and, despite its problems, a coherent response was something already expected from it. Beyond the EU, it is also useful to look at other forms of regional integration and how they have responded with containment and recovery policies for tourism. Although with a looser form of integration, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations provides insights on how a regional organisation from Asia, which is formed by some of the first countries to be hit by the pandemic, has so far reacted to the COVID-19 crisis.

As of the time of writing (December 2020), the region has so far had 1.352,296 confirmed cases with 1.164,758 people recovered and 30.959 deaths (CSIS, 2020) (Table 1).

TABLE 1:
Southeast Asia COVID-19 numbers

COUNTRY	CASES	DEATHS	RECOVERED	CASES PER MILLION
World	73.646,022	1.639,061	41.724,224	9.442
Indonesia	636.154	19.248	521.984	2.374
Philippines	452.988	8.833	419.282	4.318
Myanmar	110.667	2.319	86.795	2.074
Malaysia	87.913	429	72.733	2.818
Singapore	58.353	29	58.233	10.398
Thailand	4.261	60	3.977	61
Vietnam	1.405	35	1.252	15
Cambodia	362	0	319	23
Brunei	152	3	147	355
Laos	41	0	36	6

Source: Center for Strategic & International Studies - CSIS (<https://www.csis.org/programs/southeast-asia-program/southeast-asia-covid-19-tracker-0>). Data collected on 16/12/2020.

Unlike the EU, the ASEAN countries have developed a unified framework for economic recovery at a later stage, launching the “ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework” at its 37th Summit. This is probably

a result of ASEAN's structures, since its member-states have never sought regional cooperation in the same shape of the EU and tend to be more protective of national autonomy and sovereignty (Beeson, 2020). Thus, monetary policies and fiscal stimulus have been provided independently without much coordination on a regional level amongst ASEAN countries (Kimura, Thangavelu, Narjoko & Findlay, 2020). However, the regional platform has provided a relevant space for sharing information and stirring strategies towards common results throughout the pandemic. So far, ASEAN has tried to unify the individual responses of its member-states through several events:

- 26th ASEAN Economic Ministers (10 March): a meeting of member-states economic minister who agreed upon calling for collective action to mitigate the impact of the virus by working with external and development partners (OECD, 2020);

- ASEAN-EU Ministerial Video Conference (20 March): both organisations discussed issues related to the COVID-19 crisis and agreed to mitigate social and economic impacts, keep supply chains open and advance relevant scientific research (OECD, 2020)

- ASEAN Coordinating Council (09 April): ASEAN Foreign Ministers held an ASEAN Coordinating Council meeting on COVID-19 and called for a Special ASEAN Summit and the ASEAN Plus Three Special Summit on COVID-19, which was held on 14 April via video conference. The statement called for a post-pandemic plan to:

- Restore ASEAN's connectivity, tourism, normal business and social activities, to prevent potential economic downturns;

- Ensure ASEAN critical infrastructure for trade and trading routes via air, land and seaports remain open;

- Refrain from imposing unnecessary restrictions on the flow of medical, food and essential supplies. As a result, ASEAN proposed to establish a COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund (OECD, 2020);

- Special Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (29 April): event focused on discussing solutions for ASEAN's tourism industry;

- 36th ASEAN Summit (26 June): under the theme of "Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN in 2020", the event brought together heads of government who discussed ASEAN's unity, cooperation and solidarity, economic integration, ASEAN awareness and identity, and emphasized the importance of promoting ASEAN pro-activeness and capacity in seizing opportunities as well as in addressing the challenges brought about by rapid changes in the regional and global landscape (ASEAN, 2020).

- 37th ASEAN Summit (12 November): the event focused most of its attention of sealing trade agreements with other countries and regions, boosting ASEAN commercial relationship and creating the biggest trade pact in the world, named The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The new agreements will also have impacts on tourism and mobilities, but for the short-term perhaps the most interesting news for the sector was the "ASEAN Declaration on an ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework", which set out the first steps towards an intraregional travel bubble focused mostly on business travel among member states. Furthermore, the member-states adopted the "ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework", a coordinated regional plan to deal with the COVID-19 crisis (ASEAN, 2020).

- ASEAN Rapid Assessment (3 December): aiming at informing the regional response to the pandemic, the assessment brings rich information about impacts and challenges to key areas such as social welfare, labour, education and training. Tourism is highlighted as both as one of the most impacted and strategic sectors for the region (ASEAN, 2020);

Tourism is a relevant sector for Southeast Asia, which relies on international arrivals from China, Europe and North America (OECD, 2020). Therefore, it has been discussed by the regional bloc since the beginning of the pandemic, especially due to the heavy impact on SMEs due to the mobility restrictions. Thus, the Special Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers on Coronavirus Disease was an important moment in regional terms to at least give a sense of direction for what might be expected in the near future for this

industry. According to their joint statement, the Tourism Ministers have agreed on the following actions (ASEAN, 2020):

1. Foster ASEAN coordination in expediting information exchange on travel related health and other necessary measures undertaken by ASEAN Member States to control the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak through the enhanced operation of the ASEAN Tourism Crisis Communication Team (ATCCT), with a view to providing timely and reliable information for inbound and outbound travellers and tourism operators throughout this region;
2. Intensify ASEAN's National Tourism Organisations' (NTOs) collaboration with other relevant ASEAN sectors, especially in health, information, transport and immigration, as well as with ASEAN's external partners, relevant international organisations and the international community, to jointly implement measures and build on each other's platforms to promote a comprehensive, transparent and early response to mitigate and alleviate the impact of COVID-19 and future crises;
3. Enhance closer cooperation in the sharing of information and exchange of best practices among ASEAN Member States as well as with ASEAN Dialogue Partners on the responses to the crisis, communications readiness, connectivity coordination, national relief efforts and measures to support the tourism sector, as well as capture key learnings in a post-crisis review report for ASEAN Member States' reference to better manage future pandemics or crisis;
4. Implement clear policies and measures to bolster confidence among domestic and international visitors to Southeast Asia, including the development of clear standards and guidelines for a safer and healthier work environment to protect our workers and communities in the hospitality and tourism-related industries, destinations and establishments in ASEAN Member States;
5. Support the development and implementation of a post COVID-19 Crisis Recovery Plan without undermining efforts to safeguard public health, which includes, but not limited to, building up ASEAN tourism capabilities, engaging with industry stakeholders to instil business and consumer confidence, exploring creative and innovative solutions to stimulate the tourism sector especially through the use of digital technologies, ensuring top of mind recall of the region in our marketing efforts and joint tourism promotion programmes with the goal to advance ASEAN as a single tourism destination (emphasis added);
6. Expedite both micro- and macro-economic policies, among others, providing technical support and financial stimulus, tax alleviation, capacity and capability building, especially digital skills, for travel and tourism stakeholders, with special emphasis on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), vulnerable groups and other affected communities; and
7. Pursue cooperation with ASEAN Dialogue Partners, relevant international organisations and industry stakeholders to build a resilient and prepared Southeast Asia to effectively implement and manage sustainable and inclusive tourism in the aftermath of a crisis.

The policies, measures and guidance provided by the EU and ASEAN may differ in content and applicability, but they also indicate a similar approach by regional organisations in responding to the challenge of managing the coronavirus crisis. The new regionalism can provide a platform for endogenous policies, solutions and practices to deal with the pandemic and has the potential to congregate not only nation-states, but a multitude of actors within members of supranational organisations, such as entire industries (national and transnational), sectors, civil societies and other non-governmental organisations. From this endogenous movement, the whole region might then look outside at how it interacts with other regions. Inter-regionalism then comes in play, which is why understanding the potential conflicts and solutions that may arise from the shift in relations under a new set of foreign and trade policy in a pandemic scenario is relevant.

Thus, by bringing about the main initiatives of two major regional projects, it was possible to unveil some of the measures taken for the sector and what might be expected in a near future. That being said, the next section will discuss what this scenario might mean for tourism within the next few months, in a period of

time where the European Union has already experienced a travel bubble during summer season and where the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has set out the first steps to form regional travel corridors.

Tourism in a world of regions?

After months of restrictive measures some regions of the world have slowly reopened some of its economic activities with non-pharmaceutical interventions remaining in place, such as social distancing, the use of facemasks, quarantine measures when necessary and partial lockdowns in urgent cases. In this sense, some countries with similar coronavirus scenarios have explored opportunities to open travel ‘corridors’ or ‘bubbles’ as a first step in reopening to international tourism (OECD, 2020).

After the impacts of the pandemic had already been assessed for the tourism industry, the urge to resume the activity came strongly from stakeholders and also from the UNWTO. Thus, while the EU was preparing its guidelines for safely lifting travel restrictions, countries like New Zealand and Australia were exploring the possibility of creating a travel bubble between the two countries. Similarly, the Baltic countries discussed the same kind of strategy for Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia (OECD, 2020). Not surprisingly, this has also been discussed at the 36th ASEAN Summit with Indonesia proposing regional travel corridors between its member-states. During the 37th ASEAN Summit, the first steps towards an intraregional bubble were taken with the “ASEAN Declaration on an ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework”, as well as with the “Comprehensive Recovery Framework”, which consolidates former proposals of travel corridors into actual guidelines to put those in place.

The European Union is perhaps the most significant example of a region which has chosen to reopen its borders for tourism during the pandemic. Such a decision has been recently acknowledged as one of the factors for the resurgence infections in Europe during autumn, which highlights the “need to make any relaxation of measures conditional on both the evolution of the pandemic and having sufficient capacity for testing, contact tracing and treating patients” (EC, 2020). Nonetheless, EU citizens had been allowed to travel within the region, while the bloc also decided to impose travel restrictions to nearly every third country with few exceptions (Australia, Canada, Georgia, Japan, New Zealand, Rwanda, South Korea, Thailand, Tunisia and Uruguay). Therefore, in an unprecedented move the EU created a travel bubble within the Schengen area by opening its internal borders for intraregional travel while closing its external borders for most of the world.

This might seem reasonable in a pandemic world, but the fact that Europe and other regions are imposing external borders might generate a variety of impacts in spatial and temporal scales (Radil, Pinos & Ptak, 2020) and reflect what the world can expect from an international system struggling to adapt to the coronavirus scenario. While everything could change after mass vaccination, it is useful to analyse the political movements of organisations such as the EU and ASEAN, once they seem to provide an indication of how such regions will continue to behave in a pandemic world and possible future health crises of planetary scope. So far, the behaviour of these organisations has pointed out to the formation of a “world of regions”, with long-haul travels between continents returning at a slower pace in contrast with a faster restart within intraregional travel bubbles, where tourism takes place only between member-states, whilst tourists from other regions face restrictions or are not allowed to enter these countries. Such restrictions tend to be based on a set of principles and criteria including the health situation, the ability to apply containment measures during travel, and reciprocity considerations (EC, 2020).

Thus, tourism mobilities in a pandemic scenario tend to initially face harsh restrictions and then, as regions progressively manage the crisis, be re-established in an intraregional level after coordinated efforts. Other kinds of global mobilities tend to also be affected, once those who do not travel for tourism per se, but to reunite or visit family members – or even by forced migration – for example, find themselves in hardship in front of travel restrictions or lower availability of flights with more expensive airfares. Furthermore, there

might be a disparity between world regions, with those more advanced economically and in terms of control of the pandemic opening itself up for intraregional mobilities, whilst closing itself to other regions and imposing travel restrictions both for outbound and inbound tourism, as seen in the case of the EU. Despite the rise in number of infections across the continent, the EU seems willing to invest in efforts keeping its travel bubble working, as can be seen in its recent communication “Staying safe from COVID-19 during winter”:

Whilst travel itself is a risk factor, the generalised widespread transmission of COVID-19 across Member States means that at present, intra-EU cross-border travel does not present a significant added risk. In the context of air travel, and under the current epidemiological situation in the EU/EEA and the UK and based on existing evidence, ECDC and the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) do not recommend quarantine and/or testing of for air travellers for SARS-CoV-2 when travelling to/from zones with a similar epidemiological situation, as outlined in the guidelines for COVID-19 testing and quarantine of air travellers was published on 2 December. (European Commission, 2020 p. 7, emphasis added).

Based on such a position, the European Union seems to reinforce positive regionalism (Falk, 2003), by addressing the pandemic while maintaining the need for mobilities to flow. This movement confirms the premises held by NRA that regionalism can contribute regionalism contributes to common solutions to shared problems ranging from security to environmental issues, most of which cannot be tackled only by national or market-based solutions (Hettne, 2003 p. 25). In this sense, “the new regionalism represents the ‘return of the political’: that is, interventions in favour of crucial values, among which development, security and peace, and ecological sustainability” (Söderbaum, 2003 p. 13).

Finally, it was possible to conclude that regional organisations such as the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations provide important policies towards tourism, whether by restricting mobilities or allowing them to flow in a coordinated intraregional level. This opens relevant future questions, such as the asymmetric relationship between regions once vaccination begins worldwide (given that not every region will achieve the level required of immunization at the same time), how mobilities are being shaped during the pandemic and how this might influence the way people travel in a near future (hence Europe designating 2021 as “European Year of the Rail”). Furthermore, research on other forms of mobilities that goes beyond holiday travels, such as migrants who want to visit or reunite with their families or even those in processes of seeking asylum, escaping war and any form of extreme hardship in their countries. should be encouraged.

FINAL REMARKS

The main objective of this article was to discuss the role of regional organisations in the management of the COVID-19 crisis and recovery for tourism, based on the policies and measures taken so far by the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Furthermore, it sought to contribute with tourism research by bringing the concept of old and new regionalism from the international relations field, which might be useful for future research on this kind of organisations and their role for tourism in terms of policies, strategies, economy, among other relevant issues.

Although both organisations depict different models of regional integration, it is possible to identify that tourism is regarded as a relevant aspect in economic terms and some of their political and monetary resources were directly invested in this sector. This is noticeable especially in the way the EU handled the crisis firstly by extending travel restriction periods and then by setting out guidance and measures for lifting them. The ASEAN member-states tend to adopt a more individual approach to restrictive or opening measures, since its regionalism format tend to be softer and less focused on the level of integration the EU has. However, the regional organisation has been used as a platform to discuss mutual problems and solutions, with tourism often on the agenda, as seen on the Special Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers and the 36th and 37th ASEAN Summits.

The concepts of exogenous and endogenous perspectives from the New Regionalism Approach are useful to advancing the analysis of the current scenario. According to Hettne,

an understanding of contemporary regionalism both from an endogenous perspective, according to which regionalization is shaped from within the region by a large number of different actors, and an exogenous perspective, according to which regionalization and globalization are intertwined articulations, contradictory as well as complementary, of global transformation. (Hettne, 2003 p. 26).

However, when analysed beyond the intraregional scope, both regional organisations – especially the EU – have for the first time closed its external borders for third countries. This is a new phenomenon in the international system which indicates that regional bodies work as mechanisms for lowering barriers for trade and mobilities, but they also tend to promote a common platform to impose and manage restrictions in times of global health crises. The capacity to move resources, policies, strategies and guidance necessary to both create an external border and allow some form intraregional flow highly depends on the level of regional integration, which was possible to notice by the differences in how the EU and ASEAN have conducted their efforts during different stages of the pandemic so far.

Further research might focus on the role of these institutions for the current “recover versus reform” debate on tourism, which encompasses the themes of sustainability and technology for a more resilient and prepared sector. Also, new analyses can provide some light on other regional blocs, and how these are influencing each other on their policies and protocols. Mercosur, for instance, as a regional bloc in an area where the pandemic arrived more recently, could be an appealing study object, especially because the intraregional market has an historical relevance for the members' tourism economies - mainly between Brazil and Argentina.

Instead of trying to predict the “future of tourism”, this investigation explored aspects that unveiled what can be expected for the industry based on political decisions from two regional organisations while navigating through a volatile situation, which were analysed through the lens of regionalism concepts. The pandemic has left a highly interdependent world scrambling to manage this crisis and for the first time since globalisation became the norm, restrictions to most kinds of travel were put in place. The examples of the EU and ASEAN suggest that countries which are part of regional organisations, especially those with deeper levels of integration, tend to benefit from a common platform to deal with coordinating multi-level responses. The current scenario tends to indicate a willingness of regional blocs to incentivise the reopening for domestic or intraregional tourism, once their characteristics seem to provide a more manageable way of controlling who moves from one place to the other (by land, avoiding airports and airplanes, in most European countries) and how to assess if such mobilities are impacting on coronavirus cases.

Thus, while some countries begin their vaccination campaigns, it is safe to say that until a vast majority of the world population gets immunized, international tourism might only take place amongst countries within regional organisations capable of coordinating and implementing measures for travelling safely. In other words, tourism in a COVID-19 scenario should mostly take place in a world of regions.

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NOTES

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