TOURISM GROWTH AS A DRIVER OF MIGRATION PATTERNS: EVIDENCE FROM CROATIA

Ria Ivandić Neven Ivandić https://doi.org//10.20867/tosee.07.12

Abstract

Purpose – This research investigates to what extent local economic growth driven by tourism was able to prevent emigration from local areas. The relative economic prosperity of the Western Member States is considered to have had a large pull effect on immigrants following the enlargement of the EU to Central and Eastern European states. A similar pattern has been established in Croatia, where a mass exodus of the population has been recorded in the years following the 2013 EU Accession.

Methodology – To do so, we use the newly released Population Census data from 2021, along with data from the earlier Census, to create a panel dataset of all municipalities and cities in Croatia and estimate the role of tourism. These data sources overcome the measurement errors in previously available annual migration data from the Ministry of Interior and allow for a more disaggregated analysis using detailed variables on the age and sex profile of citizens. We estimate a linear regression model using Ordinary Least Squares with the difference in population change as the dependent variable and measures of tourism development as the independent variable.

Findings – We find evidence that the size of tourism is negatively associated with the size of emigration from the local area. We then investigate the mechanisms behind the relationship between local tourism growth and emigration, testing whether tourism is more correlated with emigration of younger or older individuals, men or women.

Contribution – This paper is the first to shed light into the empirical nexus between tourism growth as the cause of the retention of population. Policy wise, it gives important insights into understanding how economic opportunities are key for individuals' decision to emigrate that could be relevant for policymakers interested in ways to retain local populations. Finally, methodologically, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first research to explore migration patterns using the 2021 Census.

Keywords: Croatia, Migration, Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, the number of inhabitants in Croatia decreased by close to 0.5 million or almost 10% of the population. While several culprits have been put forward to explain this large decrease in population, including an ageing population and low fertility, undoubtedly one of the main reasons has been the pull effect of relative economic prosperity of the European Union Western Member States following the 2013 EU Accession. However, emigration is not the comprehensive story of all geographic areas of Croatia, it is a phenomenon present in concentrated areas across the country. At the same time, the Croatian economy is reliant on tourism which has been growing in importance over the past decade. Ivandić and Šutalo (2019, 400) have estimated that the direct and indirect contribution of tourism consumption reach 16.9% of Croatia's gross

value added in Croatia is estimated to be in 2016, while number of jobs the tourism industries in the same year accounted for 20.3% of total employment (Kožić et al. 2022, 422). However, there is a limited understanding in how these two phenomena are connected in the Croatian context. This research investigates to what extent local economic growth driven by tourism was able to prevent negative population change from local areas.

To do so, we use the newly released Population Census data from 2021, along with data from the earlier Census, to create a panel dataset of all municipalities and cities in Croatia and estimate the role of tourism. These data sources overcome the measurement errors in previously available annual migration data from the Ministry of Interior and allow for a more disaggregated analysis using detailed variables on the age profile and socio-economic status of citizens.

We find evidence that the size of tourism, measured through a series of indicators by the Index of Tourism Development (ITR), is positively associated with the size of population change from the local area, preventing higher levels of population decline present in non-tourist localities. We have also investigated the mechanisms behind the relationship between local tourism growth and population change, testing whether tourism is likelier to prevent emigration of men vs women and across three different age groups: the youth aged 0-18 years old, working age population across 15-64 year old, and the older population aged 65 years and above. We find that tourism activity is positively and statistically significantly correlated to population change across all three age categories, however, we find that tourism has the strongest correlation on retaining the oldest, and then the youngest population. The correlational effect is similar across men and women.

Literature Review: This paper is to the best of our knowledge the first to shed light into the empirical nexus between tourism as the cause of the retention of population, in the context of Croatia. While migration involves the movement of people from one place to another for various reasons, tourism refers to the temporary movement of people to different destinations for leisure, business, or other purposes. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the relationship between migration and tourism, as both have significant economic, social, and cultural implications for the countries and regions involved.

The literature on migration and tourism has explored various themes, including the impacts of migration on tourism (Williams and Hall 2000), the role of tourism in migration (King et al. 2000; Williams and Hall 2002), and the interconnections between migration and tourism policies (Provenzano 2020, 1375; Bianchi et al. 2020, 291). Studies that have examined how migration can impact the tourism industry in destination countries, have found that migrants can act as intermediaries, providing cultural and linguistic knowledge that can attract tourists from their home countries, such as in Williams and Hall (2000). In addition, migrants can also be important contributors to the tourism workforce, providing much-needed labour in industries such as hospitality and tourism (Přívarová et al. 2022, 274). Within this literature on migration-led-tourism, the visiting friends and relatives (VFR) hypothesis stipulates that increased levels of immigration surely in turn lead to tourism popularity of the destination through incentivizing their friends and relatives on visiting their new homeland (Seetaram and

Dwyer 2009, 213). Massidda et al. (2022), analyzing factors influencing the expenditure of travellers on different items of tourism consumption, is one of the first to provide empirical evidence on the size of expenditure driven by tourists visiting friends and relatives. Although, they do find that VFR tourists spend significantly less at the destination, they still do contribute sizeably to overall tourism expenditure.

Other studies have focused on the role of tourism in migration, exploring how tourism can influence people's migration decisions within the tourism-led-migration hypothesis. Research has suggested that tourism experiences can inspire people to move permanently to certain destinations, particularly retirees (Gustafson 2002). Gössling and Schulz (2005) discuss how tourism induces migration for economic and social reasons, as more job opportunities arise in the destinations. At the same time, tourism can also have negative impacts on migration, as it can create overcrowding, environmental degradation, and displacement of local populations (Castilla-Polo et al. 2023, 368-369).

As tourism can generate predominantly short-term employment which theoretically might not be sufficient to retain population and tourist destinations can be seen as undesirable living locations, it is not clear in which direction the relationship between high tourism activity and population growth might go in. Existing research that has connected tourism and migration examined topics such as the role of globalised capitalism and border management, migrant workers' well-being, social discrimination, inclusion, and settlement in host countries (Choe and Lugosi 2022, 2). Attention has been theoretically given to examining the ability of tourism to attract new residents to rural communities or less developed areas (Vuin et al. 2016, 4; Duncan et al. 2020, 374). In this direction of research, Ivandić (2021, 371) showed that tourism can be seen as a generator of demographic change, especially in rural and less developed areas, as it generates employment opportunities and, thus, the opportunity for permanent residency.

A second related literature has looked into the economics conditions that determine the decision to emigrate. Škuflić and Vučković (2018) use cross-country comparisons to find that emigration has an adverse effect on emigrant countries' labour markets by increasing the unemployment rate. Franc, Časni and Barišić (2019) using a cross-country comparison show that the increase in the overall unemployment rate in the emigration country will increase the emigration rate.

Our theoretical argument is that tourism growth stimulates local economies by providing higher returns to capital and investment (Collins 1999), and by providing opportunities for local employment (Choy 1995). In turn, both of these factors contribute to making the locality a more attractive place to live. This then leads to a lower likelihood of its population emigrating abroad or to other parts of Croatia.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a detailed discussion of the data and the research design, while the third section discusses the findings of the paper. Finally, the last section concludes by summarising the main findings and opening the discussion on further work in this area.

1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA

This section describes the data and the research design to examine the relationship between tourism demand and patterns of emigration across small geographic areas. The main sources of data this research uses are the newly released Population Census data from 2021 and the previous Population Census data from 2011, collected by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (CBS). This statistical report presents data on the whole population collected from surveying all households and families, and their features across a number of socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, income and wealth, family patterns, religious and nationality denominations, etc. The persons included in the Census are natural persons who are citizens of the Republic of Croatia, foreign citizens and stateless persons who reside in the Republic of Croatia and persons who, during the period of the Census, reside in the Republic of Croatia. However, only the individuals that satisfy the criteria below are considered to have a habitual residence in the geographical area in question: i) persons who lived in their habitual residence continuously for at least 12 months before the reference date; or ii) persons who came to their habitual residence in the period of 12 months before the reference date with the intention of staying there for at least one year.

As the unit of analysis is the municipality, we obtain data at the municipality and city level (in future text referred to as 'municipality'). Our main dependent variable of interest is relative change in the total number of citizens living in a municipality from 2011 to 2021, *Population Change*. We construct this variable by calculating the change in the total number of citizens living in a municipality from 2011 to 2021 and dividing it by the total number of citizens living in that municipality in 2011. As we further ask how tourism affected patterns of emigration across sex and age categories, we construct a series of further dependent variables. Specifically, we calculate the relative change in the total number of citizens aged 0-16, 18-65, and 65 and older living in a municipality from 2011 to 2021. We also calculate the relative change in the total number of men and women aged 18-65 living in a municipality from 2011 to 2021.

The advantage of this data as compared to the Population and Migration Data at the municipal level collected by The Ministry of Interior of Croatia at the annual level is that its accuracy is much greater as it doesn't rely on the individual citizen to report having emigrated from their residence. Draženović, Kunovac and Pripužić (2018, 417) show that the Population and Migration annual statistics collected by The Ministry of Interior underestimate the extent of emigration by 2.5 times. This issue is overcome in the Population Census data as the Croatian Bureau of Statistics records all the individuals and households present in Croatia at the moment of the survey.

Our main independent variable of interest is the Index of Tourism Development (ITR) as developed by the Institute of Tourism (Zagreb, Croatia). The Index of Tourism Development (ITR) is a composite index calculated based on normalized values of absolute and relative indicators of tourist activity by a combination of linear and logarithmic transformations. The index integrates indicators of tourism in municipalities and cities on an annual basis, which include the total number of beds in commercial accommodation facilities, the number of beds in hotels and similar accommodation facilities, the number of overnight stays and the number of

employees in the activities of providing accommodation and preparing and serving food (Klarić et al. 2020, 29). As this Index encapsulates various measures of tourism activity, it is considered to be the most comprehensive measure of tourism across Croatia. We operationalise this variable as the average across the last five years, using data from the years 2017-2021. The reason we average the last five years is to reduce potential measurement error of a given year. Also, theoretically, we believe the reason to immigrate or continue living in a certain place is likely driven by long-term trends over five years. However, as a robustness check we also include Index of Tourism Development (ITR) in 2021 as our alternative independent variable. We estimate a linear regression model using Ordinary Least Squares with the difference in population change as the dependent variable and measures of tourism development as the independent variable.

The estimating equation is the following:

$$Population \ Change_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Tourism_i + u_i \tag{1}$$

where *PopulationChange*_i is the dependent variable of the analysis, namely is the relative change in the total number of citizens living in a municipality from 2011 to 2021 in a municipality *i*; *Tourism*_i is the independent variable of the analysis, the average index of tourism development in a municipality in the period form 2017-2021 or in 2021 in municipality *i*.

We are aware of the limitations of this research design. First, we cannot interpret the results from this model as the causal estimates of the effects of tourism on population change. We recognise that these estimates can only be interpreted as correlations between tourism growth and population change. Yet, we still believe that the correlational relationship is an important insight for policymakers when thinking about how to reduce future population decline. Secondly, to explore the relationship more clearly and reduce the potential of re-introducing selection bias, we have decided not to introduce control variables to this model. The reasoning behind this is that various control variables (such as the level of wages, the development of infrastructure at the municipal level) are a direct consequence of the presence of tourism in that municipality and hence these control variables would introduce 'post-treatment' bias and are known as 'bad' controls (Angrist and Pischke 2008).

2. RESULTS

Using the newly released 2021 Population Census data, this research first explores the patterns of emigration, i.e. decline in population, across small geographic areas in Croatia. This is particularly relevant today with the newly released 2021 Census as since the last Census in 2011, over the past decade, Croatia has become a European Union Member State and its citizens have gained access to labour markets of its 26 Member States.

While on average at the national level from 2011 to 2021, the recorded decline in population is around 10 percent, from 4.28 up to 3.87 million today, once we examine

local geographic areas, we observe lots of heterogeneity. In Figure 1, we plot the histogram of the variable defined as the change in the total number of citizens living in a municipality from 2011 to 2021, divided it by the total number of citizens living in that municipality in 2011 (Population Change). First, we observe that for a number of municipalities there was even a positive change in the total population, almost close to 20 percent. Second, the average population change during this period for municipalities was a 19 percent decline in population. Note that the reason why the average decline across municipalities of 19 percent is much larger than the national decline of 10 percent is that urban areas such as the City of Zagreb that carry more population weight also experienced the less population decline.



Figure 1: Distribution of the relative change in population across municipalities

Note: Author's calculation. Source of data is the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

Finally, it is interesting to observe how large the tail is at the left part of the distribution. A significant share of municipalities experienced a population decline of over 20%, with a maximum decline of around 50%, i.e. the municipality lost half of its population over a decade. The first insight from this analysis is that there is a lot of variation across Croatia, and the patterns of this heterogeneity are worth exploring and understanding.

Next, we turn to understanding where the areas are that are most affected by the decline in population over the past decade. Figure 2 maps the aforementioned variable Population Change, the change in the total number of citizens living in a municipality from 2011 to 2021, divided it by the total number of citizens living in that municipality in 2011. The larger the decline in population is in each municipality, the darker the red shade is on the map in Figure 2. The lightest colours, where the decline was the smallest are present predominantly in coastal areas of Istria, Kvarner and Dalmatia, and pockets of the North-West region around the City of Zagreb.

Figure 2: Geographic distribution of population decline



Note: Author's calculation. Source of data is the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

To better understand the distribution of the change in population over the past decade, we operationalise the variable as a binary outcome, differentiating between municipalities that experienced population growth larger than the average (meaning either positive population growth or above negative 19 percent which is the average value), and municipalities that experience population growth lower than the average (smaller than the negative 19 percent). This is mapped in Figure 3. In this case, the darker shade of red represents areas that have experienced the highest loss in population, with a population decline between 20 and 60 percent. We can observe that the areas that have experienced the largest decline in population are concentrated around the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina (in Lika, and south of Karlovac) and throughout Slavonia and near the border with Serbia. Anecdotally, these areas are ones with the lowest tourism demand. However, we investigate this relationship thoroughly by using regression analysis next.



Figure 3: Geographic distribution of population decline

Note: Author's calculation. Source of data is the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

Using the data described in Section 2, we estimated Equation 1. The results in Table 1 show there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between Tourism Development and Population Change. Examining the results where the main independent variable is Average Index of Tourism Development (Average ITR), the estimate is 0.0047 and statistically significant under p<0.01. Going from the 25th percentile (4.6) to the 75th percentile (20.3) of the Index of Tourism Development is associated with 7 percentage points more of population growth (i.e. instead of the average negative growth in population of 19 percent, the negative population growth would have been a smaller 12 percent). We also show that regardless of the operationalisation of the independent variable, either as the average index of tourism development of the past five years or the last recorded ITR in 2021, the size and significance of the variables remains the same (0.0047 and 0.0048). Our results show there is a very strong positive association of the strength of tourism in an area and its ability to prevent a decline in population.

	(1)	(2)
VARIABLES	Population Change	Population Change
Average ITR	0.0047***	
	(0.0003)	
ITR 2021		0.0048***
		(0.0003)
Constant	-0.1930***	-0.1968***
	(0.0053)	(0.0054)
Observations	526	526
R-squared	0.2630	0.2711

 Table 1: The Relationship Between Tourism Development and Population Change

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Next, we test how tourism affects the population changes across sex and age structures. This is reported in Table 2 and Table 3 using the same estimating Equation 1 and alternating the outcome variable. In Table 2, we observe that while tourism development has a positive and statistically significant effect on population change in Croatia, the estimates are almost the same across men and women. For a 10-point difference in the Index of Tourism Development, there is on average a 4.5-5 percent increase in the change in population in the municipality (i.e. less of a decline in the population change).

	(1)	(2)
VARIABLES	Pop.Change (Men)	Pop.Change (Women)
Average ITR	0.0045***	0.0050***
	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
Constant	-0.1850***	-0.2000***
	(0.0053)	(0.0056)
Observations	527	527
R-squared	0.2370	0.2649

 Table 2: The Relationship Between Tourism Development and Population Change

 across Sexes

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

In Table 3, we breakdown the outcomes across three different age groups: the youth aged 0-18 years old (column 1), working age population across 15-64 year old (column 2), and the older population aged 65 years and above (column 3). We find that tourism activity is positively and statistically significantly correlated to population change across all three age categories, however, we find that tourism has the strongest correlation on retaining the oldest, and then the youngest population. The correlational effect is similar across men and women. While further research is needed to understand which mechanism is at stake, we hypothesise that one potential mechanism why the older population is likeliest to continue living in these areas is that the returns to capital

(property ownership in tourist destinations allows high rental income) is very high, allowing these individuals to be relatively wealthier than their peers in non-tourist localities and able to afford the means to live longer and healthier. Another explanation why the effect isn't the strongest in the working age population age cohort could be explained with the fact that the seasonality of employment in tourism is insufficient to motivated individuals to move there permanently, and these areas only attract seasonal workers who reside elsewhere. Hence, while there could be a small effect on emigration or lack of immigration of the working age population in these touristic local areas, there are other mechanisms that explain the relative increase in population present in these areas.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
VARIABLES	Pop. Change (0-18)	Pop. Change (15-64)	Pop. Change (65+)
Average ITR	0.0063***	0.0025***	0.0098***
	(0.0005)	(0.0003)	(0.0007)
Constant	-0.3025***	-0.2025***	-0.0410***
	(0.0085)	(0.0056)	(0.0109)
Observations	526	526	526
R-squared	0.1969	0.0821	0.2515

 Table 3: The Relationship Between Tourism Development and Population Change

 across Different Age Categories

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

CONCLUSION

This research investigates to what extent local economic growth driven by tourism was able to prevent emigration from local areas. We find evidence that the size of tourism is negatively associated with the size of emigration from the local area, and this effect is particularly strong for the youngest (under 18-year-old) and the oldest parts of the population. Policy wise, it gives important insights into understanding how economic opportunities are key for individuals' decision to emigrate that could be relevant for policymakers interested in ways to retain local populations. Our findings contribute to the literature on tourism-led-migration, in a novel context of Croatia using micro-level data. While this question has been studied in different countries such as South Africa in Donaldson (2018) and across the EU in Přívarová et al. (2022), this study investigates the within variation of localities across Croatia, one of the most tourism dependent countries in Europe. To that extent, our research is most similar to Ivandić (2021) who showed that tourism can be seen as a generator of demographic change, especially in rural and less developed areas. However, as compared to to Ivandić (2021), to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first research to explore population changes and tourism using the 2021 Census which improves on the quality of measurement of population change.

These findings invite more future avenues of research, specifically thinking about the mechanisms. While these findings point to the fact that tourism development is important for retaining the population, to design future policy it would be important to understand whether this is through the mechanism of more employment opportunities, higher returns to capital, or that tourism increases the local tax revenue in turn increasing spending on public resources such as schools and kindergartens.

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Ria Ivandić, PhD

Lecturer in Quantitative Methods University of Oxford, Department of Politics and International Relations Manor Rd, Oxford OX1 3UQ, United Kingdom ria.ivandic@politics.ox.ac.uk

Neven Ivandić, PhD Senior Research Associate Institute for Tourism, Zagreb Vrhovec 5, 10000 Zagreb Neven.ivandic@iztzg.hr