

## Challenges in Tourism Research

**Andreea Fortuna Schiopu**

Assoc. Prof., Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, andreea.schiopu@com.ase.ro

---

### ABSTRACT

*Delivering on the objectives of a research project undertaken in the tourism sector can be challenging, especially on account of the economic and societal changes that the world is going through. Among the critical success factors of a research project one should mention the ability to obtain the necessary funding to support the initiation and implementation of that action and to find the ways to cope with a dynamic, complex and competitive global research environment. The latter could be easily done through association, given the fact that the chances of success could be increased by relying on a collaborative organisation of individuals working together to provide support in finding the accessible sources of funding and the proper ways to collect, evaluate, analyze, organize and disseminate information.*

---

### Introduction

Doing research in the new, changed, world can be demanding, irrespective of the sector that is being researched. With regard to the tourism industry, there is a wide range of changes and challenges that have to be taken into consideration and that require a closer look at the approaches, tools, concepts and interpretations used by the modern researcher.

### Securing funding for undertaking the research projects.

There are several possible sources of funds that can be used when planning research projects in tourism. One of the most important is represented by the EU funding programmes managed by the European Commission and the EU which included, according to the Eurofunding database – the service launched by Welcomeurope (2013), 36 programmes that could be accessed in the Tourism sector. Among these, we can mention CALYPSO – PREPARATORY ACTION: Grants for social tourism in Europe aimed at broadening the base of beneficiaries in tourist trade in the European Union, CIP – COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME: Grants for innovation activities (including eco-innovation) in SMEs, take-up of information technologies, the increased use of renewable energies and energy efficiency, OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME ERDF (EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND): Grants in the framework of national sectoral or regionalised programmes to sustainable regional development in the least favoured regions of the Member States, EDEN – EUROPEAN DESTINATIONS OF EXCELLENCE: Highlight the values, diversity and shared characteristics of European tourist destinations by improving their visibility and creating a platform for sharing good practices in Europe and encouraging the networking of rewarded destinations (Welcomeurope, 2013).

The EU programmes funding schemes range from large collaborative projects to more focused collaborative projects, but the programme closes at the end of 2013. Therefore, the researchers have to be aware of the new funding opportunities offered for the next programming period (2014-2020), to be especially attentive to promote the green growth in Europe in line with Europe 2020, to support the shift to the low-carbon, resource-efficient and climate-resilient economy. The widely supported Europe 2020 objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth can be delivered only based on research and innovation as key drivers of social and economic prosperity and of environmental sustainability (European Commission, 2010).

„Smart growth means strengthening knowledge and innovation as drivers of our future growth. This requires improving the quality of our education, strengthening our research performance, promoting innovation and knowledge transfer throughout the Union, making full use of information and communication technologies and ensuring that innovative ideas can be turned into new products and services that create growth, quality jobs and help address

European and global societal challenges. But, to succeed, this must be combined with entrepreneurship, finance, and a focus on user needs and market opportunities” ((European Commission, 2010, p.9).

In the future, the EU funding programmes have to focus more on Europe 2020 priorities, address societal challenges and key technologies, facilitate collaborative and industry-driven research, streamline the instruments, radically simplify access, reduce time to market and further strengthen excellence (European Commission, 2011). According to the European Commission’s Green Paper *From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation Funding*:

„Europe needs to make a step change in its research and innovation performance. As the Innovation Union pointed out, this requires research and innovation to be better linked. We should break away from traditional compartmentalised approaches and focus more on challenges and outcomes to be achieved, linking our research and innovation funding closer to our policy objectives. Developing a simplified set of instruments and rules is equally crucial, while leaving room for flexibility where it is needed” (European Commission, 2011, p. 4).

Moreover, researchers’ special attention has to be for SMEs which, through their flexibility and agility, play a pivotal role in developing novel products and services, outstanding and fast growing SMEs having the potential to transform the structure of Europe’s economy by growing into tomorrow’s multinational companies (European Commission, 2011).

Last not least, another source of funding can be assured through collaboration with the business environment. The conditions to be met are not too restrictive, but the amounts are less important compared to the sums involved by the EU funding programmes.

### **Coping with a dynamic, complex and competitive research environment through association.**

For years, competition has been intense for the limited resources available to support research initiatives. In order to meet today’s environment needs, researchers need to rapidly find the accessible sources of funding and the proper ways to collect, evaluate, analyze, organize and disseminate information. One direction to increase the chances of success is relying on a collaborative association of individuals working together to provide support in these areas.

The Academic Centre for Research in Tourism and Services – CACTUS – was founded in 2008 by the members of the Department of Tourism and Services, now the Department of Tourism and Geography, from Bucharest University of Economic Studies in order to undertake studies within the tertiary sector – services and tourism, in particular – mainly to take advantage of this form of association materialized in a network of individuals which can provide information on current events, conferences, research, relevant sources of information to meet the most recent standards and trends in international scientific research.

The activity of CACTUS members is laborious due to the complex relationship among the researchers, the world that is being researched (the tourism sector) and the way in which the research is presented. First, any researcher has to cope with the fact that many research initiatives are now international in scope and require a global research response. Therefore, there is a high necessity to communicate and collaborate with people and organizations around the world and to design innovative international partnerships. But, the Academic Centre for Research in Tourism and Services is well-equipped in this respect, drawing together some of the best specialists in services and tourism science. CACTUS members participated in national or international research projects (along with important universities from Europe), international conferences (in France, Great Britain, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia but also the USA or Japan) and published articles in well-known journals from the USA, Japan or European countries.

Second, the sector under scrutiny is tourism, which has been an important component of the economy. Since tourism consists of a complex of related activities, delivered as linked interdependent services by hotels, restaurants, transport companies, retailers, tourist attractions and others, multi-level co-operation among regional key players is a critical factor in promoting innovation in tourism (Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services, 2013).

Moreover, tourism has been acknowledged by the European Commission (Enterprise and Industry, 2013) as a „force for economic growth, social change and welfare”. The European Tourism Ministers

met prior to the 12th European Tourism Forum to discuss three important initiatives to ensure job creation and economic prosperity in the sector:

„simplifying short-stay visa processing to attract more tourists from emerging economies;  
strengthening senior tourism which can boost occupancy in low and medium seasons;  
aligning future tourism initiatives with the priorities set in the new European financial period 2014-2020 to ensure funding and boost growth and competitiveness in this sector” (European Commission, Enterprise and Industry, 2013).

Last but not least, the results of the research may materialize in different actions, articles, and projects. In line with the EU principles regarding funding the research and innovation projects which demonstrate excellence and added-value, with a strong focus on impact, dissemination and knowledge transfer, CACTUS researchers will realign and shape a new strategic research portfolio and look for opportunities to work in partnership with other stakeholders to develop initiatives that respond to the new economic and social context. Efforts are currently underway to pursuing projects for sustainable tourism development, cultural and heritage tourism, and even for taking into consideration the effects of the digital economy. The researchers aim to ensure the elements of relevance and impact of research, to choose the right approaches and research methodologies in order to create sustainable influence on the economy and the society, in general.

### **Conclusion**

Given the intense competition for the limited resources available to support research initiatives and the today's research needs, standards and trends, a researcher in tourism should pay close attention to the changes regarding the funding schemes and to the influences perceived in the present dynamic, complex and competitive research environment. First, one should be aware of the new funding opportunities offered for the next programming period (2014-2020), which focus more on promoting the green, smart growth in Europe in line with Europe 2020. Second, it should be taken into consideration relying on a network of individuals which can provide information on current events, conferences, research, relevant sources of information in order to meet the most recent standards and trends in international scientific research.

### **References**

- Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (2013), Final Report – Enhancing the Competitiveness of Tourism in the EU An Evaluation Approach to Establishing 20 Cases of Innovation and Good Practice UK, September, [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/industrial-competitiveness/monitoring-member-states/good-practice/files/cses-gp-tourism-summary\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/industrial-competitiveness/monitoring-member-states/good-practice/files/cses-gp-tourism-summary_en.pdf), accessed on October 30, 2013.
- European Commission, Enterprise and Industry (2013), 12th European Tourism Forum (2013), Tourism – A Force for Economic Growth, Social Change and Welfare, [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item\\_id=7028&lang=en&tpa\\_id=136&title=12th-European-Tourism-Forum-%282013%29%3A-%E2%80%98Tourism-%E2%80%93-A-Force-for-Economic-Growth%2C-Social-Change-and-Welfare%E2%80%99](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=7028&lang=en&tpa_id=136&title=12th-European-Tourism-Forum-%282013%29%3A-%E2%80%98Tourism-%E2%80%93-A-Force-for-Economic-Growth%2C-Social-Change-and-Welfare%E2%80%99), accessed on October 30, 2013.
- European Commission (2011), Green Paper – From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation Funding, Brussels, [http://ec.europa.eu/research/horizon2020/index\\_en.cfm?pg=documents](http://ec.europa.eu/research/horizon2020/index_en.cfm?pg=documents), accessed on July 29, 2013.
- European Commission (2010), Europe 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels, <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>, accessed on July 29, 2013.
- Welcomeurope (2013), <http://www.welcomeurope.com/list-european-funds.html?sector=30>, accessed on July 23, 2013.