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Online resources of the World Tourism Organization: fostering knowledge and raising awareness in society during the COVID-19 pandemic

Abstract. The purpose of the article is to explore and describe the resources made available by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) during the COVID-19 pandemic and discuss their role in fostering knowledge and promoting awareness in society. The resources are examined using a conceptual model of website evaluation proposed by Li and Wang (2010), which has been adapted to be applicable to the organizational context of UNWTO. The findings show that the UNWTO website resources can be divided into two categories: resources related to the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g. information about existing special groups, and resources connected with the core mission of the UNWTO, e.g. important events from before the pandemic or the organization's main goals. There are new interactive tools, developed specifically in relation to the pandemic, with relevant data for those involved or interested in the tourism sector. The resources are freely available, easily accessible, abundant, varied and highly informative. The UNWTO website is a gateway to knowledge, providing information about, reasons for and effects of relevant actions of the organization, e.g. raising awareness of the importance of both the pandemic problem but also tourism itself, securing considerable funding for the tourism sector by making world leaders aware of the facts and the importance of tourism, or promoting safe travel measures and encouraging actions aimed at accelerating the recovery of the tourism sector.

Keywords: World Tourism Organization, UNWTO, knowledge, resources, tourism, COVID-19, webpage resources evaluation

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1. Introduction and overview

A number of serious changes in different places around the world have taken place in the functioning of the global society since the outbreak of the coronavirus and the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. In this difficult time, when tourism, in particular, is one of the areas most affected by the pandemic (UNWTO, n.d.a.), it is worth taking a closer look at the resources that the leading organisation in the area of tourism has been providing via its website and their role in fostering knowledge and promoting awareness in society.

The following article focuses on the World Tourism Organization of the United Nations (UNWTO), which is "the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism" (UNWTO, n.d.b.) and is the leading organization in the field with a website full of information. The purpose of the this article is to answer the following question:

What role do the resources provided on the UNWTO website play in fostering knowledge and promoting awareness in society during the COVID-19 pandemic?

To answer this question the author analysed selected content of the UNTWO's website using Li and Wang's conceptual model (Li & Wang, 2010).

This exploratory study could serve as a starting point for a survey of the website's users, or could trigger reflections on what other information or tools could be added to the website. In addition to exploring and describing the available resources, their role is discussed.

The first section of the article provides a contextual introduction to the topic, which is followed by a description of the UNWTO and its website, an overview of related studies and a description of the method used to analyse the website. The main section contains a summary of the findings.

The analysis focuses on the resources of the UNWTO because it is the world's leading tourism organisation with 159 Member States (UNWTO, n.d.c.) and its information is potentially useful to governments, tourist companies, educational institutions and individuals.

Another reason for undertaking this study was the author's interest in the role of online resources in learning and professional as well as personal development and related previous research (Kozinska, 2013).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The pandemic

The changes that have affected the global society since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 have been particularly dramatic in the area of tour-

ism and in related fields. At the end of November 2020 UNWTO stated: "As the world is facing an unprecedented global health, social and economic emergency with the COVID-19 pandemic, travel and tourism is among the most affected sectors with airplanes on the ground, hotels closed and travel restrictions put in place in virtually all countries around the world" (UNWTO, n.d.a).

At the end of December, UNWTO described the year 2020 as "the most challenging year in the history of tourism" (UNWTO, 2020a), giving the following commentary: "Almost overnight, the pandemic brought global tourism to a complete standstill. Millions of people missed chances to explore different places and embrace different cultures and customs. And the world lost out on opportunities for tourism to create jobs, support businesses, kick-start development, and to protect and preserve the very things we leave our homes to see" (UNWTO, 2020a).

The gravity of the situation is reflected in an article published by The Economist at the end of December: "As 2020 draws to a close, the virus is rampant. There have been more than 70m confirmed cases and the number is growing by 4.3m a week. Perhaps 7m people have had to endure the lingering debilitation of 'long covid' for more than three months. Worse still, more than 1.6m are known to have died and weekly fatalities now exceed 75,000, easily surpassing the record set in April" (The Economist, 2020).

The statistics of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), presented at the beginning of January 2021 are worrying, too. Nonetheless, UNWTO attempts to raise the spirits of those for whom tourism matters by noting that "tourism ends the year more united and determined than ever... [and that] the UNWTO Global Tourism Crisis Committee is geared towards accelerating the restart of tourism, always factoring in the most recent situation of global health... Harmonized, consistent travel protocols are essential for restoring confidence in international travel and getting tourism moving again. UNWTO will maintain the momentum we gained in 2020 into the new year" (UNWTO, 2020a).

In a special section of the official website of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) called 'Tackling coronavirus (COVID19) -Contributing to a global effort', a number of activities and actions are outlined with the aim of tackling the global crisis, e.g. in a 'green' and 'inclusive' way (OECD, n.d.).

It can be seen that, even though the situation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is serious and tourism has been badly affected, actions are being taken by UNWTO to plan the best options for the restart of tourism activities as soon as possible once the pandemic situation is under control.

2.2. About the UNWTO

As stated on its website, "The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism" (UNWTO, n.d.b.). The UNWTO sees "tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide" (UNWTO, n.d.b). The Organization identifies the most urgent problems that the industry faces and attempts to solve them. This is reflected in the vision of tourism having the potential to help advance the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, n.d.). It is important for UNWTO members to make tourism policy a priority area, develop partnerships and "lead in knowledge creation" (UNWTO, n.d.b). Ethics is crucial as the Organization seeks to promote the implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (UNWTO, 2020b).

At the heart of the UNWTO's activities lie attempts to decrease any negative impacts of tourism, while increasing its positive social and economic influence. Sustainable development and poverty reduction are of key importance for the hundreds of various UNWTO members, including states, educational bodies, associations and local tourism authorities. Furthermore "UNWTO generates market knowledge, promotes competitive and sustainable tourism policies and instruments, fosters tourism education and training, and works to make tourism an effective tool for development through technical assistance projects in over 100 countries around the world" (UNWTO, n.d.b). UNWTO emerges as being at the forefront of the global activities in promoting tourism knowledge, education and awareness.

2.3. Related studies and the method

Various authors have focused on examining different tourist websites from various perspectives. Doolin, Burgess and Cooper (2002) focused on New Zealand in their evaluation of how the Internet is used for tourism marketing, while Feng, Morrison and Ismail (2003) compared online destination marketing in China with the USA. The effectiveness of commercial Internet websites was examined from the perspective of users by Bell and Tang (1998). Law, Qi and Buhalis (2010) conducted a review of different tourism studies published between 1996 and 2009 and related to website evaluation.

In order to establish what role UNWTO resources play in fostering knowledge and promoting awareness, the author used the conceptual model of website evaluation proposed by Li and Wang (2010) (see Fig. 1).

The model consists of five dimensions: information, communication, relationship, transaction and technical merit, which affects the other four. The model was developed to evaluate websites of destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and links back to the work of Wang and Russo (2007) as cited by Li & Wang (2010,

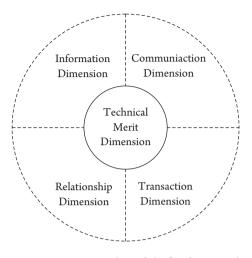


Fig. 1. A conceptual model of website evaluation' destination marketing organisations Source: Li & Wang, 2010, p. 540.

p. 539), in which they argued that for a DMO's website to be successful, it must include the following four components: "(i) up-to-date and accurate destination information provision; (ii) effective and constant communication with consumers; (iii) reliable and seamless electronic transaction; and (iv) appropriate and sustainable relationship building programmes" (Wang & Russo (2007) as cited by Li & Wang (2010, p. 539). Since Li and Wang's model was originally developed for assessing DMOs' websites, not all of these aspects are relevant in the evaluation of the UNWTO website, which is an organizational website. In particular, the transactional and relationship aspects are not considered as relevant in this context.

For this reason, the following analysis of the content of the UNWTO's website (UNWTO, n.d.d) focuses only on three dimensions featured in Li and Wang's model: information, communication, technical merit, with the goal of determining what role UNWTO resources play in fostering knowledge and promoting awareness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, only some of the items in each dimension used to evaluate DMOs' websites in the study by Li and Wang (2010) are utilised in this study, e.g. only the 'activities information' item in the information dimension, since the others are not relevant in the case of the UNWTO's website. Types of activities were not specified before the analysis, but the author's intention was to explore the website to see what activities could be identified.

Within the communication dimension, the following items were examined: search function, interactive tools (instead of interactive communication tools that are absent on the UNWTO website), online forum, comment box, online survey, frequently asked questions and e-mail newsletter.

Although it was not the author's intention to examine the website's technical aspects, the technical merit dimension is central to all the other ones (Li & Wang, 2010). For this reasons, the following items are also briefly examined: load time, navigation, visual appearance, site map, and multiple languages. Search engine recognition, webpage design and link check were not considered.

The website was visited on different occasions within the period from 27 November 2020 to 10 January 2021. The selection of material for analysis was purposive with a view to obtaining a varied sample of different resources provided by the UNWTO during the pandemic.

3. Findings

After analysing the content of selected parts of the UNWTO's website, with a view to answering the main research question, the following examples have been selected as representative of the materials that can be used for fostering knowledge and raising awareness. The findings obtained from the exploration of the website resources are presented separately for each dimension: information (Table 1), communication (Table 2) and technical merit (Table 3).

Information content		Details	
Information on COVID-19 related activities linked to	The formation of official bodies (to help tackle the crisis, follow the latest de- velopments and help restart tourism)	 Resources which inform about, state the purpose of and summarize the most important actions (UNWTO, 2020a): Information on the formation of the UNWTO Global Tourism Crisis Committee shortly after the outbreak Statement of the purpose of the body - to speed up the restart of tourism Summary of its actions in the article "As 2020 ends, tourism looks forward with determination" 	
	Organization of relevant events and meetings during the pandemic (strategic, executive, partner- ships, visits)	 Resources which inform about the most important decisions, share documents, offer forecasts and advice on recovery, and share knowledge on the trends, education and the effect that the pandemic has had and will have on the tourism industry: The document section with information, decisions, reports, notes, presentations linked to the 112 Executive Council session on 15-17 September 2020 in Tbilisi, Georgia (UNWTO, 2020e): "Decisions taken by the Executive Council at its 112th session" (UNWTO, 2020f) "the Tbilisi Declaration: Actions for a Sustainable Recovery of Tourism" (UNWTO, 2020g) 	

Table 1. The information dimension of the UNWTO's website

Table 1. – cont.

Informati	on content	Details
		• "Current trends and prospects of international tourism" (UNWTO, 2020h)
		• "Technical Assistance 2020 and Covid-19 Tourism Recovery" (UNWTO, 2020i)
		• "The impact of Covid on International Tourism" (UNWTO, 2020d)
		• Presentation on the work of the Online Education Commit- tee (UNWTO, 2020j)
		• Explanation of the purpose of events: "Over recent months we have made political and business leaders listen and make tourism a part of their plans. We have emphasized the rele- vance of tourism to almost every part of our societies, most re- cently amplified through our partnership with CNN and rein- forced through high-level, in-person visits to Member States" (UNWTO, 2020a)
	COVID-19 response	Resources which inform about the effect of COVID-19 on tourism, raise awareness through authority figures and other key international organizations, provide information on ac- tions, initiatives and guidelines:
		• A video of the speech by António Guterres, UN Secretary- General (UNWTO, n.d.f)
		• A quote by Zurab Pololikashvili, UNWTO Secretary-General (UNWTO, n.d.f)
		• Link to the 'Restart Tourism' initiative with guidelines (UN-WTO, n.d.f)
		• List of important areas of cooperation with WHO, related links and relevant news (UNWTO, n.d.f)
		• Data and forecasts linked to the impact of COVID-19 on tourism:
		• Presentation "The impact of Covid on International Tour- ism" (UNWTO, 2020d) with data on the estimated impact of Covid on international tourism between January and August 2020: a 70% drop in international tourist arrivals, translating into a loss of 705 million international tourist arrivals and a loss of US\$ 730 billion in tourism exports (UNWTO, 2020d)
		• Predictions that it may take 2.5-4 years to recover the levels from 2019 (UNWTO, 2020d)
		• List of opportunities, e.g. digitalization, domestic and re- gional tourism (UNWTO, 2020d)
		• List of challenges, e.g. volatility & lack of international coor- dination on travel regulations, low consumer confidence (UN- WTO, 2020d)

Table 1. – cont.

Information content		Details
	Call to action and concrete effects	 Resources which advocate the UNWTO aims and inform about the effects of actions: An appeal to "rethink quarantine rules for tourists. To embrace innovation and new solutions for testing travellers before or after their journeys. Alongside this, restrictions on travel must be eased or lifted in a responsible and coordinated manner as soon as it is safe and feasible" (UNWTO, 2020a) Information on effects: "This joined-up approach contributed to ensuring tourism has been given record levels of financial support and political goodwill and rewarded with public recognition. The European Commission has led the way in turning encouraging words into firm actions, most notably with its unprecedented economic support for tourism at this crucial time" (UNWTO, 2020a) Promotion of safe travel: "to show that safe international travel is not only possible but, given the social and economic benefits that only tourism can deliver, essential too" (UNWTO, 2020a)
Information not di- rectly related to the COVID-19 pandemic	Materials summaris- ing the recent most important UNWTO events, plans, goals	 Resources on activities of UNWTO linked to its mission and core aims, e.g. a video featuring an overview of the UNWTO's 23rd General Assembly in St. Petersburg, held in September 2019, where the Organization's new programme of work was approved (https://youtu.be/MDn0ejb1hb8, UNWTO, 2020c), with (selected examples): A section on the World Tourism Day in 2019 – a reminder about the tourism's potential to create exceptional and equal opportunities for individuals and organizations in an era of a dynamically changing job market (event from before the pandemic) Information on the 2nd UNWTO Tourism Start-up Competition, with 1700 innovators from 150 countries; Users learn that "US\$ 49 million investments mobilized 15% projects led by women" (1:16 min); link to one of the UNWTO's priorities to contribute to the realization of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, one related to equal opportunities Information on the significance of high-level events, e.g. the Global Tourism Economy Forum, to spread "tourism's benefits for people and planet" (1:28 min) Reminder about important initiatives, e.g. the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative, with aims for the sector to reduce waste and a move towards a so-called "circular economy" (3:48 min) Information on 2020 meant to start the "decade of action" (4:28 min) through contributing to the realization of the SDGs in the next ten years

Source: own analysis of the information dimension of the UNWTO website based on the model of Li and Wang (2010).

Tools and functions	Comments/ examples	
Search function	 Available on the UNWTO's website (top right) Search by term, but also filter items by region or tag 	
Interactive tools	 Tourism Recovery Tracker: A tool that "compiles all the relevant data in one place, giving governments and the private businesses the ability to track the recovery of tourism at global and regional level, alongside information on the top destinations for international tourism [and is] a collaborative effort of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), Forward-Keys, STR, Sojern and AIRDNA" (UNWTO, 2021) Monthly tourism key performance indicators grouped by region and subregion Real-time recovery comparison Data on: international tourist arrivals, seat capacity in international and domestic air routes, air travel bookings, hotel searches and bookings, occupancy rates and demand for short term rentals, and COVID-19 14-day notification rate per 100,000 population (UNWTO, 2021) A dedicated dashboard with data on the impact of COVID-19 on global tourism: Data showing the effect of COVID-19 on tourism around the globe free- 	
	 ly accessible, updated monthly A comprehensive source of information on "international tourist arrivals and receipts, vulnerability of destinations, tourism as share of GDP and in total exports, international tourism as share of total tourism (including domestic), impact assessment of COVID-crisis on tourism and of previous crises on tourism" (UNWTO, n.d.e) 	
E-mail newsletter	 Available, possible to subscribe to the UNWTO newsletter on the website Source of information, e.g. about events 	
Online forum, com- ment box, online survey and frequently asked questions	 Not available on the UNWTO's website Instead, links to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Linkedin, YouTube and Flickr, enabling users to share content and comment (e.g. in "As 2020 ends, tourism looks forward with determination" (UNWTO, 2020a), social media logos on the left 	

Table 2. The communication dimension of the UNWTO's website

Source: own analysis of the communication dimension of the UNWTO website based on the model of Li and Wang (2010).

Regarding the main research question: "What role do the resources provided on the UNWTO website play in fostering knowledge and promoting awareness in society during the COVID-19 pandemic?", the following answer can be formulated.

The main purpose of the website is to provide information and knowledge. The first group of resources associated with the information dimension are those linked to concrete COVID-19 related activities, such as the formation of specific

Technical aspects	Comments/ examples	
Load time	Links uploaded instantly, without delay times (can depend on the user's Internet connection, too)	
Navigation	Easy to navigate Items clearly signposted Links to related content provided beneath articles Category tags beneath articles, e.g. COVID-19 Key phrases highlighted in bold Possible to upload some articles as pdf	
Visual appearance	Colourful website, visually pleasing Variety of content, e.g. text and images	
Site map	Available on the bottom of the page	
Multiple languages	English, Spanish, French, Russian and Arabic (although not all sites are available in all of these languages)	

Table 3. The technical	merit dimension	n of the UNWTO's website

Source: own analysis of the technical merit dimension of the UNWTO website based on the model of Li and Wang (2010).

bodies, organization of events and high-level meetings, COVID response, as well as calls for action and the results of these calls. The UNWTO not only informs about these actions and summarizes them but also explains the purpose of these actions and related safety measures, their effects and consequences, e.g. to raise funds and remind business and political leaders about the importance of tourism. Through using authority figures and fostering co-operation with the media and international organizations, such as the CNN or WHO, UNWTO raises users' awareness of the seriousness of the pandemic but also of the importance of tourism and the efforts to develop solutions and share positive results of these attempts. UNWTO publishes numerous calls to action on its website. The documents, reports, presentations and other resources linked to key events contain forecasts, decisions, trends, guidance and advice for those interested in the tourism industry and its recovery. The UNWTO provides information about the consequences of the pandemic, not only negative effects but also opportunities.

The second group of resources associated with the information dimension refers to routine activities of UNWTO linked to its mission and core aims. These resources are available despite the pandemic to reaffirm the importance of tourism and the role of the UNWTO in this difficult time, to promote its mission and its key priorities.

As regards the communication dimension, the most important role of the UNWTO resources is the provision of new interactive data and tools related to COVID-19 and tourism, e.g. the Tourism Recovery Tracker. Such data and tools can help institutions, companies and individuals make short-term and long-term

decisions concerning their functioning and their future. One possible criticism from the perspective of communication is that users cannot make comments about the content published on the website or otherwise interact with the site, for example by asking questions on a chat. This, however, is compensated by links to a number of social media available on the UNWTO website.

Taking into consideration the technical aspects of the website, they enable users to effectively access the content through easy navigation, visually pleasing design and resources available in a few languages.

Overall, the main strength of all resources examined in the study is the fact that they are freely available, easily accessible, abundant, varied and relevant. However, the abundance of information, links, data, presentations, etc., which is likely to be appreciated by experts, may also be overwhelming for more casual users.

4. Summary and conclusions

As established through the exploration of the resources published on its website, the UNWTO uses it to inform, share knowledge and raise awareness in society. Some information is created as a result of the formation of specific bodies to deal with the crisis. Some documents relate to events organized by the UNWTO. Some tools are developed by UNWTO experts, sometimes in collaboration with other organizations, in order to provide interactive data. These resources are there to foster knowledge and promote awareness in society, particularly in relation to the difficult situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The website resources contain new information about current and future activities, e.g. via the COVID-19 dashboard, and remind users about important past events, competitions, tourism days, forums, agreements.

UNWTO activities during the times of COVID-19 and the related website content can potentially be of great significance to many different stakeholders in the tourism sector, tourism and economy experts, travel and tourism companies and airlines, researchers and educators, as well as individuals. The formation of crisis bodies, relevant events and knowledge created as a result, different data-based interactive tools, reports, links, etc., all these are an invaluable source of information and knowledge, and help raise awareness concerning the status quo. All the resources, depending on the purpose of their use, can fulfil the role of market intelligence, policy-making advice, and educational resources. As stated on the website, "UNWTO generates market knowledge, promotes competitive and sustainable tourism policies and instruments, fosters tourism education and training, and works to make tourism an effective tool for development through technical assistance projects in over 100 countries around the world" (UNWTO, n.d.b).

The knowledge gained from online resources of UNWTO concerns significant steps and actions, e.g. securing financial support for the tourism sector and raising awareness of the importance of tourism among world leaders. Users of the website can also learn about the special crisis group that promotes safe international travel and encourages would be travellers to rethink quarantine rules and prior to their journeys and afterwards. Knowledge is fostered via the UNWTO website through the provision of relevant, up-to-date information, both related to COVID-19 activities specifically, including past and future activities that constitute the UNWTO's mission. The website provides advice on recommended safety measures, forecasts, interactive data and new COVID-19 related tools, relevant for those in the tourism industry, guidance for policy-makers and awareness raising statements by authority figures and partnerships.

Finally, the UNWTO reaffirms its position as the leader, decision-maker and the greatest promoter of tourism, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g. as evidenced by the following quote: "The important steps undertaken to ensure better coordination and refusing to stand still, are the precursors to prepare for the new year. 2021 could be a critical year for the restart of tourism, but only if we continue along this path. The foundations are there for this to be a turning point. It is a moment for directing our sector towards greater sustainability and inclusivity and realizing its massive potential to deliver lasting development and change for all. We cannot waste this chance" (UNWTO, 2020a).

The main limitation of this study is that the website content analysed during the study is regularly updated, and, at a volatile time like that of the pandemic, can literally change overnight. Furthermore, given the exploratory nature of the study, only arbitrarily, purposively selected resources available on the website were analysed. Thus the results should not be treated as representative of the whole UNWTO website. Additionally, the assessment of the website and its usability represent the experience of only one user. Even though some technical aspects of the website were also analysed, as required by Li and Wang's model, the scope of the description was minimal since the study mainly focused on the informational dimension.

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Internetowe zasoby Światowej Organizacji Turystyki Narodów Zjednoczonych (UNWTO): promocja wiedzy i podnoszenie świadomości społeczeństwa w czasie pandemii COVID-19

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu było zbadanie i opisanie, jakie zasoby udostępnia w czasie pandemii COVID-19 Światowa Organizacja Turystyki Narodów Zjednoczonych (UNWTO), oraz przedyskutowanie ich roli w promowaniu wiedzy i podnoszeniu świadomości społeczeństwa. Zasoby są analizowane za pomocą modelu ewaluacji stron internetowych Li i Wang (2010), dostosowanego do kontekstu strony UNWTO. Wyniki pokazują, że zasoby UNWTO można podzielić na dwie grupy: te, które mają związek z pandemią COVID-19, np. informacje dotyczące utworzenia specjalnych grup. Druga grupa to zasoby związane z misją organizacji UNWTO, np. ważne wydarzenia sprzed pandemii czy jej główne cele. Na stronie znajdują się nowe, interaktywne narzędzia, zaprojektowane konkretnie w związku z pandemią, z danymi dla tych z sektora turystyki lub nim zainteresowanych. Zasoby te są dostępne bezpłatnie, są urozmaicone i bogate w informacje. Strona UNWTO to brama do wiedzy, informująca o istotnych działaniach organizacji, ich powodach, a także skutkach, np. podnoszeniu świadomości znaczenia zarówno problemu pandemii, jak i samej turystyki, zdobywania dużych nakładów finansowych dla sektora turystyki poprzez uświadamianie światowym przywódcom faktów i znaczenia turystyki czy też promowanie bezpiecznych podróży i zachęcanie do działań ukierunkowanych na przyspieszenie odbudowy sektora turystyki.

Słowa kluczowe: Światowa Organizacja Turystyki, UNWTO, wiedza, zasoby, turystyka, COVID-19



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