

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AFTER COVID 19 PANDEMIC

CIPRIAN NIMARĂ *

ABSTRACT: *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has become a global pandemic that has caused the mobility of people in all countries to cease. The pandemic has affected the physical, social, mental and economic well-being of the people around the globe. Tourism is an industry that is very closely related to human movement, moving from one place to another. In this condition, tourism is the biggest sector affected. The pandemic shifted the tourism industry toward more creative and sustainable dimensions by encouraging the use of technological solutions. One of the main aims of this paper is to show which are the challenges, the strategies and the predictions for a sustainable tourism after the Covid 19 pandemic.*

KEY WORDS: *Covid-19 pandemic, tourism, sustainability, digital hygiene.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *R0, R1, Z3.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The SARS epidemic in 2003 is a good starting point. It was also triggered by a coronavirus, so it is epidemiologically comparable. On the other hand, it also started in South Asia and it was the first epidemic in the age of globalization and the Internet, which is why similar behavior can be expected today. Between November 2002 and June 2003, around 8000 people were infected with the SARS virus, almost two-thirds of them in the People's Republic of China and a fifth in Hong Kong. There were also higher numbers of illnesses and deaths in Taiwan, Singapore, and Canada. Given the overall low number of infected people, the effects of SARS on the job offer and, thus, on production were limited. However, the indirect effects were noticeable (Nagaj & Žuromskaitė, 2021). So tourists avoided the Southeast Asia region for a while in order not to run the risk of infection.

The novel coronavirus (CoV) is now called SARS-CoV-2, the infection COVID-19. With around 80% of all confirmed cases, the province of Hubei remains

* Lecturer, Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, ciprian.nimara@yahoo.com

the epicenter. Flights and train travel from the largest cities in this province have been canceled until further notice, roads are closed and there is still a general obligation to wear a mask. In the meantime, the SARS-CoV-2 has also reached Europe and Switzerland. News from newspapers, radio and television roll over every day with new figures on infections and deaths. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared an international health emergency.

In particular, the indirect effects of COVID-19 are likely to be considerably higher than with SARS. The governments have taken drastic measures to control the epidemic.

COVID-19 pandemic has affected the physical, social, mental and economic well-being of the people around the globe. According to the World Health Organization a total of 521,920,560 confirmed cases of COVID-19, comprising 6,274,323 deaths, have been recorded globally as of 16 May 2022. Around 114 million individuals in the world lost their employment during 2020 as a result of the massive lockdowns enforced to control the transmission of the virus. The terrible impact of the pandemic on various sectors of the world economy raises concerns before policymakers and stakeholders.

2. THE SIDE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TOURISM

The news that the virus had spread to Italy and to other countries in Europe has caused considerable anxiety for tourists, potential tourists and the wider tourism industry. Research from the Global Business Travel Association (2020) shows widespread business meeting cancellations and postponements are taking place worldwide. The International Air Transport Association (IATA, 2020) has announced that the coronavirus has reduced the global airline revenue by \$29.3 billion in 2020, arising from a contraction in global air demand.

Table 1. Passenger traffic analysis

No	Regions	Passenger traffic		
		% change vs previous year		% change vs 2019
		2020	2021	2022
1	Global	-65.8	21.8	-29.4
2	North America	-65.1	74.7	-8.6
3	Europe	-69.5	27.5	-18.6
4	Asia-Pacific	-62.0	-12.8	-55.7
5	Middle East	-72.1	8.5	-20.7
6	Latin America	-62.5	40.5	-12.6
7	Africa	-68.2	17.0	-32.3

Source: <http://www.iata.org>, 2022

While this is the first such contraction since the global financial crisis of 2008 to 2009, it needs to be recognized that virtually 95% of this projected loss were for Asia/Pacific carriers (Global Business Travel Association, 2020). The most affected regions by passenger traffic in 2020 were: Middle East and Europe and in 2021 only Asia-Pacific (table 1).

The IATA expects global airline losses to amount to \$6.9 billion this year, a significant improvement over 2020 and 2021, when the industry realized losses of \$137.7 and \$42.0 billion, respectively. Going forward, the IATA expects the aviation sector to return to profitability, albeit a much lower level compared to pre-pandemic times. Profits are expected to reach \$4.7 billion next year, compared to \$26.4 billion in 2019. Looking at the profit margin, 0.6 percent expected for 2024 vs. 3.1 percent in 2019, reveals that there is still a lot of ground to cover for the industry to return to previous heights.

Tourism as an open system is characterized by its high degree of networking with the environment. The numerous interactions with the various dimensions of the outside world not only influence the tourism system itself but also influence the environment (Buia & Nîmară, 2016). The environment as a whole can be divided into technological, socio-cultural, political, economic and ecological dimensions. Due to the many interrelationships, tourism, with all its components, is very susceptible to changes in all dimensions of the environment. There are also a variety of external influences that can have a significant impact on traveller mobility. These potential external factors can be summarized in two main categories:

- the natural offer of the destination;
- the potential risk of crises based on the different environmental dimensions.

The severe impact of the pandemic on all aspects of travel and tourism has exacerbated the already prevailing sustainability challenges (Fletcher, et al., 2020). In fact, the likelihood of a more frequent incidence of such crises in the future (Hoarau, 2022) signals a need to rethink tourism sustainability in the light of major event crises such as COVID-19.

One of the most significant and positive impacts of the pandemic on global tourism sustainability is the decline in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from tourism-related activities. Not specific to tourism, but in general, the pandemic presented businesses with an opportunity to genuinely participate in corporate social responsibilities (CSR) by fulfilling urgent social and environmental needs. Other positive outcomes of the pandemic on the tourist industry include the promotion of ecofriendly products, an increase in nature-based tourism activities, the emergence of new destinations, greater standards of hygiene and sanitation, and an accelerated awareness of safeguarding biodiversity.

The most unprecedented decline witnessed by the tourism businesses during the pandemic persuaded them to accelerate the implementation of innovative digital technologies in their operations. In essence, the pandemic shifted the tourism industry toward more creative and sustainable dimensions by encouraging the use of technological solutions such as virtual reality, internet tours, augmented reality, artificial intelligence and other cutting-edge technologies that comply with the COVID-19 protocols. The application of such human-machine interactive technologies

in the tourism industry can lead to smarter and more sustainable destination strategies while also offering tourists a more sophisticated experience (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020).

The pandemic also presented a need for tourism suppliers to rethink tourist behaviour and trigger more sustainability by offering opportunities and information to the travellers to reflect responsible behaviour. In essence, the pandemic can be perceived as an opportunity to ponder the unsustainable practices of the pre-pandemic tourism industry and induce quality tourism, responsible behaviour and technological footprints to trigger greater sustainability. In this way, the current crisis may be recognized as an opportunity to incorporate responsible behaviour in the present-day tourists to avoid the pre-existing phenomenon of over-tourism.

Tourism has been one of the sectors worst affected by the Covid-19 pandemic: hotels, restaurants, airlines and travel agencies had to stop their activity almost completely during a long period and only now touristic activity is slowly recovering back to pre-2020 levels. However, the pandemic has also accelerated the transition to a more sustainable models of tourism.

While touristic activity has returned to pre-pandemic levels in many regions of Europe during spring 2022, some researchers warned that the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis are posing new challenges to the sector. They underlined the importance of tourism to the economic growth and called for the European Union to consider tourism as one of its key policy areas. At the same time, cities and regions across Europe are responding to the growing demand for more sustainable ways of travel: for example, the Veneto Region in Italy has recently inaugurated several new walking and cycling routes across the territory. A study shows that 54% of tourists arriving in his region would accept to pay an extra price for a more ecologic-friendly accommodation.

3. THE DIGITAL HYGIENE

More importantly, the most important fact for tourists is to share new experiences. The reality is that by COVID -19 restrictions, these discoveries can only happen online. The question posed now is how exactly the tourism industry can leverage the tool of technology. The answer to this question is what is known as *digital hygiene*.

Digital hygiene is the foundation and basics of digital presence. Digital presence is how you and your business appears online. It is the basic building block of using the best impact of digital asset. The tourism industry has a lot to learn and do when it comes to digital hygiene. The world of technology is the world of possibilities. However, only those who can leverage them to suit their areas of strength and to make up for their limitations can enjoy the endless benefits of the new digital age.

A great way to integrate a digital presence is through social media. The space of social media is one of great wonder especially with the advantage of easy publicity. You can show the world what you want them to see and have it circulated to millions in a matter of minutes. The services of social media influencers can be engaged. Many have made a career by being travel bloggers; these categories of people make a living by curating experiences across several locations of the world.

Social media also presents a wide range of options for information to be included in the web blueprint. Information placed on the socials is generally known as content and content can be in diverse forms. It can be in a written form, in the form of an image, audio, or video format. The implication of the wide range of options on digital media for the tourism industry means that content around tourism and people's travel experience can be curated creatively (Seabra & Bhatt, 2022).

In essence, someone who travels can decide to not enjoy the entire trip alone but take many others who may not be physically present on a journey of his or her experience. That way, many others now have inkling into what being on that journey feels like and as such are more curious to experience it firsthand. If anyone in this category should be given an opportunity, they would not hesitate to take it a step further by going on that journey physically. Besides, there is a lot that can be done to pique the interest of tourists from anywhere in the world on the internet (Ugur, 2020). The tourism industry can partner with travel enthusiasts who are tech savvy to help create tailored content to suit the demand of the times the world is in at the moment. Approaching this the best way would be to single out those who are excellent at what they do to strategically execute. So, the stakeholders want to go for the best content writers to create mind blowing written content about places people can visit. To properly achieve the goal of awareness, written forms like articles, blog posts and email newsletters can be employed to drive the execution of the written consent form.

4. PREDICTIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

From globalisation to risk perception and crisis management, in a framework where technology, communication and digital content represent undeniable importance, we are facing circumstances especially conducive to the redesign of the collective future, where the sustainability of tourism is a collective goal, arising from the right balance between the competitiveness of destinations and climate action.

Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, tourism was among the high-growth and priority sectors of the global economy. In the year 2019, the tourism industry exclusively contributed to 10.4% (EUR 9.4 trillion) of global GDP, 10.6% (341 million) of world employment, and 6.8% (EUR 1.7 trillion) of total exports. International Tourism Highlights of the World Tourism Organization claims 2019 as the tenth consecutive year of sustained growth. This shows that tourism remained one of the effective engines of economic growth and prosperity at the global level, helping millions of people secure a better livelihood.

The post-pandemic challenges in the tourism industry are:

- business deterring to undertake successful planning;
- devising sustainable strategy of operation;
- dealing simultaneously with health and environmental challenges;
- realizing climate-neutral world;
- recuperation of demand;
- uncertainty about tourist returning to their normal habits;
- addressing the pre-existing issues of over tourism and unsustainable tourism.

The absence of any sustainable strategy, the tourism industry in the aftermath of COVID-19 will again return to the pre-pandemic over-tourism and unsustainable practices. The resilient strategies imposed by some authors, might be:

- creation of travel bubble;
- evolution of new niche of tourism such as: *untact tourism* (avoiding crowded places or indoor activities and instead turning to outdoor attractions with plenty of space), *staycation* (a holiday spent in one's home country rather than abroad, or one spent at home and involving day trips to local attractions), *workation* (combining work and leisure to allow employees to relax and be more productive), *six feet tourism*.

Tourists can have a negative perception of a tourist destination if they feel their safety will be "at risk" when visiting the destination. This perception relates to information that tourists get from various sources. Exposure to mass and social media has an impact on tourists' intentions to visit tourist destinations. Hot topics in various online mass media today about the COVID-19 pandemic that has spread to almost all countries in the world. This news certainly will affect the thinking of tourists traveling.

Needless to say, nature has been replenishing itself like never before and travelers will definitely be keen to indulge as this form of tourism will allow them to put together social distancing automatically and emphasize direct contact with nature, which in recent weeks many travelers have been unable to benefit from. More than museums and theme parks, people will be keen to spend a couple of days in some resort surrounded by lush greenery - away from the crowd and fear of contamination. Nature tourism will be the most popular attraction with important aspects of safety, cleanliness, and beauty to fulfill tourist demand. The next trend is short-time period tourism, perhaps due to the anticipation of tourists for the COVID-19 pandemic or others experience (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020).

Travel agents and operators are seeing significant growth in booking compared to last year as consumers' confidence is returning. While before Covid-19, people were traveling for different reasons after the pandemic with its restrictions and limitations, travelers are now searching for rich and meaningful experiences. More and more customers are seeking to complete their bucket list items.

Many companies will function fully remote, or even hybrid, allowing people to work from any location they want. Because of that, there will be an increase in more extended stays; for example, an Airbnb report showed that in a quarter of 2021, one of every five bookings was for 28 days or longer and almost half of all reservations were for a week or longer.

Education has become a searched activity among family travels. Thematic classes in the destination are gaining popularity. Now kids can learn about history while visiting in real life the museums and buildings on tour with itineraries focused on them; some companies are offering courses such as science and art focused on kids. Combining outdoor activities with culture immersion is how families choose to travel in 2022.

Over the last few years, we've seen that retirees across the globe have been traveling much and utilizing their time, indulging in exploring faraway places. Their newfound liberation may get heavily tempered by the fear that older humans are more

susceptible to the virus. In the post-corona era, younger travelers in the 18-35 age group, who appear to be less vulnerable to COVID-19, will be the ones to get out of their homes for traveling more.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is a good way to meet people and explore new places if the travel is free of illness, crimes, catastrophes, terrorism and diseases. Epidemics and pandemics are two of the most frightening news for travelers or planners. Besides, not only the travelers but also other people they contact during the journey are at risk and passengers play a serious role in the transfer of epidemics or pandemics between locations. Tourists can have a negative perception of a destination if they feel their safety will be compromised when visiting the destination. This perception relates to information that tourism get from various sources.

Tourism industry and the related activities have been negatively affected by the pandemic. The spread of the virus (with or without state quarantine measures) led to a noticeable decline in so-called “social consumption”. The restrictions included restaurant visits, domestic tourism, visits to cultural events, trade fairs etc. Several prominent events have already been postponed or even canceled in many countries. Given the high number of cancellations, the airline industry has reduced the flight plans by almost a half.

The tourism industry is experiencing a shift away from tourism acting as an island and towards highly engaged communities taking an active role in their collective tourism future. It's no different when it comes to digital. If we improve the digital presence of the collective stakeholders of the destination, the overall digital presence of the destination improves. The destination's stakeholders will increase their digital skillset and the overall visitor experience of the destination improves. Finally, if we engage the stakeholders of a destination in a meaningful way, the stakeholder becomes the champion of tourism in our communities.

The post-pandemic strategies in the tourism industry must answer to the needs of recuperation of demand. For that, some researchers give the following solutions, which might be found in nature tourism and the evolution of new niche of tourism such as: untact tourism, workation, six feet tourism. But, fortunately, the human being is one of the most adaptive species on Earth and whose quality, among many others, is to quickly forget the mistakes of the past, so that the tourism industry will quickly resume its activity at the same values as before the pandemic.

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