

TRANSFORMING TOURISM FOR TOMORROW

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Any crisis is actually a new beginning. It is a restart, with new forces. And this occurs especially when we talk about an activity that has decreased by 80% in one year, as happened with tourism.

Thousands of pages have been written this year about the pandemic with the new coronavirus and its effect on economic and social life. Reports of international organizations, studies of world-renowned research or consulting companies, analysis of financial-banking institutions, articles from academia, etc., all used various models of analysis and predictions to make us better prepared for to cope with this pandemic but especially to restart the engines, once the control of the sanitary situation will be taken.

Is tourism capable of a new beginning? Is there a need for dramatic changes in its post-pandemic development? Or do we just need to easily change our approach, take a deep breath and move forward with courage, but with greater attention and respect for the principles of sustainability, which we, humanity, have imposed on ourselves in the last decade (without making real progress in this regard...)?

The tourism sector is an "engine" of economic growth, due to the multiplier effect it generates. Tourism creates jobs and reduces unemployment, intensifies international economic relations and creates added value, thus generating overall economic development. Before the pandemic, the sector directly contributed 4.4% to GDP, 6.9% to employment, and 21.5% to service exports in OECD countries, on average (and 6.5% of global exports according to the World Trade Organization). The indirect impact of tourism is also significant, now exacerbating the economic downturn. The OECD estimates that more than a third of the tourism added value generated in the domestic economy comes from indirect impacts, reflecting the breadth and depth to linkages between tourism and other sectors (e.g. food production, agriculture, transport, business services).

But the activity of all economic agents directly or indirectly involved must not only aim at the immediate effect, but must be based on a medium and long-term planning that will ensure a sustainable development of tourist destinations. At the moment, the crisis is putting millions of jobs in the tourism sector at risk. The European Commission Joint Research Centre forecasts that in 2020 between 6.6 and 11.7 million jobs in businesses operating and/or dependent on tourism-related activities could be at risk of reduction in working hours or permanent losses in the European Union, representing between 3.2% and 5.6% of the total active population. Women, young people, rural communities, indigenous peoples and informal workers are disproportionately affected – groups that are more likely to be employed in micro or small tourism businesses. Therefore, the future development of tourism should ensure greater job security - in other words, it should be sustainable.

In fact, all reports and studies of international organizations and especially of the UNWTO emphasize that sustainability will be a driving force for future tourism development (OECD, 2020).

Tourism is a social process, a way of life for people today and tomorrow. Tourism should strengthen its essential role not only for the economic development of society, but also for its cultural and social development. It can broaden the way of thinking among the inhabitants, becoming an "open window" to the world, a factor of education, of forming the attitude of tolerance, and in no case a factor of relativism of morality. The inhabitants must preserve the traditional values, be against their commercialization, have respect for everything that is sacred to them and keep their national and cultural identity, and tourists must become more responsible for the destinations visited.

In this sense, we consider that the smaller destinations, typical of smaller communities, which will provide tourists with authentic experiences, with emphasis on quality and not quantity, will be the

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model for tomorrow's development of tourism. Tourists will travel, at least in the short term, closer to home, especially inside the borders, thus supporting domestic tourism and also the national economy.

Moreover, they will choose the destinations according to the criteria of sustainability, safety and health. Accordingly, natural areas, regional and local low tourist density destinations are expected to be the first options, consequently shorter travels will result in a lower environmental impact of tourism. "After this crisis people will want to know more when choosing their travel options. They will want to know not only what is the best deal they can get, but also which travel option is more sustainable, for example, and therefore tourism operators will have to be more transparent, and digitalization will play an increasing role in this regard, making travel simpler and cheaper, but also safer and cleaner"(Wilks, 2020).

Under these conditions, tourism policies must adapt in an agile manner, respond to the needs and safety of tourists and locals, but also to support the private sector, especially small businesses. Recovery plans are a once in a lifetime opportunity to move towards more sustainable and resilient models of tourism development. Building resilience in the tourism sector also involves policies to address structural weaknesses, advance key priorities and take advantage of new opportunities.

As a conclusion, tourism must go on in a slightly changed paradigm, but continuing to apply the principles of sustainability.

Standing still is not an option. Tourism will restart and grow back better for people and the planet! (UNWTO)

References

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