

The need for creative actions in tourism in the Post-COVID 19 pandemic world

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Abstract

The unprecedented advent of COVID 19 has put the world and tourism sectors at a halt. Never have we faced a global problem such as the one we are experiencing. While countries take measures to mitigate the pandemic “revolution”, the tourism sector strongly affected, tries once again to fight against this major problem. At the time I write this contribution, 50 - 75 million jobs are estimated to be lost in tourism and according to the UNWTO, a million jobs, some of them in layoff conditions in this sector will be lost per day and global tourism arrivals could fall by nearly a third this year in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. The approach I use to discuss such matters and point to creative actions in the Post-COVID 19 pandemic tourism world, is based in the agency of Pierre Bourdieu and the concept of action of Hanna Arendt. This is done to emphasize transformative decisions and actions by all social agents of the tourism ecosystem in trying to thrive in the post-pandemic tourism scenario. Such suggestions are presented in the final section of this contribution. The author postulates that only fully engaged tourism academics and practitioners, willing to act differently and to take actions in changing the world of tourism.

Keywords

Tourism; COVID19; Creativity; Agency; Action.

Resumo

O advento sem precedentes do COVID 19 interrompeu os setores do mundo e do turismo. Nunca lidamos com um problema global como o que estamos enfrentando. Enquanto os países tomam medidas para tentar mitigar a “revolução” da pandemia, o setor do turismo fortemente afetado, tenta novamente lutar contra este grande problema. No momento em que escrevo essa contribuição, estima-se que 50 a 75

milhões de empregos sejam perdidos no turismo e, de acordo com a OMT, um milhão de empregos, alguns deles em condições de layoff neste setor, serão perdidos por dia e as chegadas turísticas globais poderão cair quase um terço este ano após a pandemia de coronavírus. A abordagem usada para discutir esses assuntos e apontar para ações criativas no mundo do turismo pós-COVID 19, baseia-se na agência de Pierre Bourdieu e no conceito de ação de Hanna Arendt. Isso é feito para enfatizar decisões e ações transformadoras de todos os agentes sociais do ecossistema turístico na tentativa de prosperarem num cenário turístico pós-pandemia. Tais sugestões são apresentadas na seção final desta contribuição. O autor postula que apenas acadêmicos e profissionais de turismo totalmente envolvidos, dispostos a agir de maneira diferente, estarão aptos a tomar ações para mudar o mundo do turismo.

Palavras-chave

Turismo; COVID19; Criatividade; Agência; Ação.

Introduction

The COVID 19 Pandemic has put pressure in world economies and the global capitalist economic system. According to Korstanje, (2020) two major happenings have influenced tourism processes and as I defend, alerted academics and practitioners responses to try and tackle recent events with the need for readjustment of a logic of the tourism praxis. A) the process of globalization faced its first blow on 11 September of 2001, when four commercial aeroplanes were weaponized against the commercial and military icons of the US and B) the second blow was the financial crisis that affected the capitalist markets in 2008 – something that had a knock-on effect on the tourist industries. These “blows” contributed to the implementation of “more aggressive protocols of surveillance, including border closures, the advocacy of supremacist discourses, Islamophobia and Tourist-phobia (...) and endorsed reactionary movements that led to the triumph of Donald Trump in the US, to Jair Bolsonaro’s election in Brazil, Orban’s in Hungary and the very Brexit fiasco in the UK” (Korstanje, 2020). The Pandemic is seen by the author as a third event that has originated the reinforcement of isolation and mitigation measures helping to erode social ties and mobility that are seen as fundamental in everyday tourism.

This approach for the need for repositioning/readjustment of academics (e.g. <https://www.tourismtransformed.com>) and tourism professionals initiatives in

the face of the events caused by the pandemic of COVID19 and its impacts on society, in general and on tourism in particular, is developed here under two assumptions: the concept of “agency” of Bourdieu, (2008) and “action” according to Arendt, (2007). This conceptual reading presented here does not, of course, dispense the full and contextual reading that each concept plays in the general works of the respective authors. The relationship between the two concepts reinforces, arguably, the need for a social (re) agency of man in the face of this “admirable” new world. Far from going into detail about both concepts, the author uses these terms to justify his ontological vision in the face of the future of tourist phenomenon. Simply stated, the Bourdieusian “agency” understood as options the social agent has, through the accumulated symbolic capital (ex: competences), can be understood as structuring and structured dispositions, thus constituting means of actions in a respective field (Bourdieu, 1985), but necessarily capable of transposing other fields of social action (Pöllmann, 2013, 2016) as I postulate.

With the concept of “action” by Hannah Arendt, it is intended to appeal to the need to apprehend and readapt to this new world as part of the new human condition in the sense that we have to take action, upon the world that results from the post-COVID19, the post-pandemic active “vita”. By changing the world we fully engage with it, giving meaning through transformation to a meaningful life, worthy of being remembered by our transformative actions (Arendt, 2007) and tourism allows for such transformations (e.g. skill development through tourism actions) (Carvalho, 2014; Carvalho, Costa, & Ferreira, 2019; Pung, Gnoth, & Del Chiappa, 2020) there is not yet a precise understanding of tourist transformation. This action is reflected in a political-strategic way in the options that the social agents of the tourist ecosystem must take. The author also intends to emphasize the concept of “action” as a necessary provision for the urgency to act and to make a difference at an, especially difficult time. Despite the brief and superficial exposure of the author’s ontological stance, it is clear the urgent need to act, to act reflexively in a different tourism praxis logic, even conditioned by the world and the moment we are going experiencing.

In the end, the options we have available in this new scenario depend on the capacity to learn, think creatively and the habitus of each academic and professional in the area, facing a complex approach (Morin, 2008) to the tourist phenomenon of an inter, plural and multidisciplinary “nature” and like this article intends to allude, the need to reposition/readjust to the need to rethink creatively the tourist practice of tomorrow. Let’s not forget tourists and other travellers habitus which can be added to this discussion but will not take place here.

1. State of play COVID 19 and symptoms of a (post)modern tourism

“The impact of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry is going to be devastating and similar (but with a higher magnitude) to what happened in the case of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002-2003 (see e.g. Pine and McKercher, 2004; Wilder-Smith, 2006)” cited by Strielkowski, (2020,p1). According to the World Travel & and Tourism Council, the number of jobs at risk from COVID-19 pandemic is up to 75 million (WTTC, 2020) as IATA report inform us that general restrictions cover 98% of global passenger revenues (Pearce, 2020) with the possibility of industry passenger revenues that could fall \$252 billion (Breaking travel news, 2020) while international travels from 290 to 440 million representing 20% to 30%, taking tourism back to levels of 2012/2014 (UNWTO, 2020).

Layoffs in the tourism sector around the world, while national governments are trying to keep their economies safe, with repercussions in tourism demand, major unemployment outcomes are already affecting millions. At this time, official news broadcasts inform us that in Europe alone more than 12 million jobless people are to be expected to originate a deeper crisis than the one of 2008/9 (Guerreiro, 2020). According to Semple (2020), the tourism sector could lose 2.1 trillion dollars until the end of the year. Even the most liberal enthusiast would change their opinion about the role of the government in helping workers and companies in these special times of need.

What is at stake due to the COVID19 pandemic is much more than what we are going through at the moment, but mainly the brutal global economic recession that follows and how we will react to it. Countries closed borders (except the circulation of goods and commodities essential to their operation) and free circulation on the streets, measures not seen since World War II time (Barría, 2020); Suspension of leisure and nonessential travels between Europe and the United States, (in Portugal alone more than 2 million people were sent home mostly in a homeworking regime whenever is possible, with the state of emergency declared on March 18, social isolation measures were reinforced) in addition to the basic care measures and its massive dissemination by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020).

Global markets are plunged in a dark abyss as layoff measures implemented by several governments, several economic packages were announced to help micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in the attempt to pay salaries and save jobs and the suspension of banking obligations even if this represents the increase of national deficits. In the middle of this, a reminder of the insidious remark about the

incapability of Spain in fighting the COVID19, because of money shortage and the remarkable answer by Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa (Miguez, 2020) in a time where the centre of the coronavirus pandemic still in Europe with devastating results for Italy and Spain at the time I write these words and is appointed to “naturally” shift to the United States.

Among this horrifying truth, recently social networks inform us that the world is healing. Because human mobility has decreased immensely in the last months with some cheerful climate and ecosystems improvements, just think of brighter water channels and dolphins in Venice and clear skies in China as tourism sites are empty (Morton, 2020), it makes wonder what the hell have we been doing exploring our natural resources in such a way that, just a couple of weeks after “lockdown” improvements in the environment are already visible.

Amid all of this, tourism can be seen as just another way of consumption of goods, products, services and experiences. The way tourism consumption has evolved mainly over the last century, gave rise to awful repercussions to destinations economically, socially, culturally, politically and of course environmentally. Problems originated by excessive consumer behaviour and poor planning of tourism development and tourism management choices (e.g. Reid, 2003) created limit situations for local communities to cope with and learn to live with thousands of tourists at their doorstep almost every day of the year. The advent of overtourism created friction among visitors and hosts around the world creating asymmetries in some “world capitals” with problems for the identity of cities (e.g. Zukin, 2010), gentrification issues (Terhorst & Erkuş-Öztürk, 2015), dedifferentiation (Dicks, 2004) among many others. As COVID19 advances one can ask will the spreading of the virus stop overtourism? (Maudin, 2020) Probably not!

Characteristics of postmodern consumption in tourism (Carvalho, Costa, & Ferreira, 2018; Dujmović & Vitasović, 2015; Thompson, 2000; Uriely, 1997) have been at the centre of all types of tourism practices, impregnated by technological forms of co-creation of value, as more and more persons can become tourists at the expense of natural resources exploitation and the cheap provision of tourism services mainly in underdeveloped countries. Lowcost companies, cheaper flights, the ubiquity of the internet services, the ease of mobility to cross international borders, technologically savvy consumers looking for instant gratification online resulting all of this in the “potential” serial reproduction of culture (Richards & Wilson, 2006) and the blasé consumption of tourism.

Since the 1970s, environmental issues in tourism studies (Jafari, 2005) have been on top of research agendas for tourism, as tourism impacts on destinations worldwide were seen as symptoms of a mono tourism culture of sea and sand tourism, mainly around the Mediterranean countries and recently with cultural tourism encompassing around 40% of international arrival globally as it is well known. Since the early stages of the scientific study of tourism (see Jafari, 2001; Panosso Netto, 2005; Tribe, 1997) that management and quantitative views of the object of study has been prevalent, although qualitative stances (e.g. critical theory) have been gaining more adepts and more responsible ways of tourism are on the rise (e.g. Butler & Hinch, 2007; Fullagar, Markwell, & Wilson, 2012; Heitmann, Robinson, & Povey, 2011; Moira, Mylonopoulos, & Koudoudaki, 2017; Wanga, Hayombe, Onyango, & Agong, 2014). This must be the starting point to the discussion of all “eco + tourism” agents repositioning for a creative social agency and social actions to be effective in an ever-changing world.

2. The need for creative social agency and social action in tourism

The COVID19 pandemic has brought us an important chance to change our lifestyle habits and among them, the way we consume tourism and explore the natural resources of destinations. The sustainable development of tourism is not only important to implement but is also mandatory for future tourism development plans (Font, Higham, Miller, & Pourfakhimi, 2019; Scott, Hall, & Gössling, 2019), along with a tacit sensibilization and awareness of potential tourist (e.g. the shame of flying) for responsible ways of doing tourism. Needless to say that, much work has to be done! From universities to public institutions responsible for tourism national strategies of promotion, infrastructure management, tourism firms and tourists themselves.

If one could assert the carrying capacity of all destinations in the world, many would have tourists blocked in their territories. The very nature of tourism should be engaged under a complex thinking approach (Morin, 2008) raging from ontological stances to epistemological ones where the actual tourism activity should be planned for all to benefit. But sociologically, one has to look at the values one has gained through education and early approaches to tourism phenomenon. From a realignment of tourism curricula courses to more engaging and responsible tourism themes worked pragmatically with tourism enterprises (not supported only in a few sustainable and ecotourism ideas as there are very good examples out there)

to a reposition of the tourism teacher to think creatively about these issues and let students think creatively about tourism, in higher education courses, by adding philosophy, history and arts to tourism courses curricula in the first year at least.

Responsible and environmental promotion of tourism destinations is mandatory and that could be one of the new battlegrounds for future marketeers and DMOs. Has I have read somewhere, tourism companies and tourism boards should develop strategies (during confinement) and not think that they are wasting their money in the current circumstances. See the beautiful example of Portugal tourism strategy for domestic tourism “Can’t Skip Hope” vídeo on youtube. Public institutions must allow local communities to be a part of local and regional tourism policies improving their position on the ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969) as they should be the main actors of the tourism of tomorrow.

As logically tourism experts have been pointing to domestic tourism recovery after the pandemic period, enterprises should better connect their entrepreneurial strategies to regional and local public tourism strategies, by engaging with locals as logical and tacit business stakeholders and potential consumers as co-creation partners in the design and consumption of their tourism products and experiences. The grand majority of tourism experiences of the future must be territorially bound for better responsible consumption. The weaknesses of our capitalist global system should and could be fought locally and regionally by the critical infrastructure elements (Zukin, 1995) in the destinations in the first phases of tourism recovery worldwide, this implicates much more than the “think globally and act local” jargon from the past.

Tourists behaviour must change in extreme cases. When it is possible, tourists must be made aware by tourism entities and legal authorities of responsible ethics while visiting a place and good practices should be endorsed and promoted as good examples present in tourism promotion campaigns. Such good behaviours can yield tourist discounts in a revisiting system of the same destination. Tourists are ecologically aware of the choices they make while going on vacations. More than quality management or eco-certification policies, “ecotourism dispositions” must consist of the base of the tourism experience in a near-future possibly seen as a moral obligation towards a sustainable consumption of tourism (Wu, Font, & Liu, n.d.).

In the end, at macro, meso and micro levels, creative social agencies and social actions are undertaken, consisting of conjunct strategies made by individuals and social groups of responsible and sustainable tourism practices, based on common values

of individual freedom of tourists, their reflexive transformation through tourism praxis. The local community pride and history protection, tourism enterprises education and environmental roles according to qualifying e differentiating tourism resources, present at the destination. For that to happen, individual agencies could be aligned with tourism social groups interests and begin by acting locally and regional first, avoiding a strong dependency on tourism at an international level. In this sense, domestic travels (local and regional markets) should be made a priority for tourism DMOs and tourism boards, only later when it is safe should international trips be redeveloped responsibly.

Cultural resources for tourism development as the “symbolic economy” (e.g. culture, traditions, intangible cultural heritage of tourism destinations) and the importance of the cultural and creative industries must be supported because of the role they can play in the design of tourism experiences and destination differentiation. Creative resources are mobile and intangible by nature, because of this they must be nurtured. As creatives think horizontally and laterally (Landry, 2005) they are among the individuals’ tourism academics and tourism practitioners should continue to engage and cooperate in the revival of tourism in the near future.

3. Directions for a post-pandemic tourism praxis

Based on the theoretical stances I have mentioned earlier, in this final section I point out several examples and suggestions that can be seen as good examples to help the tourism sector improve in the future. Needless to say that no one knows when this is going to improve, but in this case, is the intention that counts. While international institutions, national governments, banks, public and private sector entities are trying to cope with recent events, universities have been developing efforts promoting webinars, online meetings about the next phase of tourism after COVID-19 (see www.tourismtransformed.com).

As I have mentioned earlier, tourism experts point to three phases for a possible tourism recovery. At a micro-scale the example of Barcelona (Santana, 2020), according to this structuralist point of view, once confinement measures are lifted, tourism presence can be expected in the provincial periphery of the city, in phase two, regional and national tourism and at the end international tourism can be a reality again (Santana, 2020). At a macro level domestic travel could come back until the end of the year with tourists using mainly land transportation, depending

on the country of course. Secondly, Europe will see tourism grow slowly, probably in the first half of 2021 and finally international travels until the end of 2021. But, nobody knows.

As in the past, hybridization of tourism (Vargas-Sanchez, 2018) has been a fruitful strategy for several destinations, big and small enterprises and the development of recent tourism niches (e.g. glamping, bleisure). These should be continued to be pursued in the future. As confinement diminishes, it's only logical one can think that separated families could get together again using tourism as a vehicle in the months to come. Small companies could target regional and internal tourism markets for such examples with an emphasis on security and health conditions for family travels.

As families have adapted to work from home and with new technologies playing a central role in the recent increase of online shopping, one could expect potential tourists with renovated technological competences. That should be seen as not only as a major change in tourists profiles but a basic condition of a growing market for tourism companies to connect in the meantime but also in the future. It is expected that future travelling decisions pass through deciding between frequented or crowded destinations including event's venues and other places for large crowds occasional gatherings.

Initiatives like **www.adoptaunbar.com** where you can help bars, restaurants and discos in these dark times, has been able to gather more than 20.000 euros. Here you can help commercial establishments in the present and enjoy your drink when the storm passes. Tourism "corona vouchers" are being pointed has meaningful strategies for travel agencies, hotels and airlines to stop cancellations policies and maintain reservations for the next months continue. Because the virus has affected the entire tourism chain of value, also cultural sectors are experiencing difficult conditions worldwide (e.g. Liscia, 2020) as museums are adapting their content to an online environmental as cultural and creative industries can be an important ally in tourism recovery (OECD, 2020).

Because we have shifted from overtourism to undertourism (Pérol, 2020) an ever global sustainable conscience (Lew, 2020) has established itself upon future tourism travels (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Tourist's agencies are going to be marked by pro-environmental behaviours (Wu et al., n.d.) in the future. Whether Eurobonds could be a solution to ease the European country's economies or if we think of China's role in the kickstart of the post-pandemic economy, future tourism consumption has necessarily to be sustainable in all its dimensions. Territory bound tourism

experiences, as next-generation tourists are aware of the need for healthier and environmental lifestyles. Sustainability, climate change, travel security, health issues, rural and nature tourism will be aspects that will mark future tourism praxis and should be in everyone's agendas.

The need to develop socially individual creative agencies and take "action" together in the future, will shape the world we want to have, tourism included. Future tourism professionals have to be able to act reflexively within several social fields using different skills, use creative thinking (horizontal and lateral thinking) to achieve a transformational tourism action in Arendt's sense of the word.

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